SONGS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE:
THE REPRODUCTION OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE THROUGH TRADITIONAL
AND POPULAR MUSIC

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Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Ph.D., except where indicated, that due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used, and that this thesis is less than 100 000 words in length excluding Figures, Tables and Appendices.

Alberto Furlan
March 2005
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Notes

For reason of cultural sensibility, in the text I refer to people alive and active in the community only with their initials. The names of composers and performers, on the other hand, are given in full as suggested by them, or their relatives, who wish for their talent to be acknowledged.

Names of places, texts of songs, and Murrinh-patha terms, except language-group names, are given in Italics.
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Guide to Spelling and Pronunciation

In this thesis I use Chester and Lyn Street’s Murrinh-patha spelling, as published in their Murrinh-patha Vocabulary (1989). Pronunciation is as follows:

Vowels:  
\( i \) sounds like the ‘i’ as in the English word pit  
or sometimes like the ‘ea’ in the English word heap  
\( e \) sounds like the ‘e’ as in the English word men  
\( a \) sounds like the ‘a’ as in the English word cat  
\( u \) sounds like the ‘u’ as in the English word put

Consonants pronounced the same as English language:  
\( b \ d \ g \ m \ n \ l \ r \ w \ y \)

\( p \) sounds like the ‘p’ in the English word ‘spin’

\( t \) sound like the ‘t’ in the English word ‘stun’

\( k \) sounds like the ‘k’ in the English word ‘skin’

\( dh \) (before vowels \( a \) and \( u \)) sounds like the ‘th’ as in the English word mother  
[as in Walakandha (Ancestral Beings)]

\( dh \) (before vowels \( i \) and \( e \)) sounds like the ‘j’ as in the English word jet  
[as in Thelerrdhe (News)]

\( dh \) at the beginning of a word sounds like the ‘j’ as in the English word jeep  
[as in Dhanba (Murrinh-patha song genre)]

\( ng \) as in ‘ng’ in the English word singer  
[as in Ngay (I, me, mine)]

\( nh \) (before the vowels \( e \) and \( i \)) sounds like the ‘ni’ in the English word onion  
[and in Nhel (Mosquito)]

it also occurs at the end of Murrinh-patha words  
[as in Thamunj (Maternal grandfather)]

(before the vowels \( a \) and \( u \)) this sound does not occur in English. Put the tip of your tongue  
between your teeth and make a ‘n’ sound  
[as in Winhat (Javelin fish)]

\( th \) (before the vowels \( e \) and \( i \)) sounds like the ‘ch’ in the English words chicken  
[as in Thimu (Nose)]

\( th \) (before the vowels \( a \) and \( u \)) this sound does not occur in English. Put the tip of your tongue  
between your teeth and make a ‘t’ sound  
[as in Thamul (Spear)]

\( rr \) (rolled ‘r’) as in Scottish English ‘sporran’  
[as in Murrinh (Name, Word, Language)]

\( rd \) as in the north American pronunciation of the word card  
[as in Kardu (Aboriginal man)]

\( rl \) as in the north American pronunciation of the word curl  
[as in Merl (Sandfly)]

\( rn \) as in the north American pronunciation of the word barn  
[as in Parnu (Grass)]

\( rt \) as in the north American pronunciation of the word cart  
[as in Tervert (Many)]
INTRODUCTION

One of the standard readings of the school curriculum in Italy, the country where I was born and received the major part of my education, is Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's 'The Leopard.' The novel describes the demise of Sicilian aristocracy in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the years that led to the unification of Italy. In that period, the authority of southern aristocracy, based on land ownership and title privileges, was challenged by republican ideals and the growing influence of the northern states. While Prince Fabrizio of Salina, the protagonist of the novel, observes the situation unable to respond to the challenges, Tancredi, his young nephew, embraces the populist ideals knowing that 'if you want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.' Tancredi senses that only by joining the forces of the incoming order, can the old aristocracy maintain its privileged position in the region. Outright resistance to Garibaldi's advance would result in the complete demise of the old social order.

At the time, Tancredi's remark struck me. I began to reflect on the fact that social and cultural change is a complex phenomenon. Things change, but they are also preserved as people reposition themselves in the face of key historical events. The success of this process depends on the ability to adapt to new circumstances, for the preservation of a social-moral order requires
the reproduction of systems of value in new forms, rather than stubbornly remaining attached only to established vehicles of meaning. Tancredi’s remark shadowed me throughout my ethnographic research as I investigated the ways in which indigenous people at Wadeye on the northwest coast of Australia have reproduced their own domain, albeit an intercultural one, in the face of historical change. Moreover, as I have reflected on the narrative of Murrinh-patha people’s engagement with missionaries at Port Keats as told by Harry Luke Kolumboort around 1980, Tancredi’s remark has taken on meanings I could not have imagined as a schoolboy in Italy.

I came to Australia with the intention of studying traditional and popular Aboriginal music. I was drawn to this subject by the sheer beauty of the songs I heard, but I was also drawn by the challenge to integrate musical and socio-cultural analysis. I believed that musical analysis could provide a meaningful insight into the lives and circumstances surrounding the composers and performers of these songs. I knew from reading the relevant literature, that traditional music could provide the possibility to investigate the relationship between different individuals and groups involved in ritual performances. Moreover, as I listened to the songs of Yolngu rock band *Yothu Yindi*, and read the translations of the songs in the CD notes, I also pondered the process of reproduction of traditional values through a different and non-indigenous musical medium such as popular music.

Before fieldwork, however, the extent to which traditional and popular music could be intertwined with the conditions of people’s lives was unknown to me. The fieldwork for this study was done at the remote settlement of Wadeye (formerly Port Keats). I was introduced to the area by Allan Marett (1991, 1992, 1994, 2000) and Linda Barwick (2003) who have carried out extensive research there on song. At the outset, I travelled to Wadeye with the particular intent of juxtaposing traditional and popular song. However, in the field, and as my investigation progressed, I became interested in the emergence of song genres and, of three in particular. Each was connected with key events and social conditions in the history of the region.
both prior to and following the foundation of Port Keats mission. These genres – traditional song-genres *Malkarrin* and *Dhanba* and popular music – have accompanied changes introduced by the missionaries’ arrival, by the spatial redistribution of various language-groups in the area and, finally, by the re-affirmation of indigenous identities during the ‘Outstation Movement.’ The identification of these genres sustained my hypothesis that musical production not only mirrored socio-cultural process in Wadeye, but also played a fundamental role in its development.¹

On the occasion of a trip to Canberra, in the months while I was developing my research proposal in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, I was introduced to Lawrence Kolumboort and Leo Melpi, two Aboriginal elders and songmen of Wadeye. When I sought to explain to them – but also to myself! – the framework of my research, they met me with openness and enthusiasm. They indicated approval at the prospect of my sojourn in Wadeye, and I could sense that they were pleased by my interest in their accomplishments. This, I discovered, was a generalized sentiment among all the composers and performers in Wadeye. They took great pride in their music. In view of this, I was surprised to find that such a place as Wadeye, so rich and extraordinary in many ways, had not attracted much interest from researchers in the past thirty years. I date this period from the time when Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner last worked there. Moreover, while other song genres performed in Wadeye (namely *Wangga* and *Lirrga*) have been investigated by Marett and Barwick, *Malkarrin, Dhanba* and popular music were yet to be analysed. I lived in Wadeye for fourteen months, from July 2002 to August 2003, with the permission of traditional landowner elder, Boniface Perdjert.

Living in Wadeye influenced me deeply both as a researcher and as a person. While I was coming to terms with a place and a culture very different from my own, I was at times stunned

¹ The song-genres analysed in this thesis are classified into the ‘open’ (non-restricted) ceremonial genres.
by the generosity and the patience demonstrated towards me. As the months passed, my engagement with the people around me increased and I shared many experiences with them, from witnessing ceremonies – and, at times, taking part in them by playing the didjeridu – to hunting expeditions. There is no doubt that I did not entirely free myself from the status of ‘outsider.’ Yet, the terms of the engagement involved in my sojourn, the mutual trust developed, and the insight into the past and present lives of people at Wadeye, provided me with knowledge fundamental to this research.

The time in Wadeye provided exhilarating experiences that an Italian twenty-something man could never have dreamt of. Probably I have failed to communicate to my relatives in Treviso the emotions, expectations and physical demands entailed in driving a car, packed way beyond its structural possibilities, for twelve hours straight across the Australian outback in order to take my fellow travellers to a ceremony. Moreover, such experiences also presented me with the dramatic reality of indigenous life in conditions that could only be described mildly as ‘testing.’

Poor housing, health issues, substance abuse, and the increasing cultural displacement of youths who struggle to reconcile their traditional values with the effects of an encroaching modernity, were all part of the daily life of people around me. Episodes of violence, often dictated by despair, occurred with a worrying regularity in the months I was there. Yet, in the midst of all this, what emerged was the strength and resilience of people who tried hard to articulate their values in the face of changes and to sustain important cultural continuities. I admired them for their efforts and I was at times amazed by the strategies they developed to cope with their situation. As my study of the three genres progressed, I realized that indeed these genres were part of those strategies. They were developed by people of Wadeye throughout the twentieth century to encompass and re-render the changes dictated by historical circumstance.
This led to a desire not only to compare and contrast the three song genres but also to place them in the context of the challenges that the people at Wadeye have faced. Therefore, the study of song genres also became a study of the way in which people produce continuity out of change. In this I was influenced by the interests of Diane Austin-Broos (1994, 1997, 2001) who first introduced me to the importance of addressing change in the Australian environment. The thesis captures this focus in two ways: first, by showing how each song genre informs various relations of exchange crucial to Aboriginal social life between clans, families, individuals and indigenous and non-indigenous people. For this reason the analysis also underscores dialogue and, in Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, the ‘dialogic’ nature of social and cultural life. Second, in analysing the actual meaning of songs and their modes of representation, my discussion points to issues of homology and ellipsis, literary devices that in Aboriginal hands produce a characteristic poiesis so that a traditional Dreaming figure is God and a popular song is a clan song. Discussion of these rather dramatic connections between things that are ‘same but different’ comprises a significant part of this thesis.

In this research I have focussed on the songs of Murrinh-patha people, one of the seven language-groups residing in Wadeye. Their songs, however, do not stand alone, but rather, are closely matched by other song genres composed by other language groups of the area. All these genres relate through sets of parallel differences, and are part of a ceremonial exchange that will be investigated in depth below.

A Chapter Outline

Chapter One is divided in three sections. In the first section, I discuss the relevant ethnographic literature on the Wadeye area. This area has been unusually neglected by researchers in the past three decades with only a very small number of publications appearing in recent years. In my

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2 This is particularly evident, but not an exclusive prerogative, of indigenous people living in remote Australia, such as those I have engaged in this research.
discussion I devote my attention to three major contributions: the work of W.E.H. Stanner, of Johannes and Aslaug Falkenberg (1961, 1981) and, more recently, of Allan Marett.

A famous example of Wadeye (then Port Keats) ethnography is the work of Australian anthropologist William E.H. Stanner. His monograph *On Aboriginal Religion* (1989) is a detailed study of male secret ritual among Murrinh-patha people. Moreover, in many other articles, both specific and general, Stanner has contributed to the Australian corpus. Along with the work of the Falkenbergs, Stanner’s ethnography provides a rich introduction to the area. Still, by privileging his discussion of symbolism over the social exchanges between those involved in ‘religious’ activities, Stanner failed to pursue a project he himself acknowledged as central to his research; namely, a focus on the ‘operational structure of transactional life’ rather than on the ‘functional structure of “relations” between “points” in a “network”’ (Stanner 1989:171). Stanner addressed cosmology and ontology rather than the forms of social process that sustained this panoply over time.

The Falkenbergs investigated kinship patterns of the different language-groups that lived around the Port Keats mission. Their work has been useful for an understanding of the social position of the people of the area, of their marriage relations, and of some relations between clans. On the other hand, neither the Falkenbergs nor Stanner investigated the impact of the mission on social, ritual and economic life in the area or on the dynamic of relations between language groups and clans that ‘came in’ to Port Keats. The research in this thesis has responded to this oversight. It takes a particular interest in indigenous people’s reaction to change and in the strategies adopted in order to mediate and incorporate these changes into an Aboriginal cultural domain. An example of these strategies is described by the ethnomusicologist Allan Marett in his forthcoming book of *Wangga* songs.

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3 Throughout the thesis, the reference to *On Aboriginal Religion*, Oceania Monograph 1963 and 1966, is given to the 1989 reprint.
In the second section of Chapter One, I discuss the relevant musicological literature on traditional and popular music. I note how, especially in recent years, various authors (see Corn 2002; Knopoff 1992; Marett 1994; Toner 2001, 2003; Wild 1987) have discussed indigenous music as one of the tools employed by indigenous people in order to accommodate variations and innovations within their socio-cultural systems. The creation of new song genres in Wadeye, of both traditional and popular music, bears witness to this process.

The last section of this chapter considers a range of literature on change among indigenous Australians dating from the 1950s. Time has shown that Sharp’s (1952) predictions on an imminent demise of indigenous culture were inaccurate: indigenous people have weathered disposssession, marginalization and various tentative forms of assimilation, in order to maintain characteristic qualities, practices and beliefs that define them as Aboriginal people. Things have changed, but also remained the same. Forms of negotiation, adaptation and cultural embodiment have been key components of indigenous response to intercultural relationships. The point in discussion here, and also a central argument of this thesis, is that research should not focus only on elements of culture reproduced, but also on the effectiveness of the strategies to sustain systems of value through embracing new or modified vehicles of articulation. The analysis of new song genres provides an apt arena for this investigation.

Chapter Two offers an insight into the history of the area in a period from the years preceding the mission (pre-1935) to the early years of ‘self-determination’ (1970s). This history is described through various narratives provided by different actors. I begin the chapter with some recollections of nineteenth-century explorers, noting how their views of the people and the landscape were ultimately the product of European self-consciousness. Later, as settlers moved into the region, the interaction with indigenous people intensified, giving rise to another kind of narrative, namely that of the reasoning ‘bush outlaw.’ Port Keats was home to one of the most famous of these: Nemarluk, ‘King of the Wild’ (see Idriess 1941).
A third narrative, an indigenous and local one, reveals an autonomous and intercultural intent. The long text reproduced in Chapter Two describes the journey taken by missionaries and indigenous people together at the outset of the foundation of the Port Keats mission in 1934-35. The Aboriginal narrator, Harry Luke Kolumboort, proposes that indigenous people endorsed the mission because it involved forms of exchange between his clan, and others, and the missionaries. These narratives act as a frame for introducing the song genres - further indigenous narrative forms that have responded to change in and around Wadeye. Chapter Two also sketches some of the conflicts between regional language groups that ultimately shaped, in creative ways, new forms of open ceremony and traditional song.

Chapter Three describes the first of the three song genres, the new ‘open’ traditional songs called *Malkarrin*, which were produced as a result of regional contacts with Christianity. *Malkarrin* was composed by Mollinjin after a dream-vision in which the Christian God appeared to him and ‘gave’ him the first song. Strikingly, the origins of this genre are said to pre-date the foundation of the Catholic mission called ‘Port Keats.’ This apparent contradiction, which can be resolved by considering the influence of white settlers in the area, demonstrates that these songs are not merely the product of historical circumstances. From the viewpoint of indigenous people, the songs provide the very condition of newly emerging events.

These song items were composed by Mollinjin as a result of dreams in which he ‘travelled’ to foreign Aboriginal estates to the south-east and to the north of Wadeye. In the songs, the attention shifts from a major song-giving figure, and the epitome of the Christian order, to minor song-giving Dreaming beings known in English as the Little People. Images of unknown countries and foreign Little People figure prominently in these songs. Relationships with foreign groups had always been part of local economic and ceremonial exchange, integral to the life of

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4 These beings, known in Murrinh-patha as *Kardu Wakal*, are closely related with the territory as they reside in the proximity of important Dreaming sites in order to protect them from the intrusion of strangers.
people in the Daly River region (see also Stanner 1933-34). The later *Malkarrin* songs, which are concerned with local identities and the relationships between neighbouring clans, bear witness to the increasing need to establish links with various social groups that came into contact as a result of the pressures of colonial settlement. The later *Malkarrin* corpus can thus be seen as an initial attempt to regulate the relationships between groups.

In Chapter Four I investigate how people at Wadeye responded to the need to accommodate new indigenous social subjects within the environment of the mission. In the 1950s, a consolidated mission economy allowed an increasing number of people to reside at Port Keats on a permanent basis. This meant that Murrinh-patha people, the traditional landowners of the Wadeye area, had to share their space with a number of other language groups. Some of these, for example the Marri Ngarr, had been traditional enemies of the Murrinh-patha. This new residence pattern had to be addressed and ultimately the relationship between these groups was regulated by a tripartite reciprocal exchange sustained by the production of three new song genres. These are *Dhanba*, performed by Murrinh-patha speakers, *Lirrga* performed by Marri Ngarr people and *Wangga*, performed by speakers of Magati Ke, Marri Tjevin and Marri Amu languages. This system is constituted around a pattern of reciprocal ceremonial performance in which each one of the groups asks one of the other two to perform so that, for instance, when a person of *Dhanba* mob dies, either *Wangga* or *Lirrga* mob sings at his/her funeral. In the course of this chapter I focus on *Dhanba*, the song genre of Murrinh-patha people, describing the composition process and the recurring subjects that feature in the song texts.

Chapter Five continues the history of Wadeye from the onset of ‘self-determination’ and a cash economy to the present day. Modernity in Wadeye has contributed to the transformation of social categories and groups. As I note in Chapter Four, the song genres involved in the tripartite exchange helped to define people according to their affiliation with a specific ‘mob,’ or language macro-group that comprised a number of patrilineal clans associated with specific ritual estates. This helped people affiliated with different language groups to maintain their
identity and negotiate a relationship in the ‘multicultural’ environment of the community. Mobs superseded other attempts at sustaining higher order classifications reflected in Murrinh-patha people’s and their neighbours’ interest in sub-sections and subsequently in the re-introduction moieties (see also Stanner 1936a, 1936b).

At the same time, mission influence fostered the emergence of patronymic ‘families’ defined in terms of patrilinial relations that extend back to a named antecedent. This form is integral to a Christian culture and the practice of baptism, where a family name is passed down through generations of fathers. However, families have not replaced clans at Wadeye (cf. Sutton 1998). Rather, clans and clan identity encompass families. The importance of clan identity rests significantly on engagement with country and on the continuation of the system of tripartite ceremonial exchange. The re-strengthening of the affiliation with ritual estates is also evident in the production of popular music. Here songs almost invariably describe and praise the country of the composer.

In Chapter Six I describe the emergence of popular music in Wadeye, and the role it has had during the 1980s and 1990s in the articulation of identities and relationships between individuals, families and clans. In the same way in which the tripartite ceremonial exchange reinforced regional language-group affiliations in the aftermath of settlement, on a smaller scale and generated by the group and personal individuation that cash economy has brought, popular music emerged in response to a desire to reassert clan identity and educate younger generations about their heritage. The outstation movement of the 1980s was instrumental in this as families and clans began to sing about their countries as they also planned their relocation to traditional estates. However, popular music was produced by a younger generation of people who had been raised in the mission dormitory and used this genre as their own means of specifying identity in opposition to mission policies of individuation and homogenisation.
The final chapter, Chapter Seven, addresses two ways in which people of Wadeye have engaged the encompassing powers of the nation state and sustained specificity and cultural continuity. The two developments that I discuss are: the emergence of a new form of indigenous governance in partnership with national and Territorian governments, and a recent circumcision journey and ceremonies conducted according to principles that were characterised as permission ones. In my discussions of the Thamarrurr Regional Council and the circumcision journey, I emphasise the way in which especially Murrinh-patha people at Wadeye have begun to generate an explicit dialogue about indigeneity and tradition at Wadeye. This has meant that in both these institutional spheres reference is made to traditional practices that pre-date the mission and its rise and decline in order to establish a status in the present (see also Beckett 1988a, 1988b). Chapter Seven shows how local ritual politics intertwines with national process to produce a distinctive, indigenous character to social and cultural life. With these types of development the thesis remains open to the possibility that there will be more song genres at Wadeye. This is suggested, especially, by the confidence that the various forms of performance, new procedures of governance and ritual are providing to indigenous residents.

Methodology

I conducted fieldwork in Wadeye from June 2002 to August 2003. During this time, I was associated closely with the family of Murrinh-patha elder and leading songman, Lawrence Kolumboort. I gravitated to his household and those of his offspring on a daily basis. This affiliation allowed me to investigate the traditional song genres belonging to Murrinh-patha people, namely Malkardin and Dhanba, of which Lawrence was a leading singer and composer.

A considerable amount of time, especially during the dry season from May to November, was spent travelling with traditional song performers to a number of communities in order to participate in ritual ceremonies. These journeys mainly covered the Daly River region, but also extended beyond it to Darwin, to Timber Creek, and even to Kununurra in Western Australia. Kununurra is some fifteen hundred kilometers from Wadeye. I attended ceremonies including
mortuary rites such as funerals, house smokings and ragburnings (see Chapter Two, note 23), and initiation rites such as circumcisions (see Chapter Seven).

During this course of events, I documented and recorded the production of traditional music – in particular the performance of Dhanba, the song-genre belonging to Murrinh-patha people – and of popular music – the sporadic performances of Wadeye’s four rock-bands. I gathered around two hundred songs, the text of all of which have been transcribed and translated with the invaluable help of indigenous composers and performers (see Appendix I and II). Much of this came about during song elicitation sessions that also involved the help of informants with Murrinh-patha language and with accounts of the contexts in which songs were produced. Many of these songs had not been performed in a long time due to their particular association with deceased performers. Nonetheless, they were preserved on tapes in the archive of the Kanamke - Yile Ngala Museum and people encouraged me in the translation task. I gathered, labelled and digitised the bulk of these tapes – around seven hundred items – thus instituting the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive (WASA). Now many of these songs have been up-loaded onto a computer at the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, and are available for anyone to copy. Elders of the community expressed their enthusiasm and supported this project as they looked at youngsters accessing the facilities to listen to a father’s or grandfather’s song. This is yet another form of cultural continuity and one that will endure at Wadeye.
CHAPTER ONE

A LITERATURE REVIEW AND SOME RELEVANT CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

1.1 Ethnographic Literature on Wadeye

The history of ethnographic studies regarding the Wadeye area is an extremely fragmented one. Notably, the number of publications is quite small, especially if compared with the literature on other areas, such as the Central and Western Deserts or Arnhem Land. It is this absence of publications in the past thirty years that leaves Wadeye – today the largest and fastest growing Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory (see below Map 1.1) – mostly unknown to the research community. While Murrinh-patha people are widely known for the description of their secret ritual life given by Stanner (1989) – a study based on research done from the 1930s to the 1950s – no studies have investigated the adaptations, continuities and changes that the local indigenous community has experienced in dealing, first with the mission order, and later with 'self-determination' and a cash economy.
The main publications on Wadeye, or Port Keats as it was known then, are by William E.H. Stanner (1933, 1936a, 1937, 1973, 1979c, 1989), the famous Australian ethnographer, and Johannes and Aslaug Falkenberg (1962, 1981), a Norwegian academic couple who spent six months in the field in 1950. Michael Walsh, a linguist now based at the University of Sydney, worked on Murrinh-Patha language for his doctoral thesis (1976a). The outcome of this research has been a number of articles on forms of classification and the use of language (see Walsh 1976b, 1976c, 1976d, 1996, 1997). In the past fifteen years, Allan Marett (1991, 1992, 1994, 2000, 2005 in press) and Linda Barwick (2003, 2005 in press), two ethnomusicologists based at the University of Sydney, have investigated the musical repertoires of the area. I include the forthcoming publication of Marett in this discussion of regional ethnography because, even though it is mainly musicological, it nonetheless describes forms of social change and the role that music has played in this process. Moreover, in a period of more than thirty years, Marett’s and Barwick’s works are virtually the only extensive studies produced that describe the people of Wadeye.¹

William E.H. Stanner arrived in Port Keats in 1935 with the first settler party, after a period of fieldwork in the Daly River settlement. He first went to the Daly River region in 1932 to work for a masters degree in anthropology from the University of Sydney under the supervision of Elkin (1934). Consequently he produced a number of articles (1933, 1933-34) on the Daly River Tribes, in which he described the economic, social and ritual organization of the indigenous people of the area. These articles dealt only marginally with Murrinh-patha people because, even if they were present in the settlement, their presence was sporadic and its social impact ephemeral.

Stanner’s first article on Murrinh-patha people appeared in 1936. ‘Murinbata Kinship and Totemism’ (Stanner’s spelling) deals particularly with the adoption of the subsection system

¹ While other anthropologists have carried out research in Wadeye during this time span, much of this work remains unpublished for reason of legal confidentiality.
from neighbours, the Djamindjung, at the beginning of the 20th century. Until then, the people of the area had been organized in moieties (*Karrthin* and *Tiwungku*), a system that fostered collaboration between groups and regulated marriages. Stanner (1936a:190) reports that the introduction of the subsection system created a number of problems because ‘the patrilineal descent of the moieties [was] coming into serious conflict with the indirect matrilineal descent of the subsections.’ People intended to retain the traditional cross-cousin marriage form along with the new arrangements that required marriage with a mother’s mother’s brother’s daughter’s daughter. To accommodate these changes, kin terms were imported that distinguished the term for wife (*purrima*) from the term for cross-cousin (*pugarli*), the latter term adopted from the Djamindjung.\(^2\) Despite these efforts, a number of irregular marriages occurred, creating tensions. As Stanner (1936a:213) reports: ‘I have heard scathing remarks about men whose daughters had been lost by other men as wives because of irregularities in marriage and attempts to follow conventional subsection descent.’

Integrating the traditional moiety organization with the new subsection system proved difficult, to the point that, as Falkenberg (1962:227) noted fifteen years later, matters were modified in an unconventional way: despite having eight groups, only four were entirely functional. Stanner noted that part of the difficulty could be attributed to the disrupting presence of the mission, but he did not investigate the modalities of this disturbance, nor did he address the acquisition of moieties and subsections by other language-groups, such as the Marri Ngarr, Marri Amu and Marri Tjevin, who came to reside at Port Keats on a permanent basis in the 1950s. The engagement of these groups with Murrinh-patha people was not addressed in any major way.

In a 1937 article for *Oceania*, Stanner described ‘Aboriginal modes of Address and Reference in the North-west of the Northern Territory.’ He deals extensively with avoidance relations and with the use of personal and kin names. Avoidance between brothers and sisters and mothers-in-

\(^2\) Distant cross-cousins, Stanner reports (1936a:199), referred to as ‘half *pugarli* whose subsections are appropriate, may be married, but they are then called by the normal Murinbata term for wife (*purrima*).’
law and sons-in-law is still respected today, but it has disappeared between brothers-in-law. Stanner also referred to a namesake ceremony, *Kanthira*, performed by Murrinh-patha people to lift the taboo on children who had been given names that were already in possession of living persons. This ceremony is not performed anymore, but the songs related to this ceremony are still used in the wider ritual context (see *Dhanha 10* and *36*).

In the 1950s Stanner returned three times to the area (Hiatt 1989), spending a few months there. In a time of great economic and social changes, however, his research in Wadeye remained focussed on the secret ritual aspects of indigenous life. During this and subsequent decades, Stanner’s publications included a number of articles on more general topics, where he employed material gathered in the field to discuss wide-spread features of Aboriginal life including territoriality (1965) and the Dreaming (1979a). His 1965 account of estate, range and domain in response to Hiatt (1962) has remained a focal point in debates about social organization up to and including the land rights period. Stanner’s general remarks on the Dreaming have had a similar impact being some of the first to alert anthropologists to the fact that this cosmology also reflects a specific experience of the world (see Merlan in Stanner 1989). Stanner also wrote in general ways on modes of continuity and change (see Stanner 1979b). In this later article, he argues for an understanding of indigenous people as a ‘highly specialized and contemporary people’ whose efforts are directed to the preservation of a system that, even though it includes changes, is ‘still fundamentally Aboriginal in type’ (1979b:62). He gives as an example of these adaptations the rise of the All-Mother cult *in lieu* of the All-Father, a theme analysed extensively in his subsequent monograph (Stanner 1989). He also notes that even where people have moved away from traditional territories, they still know where their patrilineal and matrilineal sites are. On the other hand, he remarks on the difficulty people encountered when asked to name their moiety. In a further article pertaining to change, Stanner (1979c) reported

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3 On this subject see also Elkin 1950.
the contempt and worry of older generations in the face of the young’s progressive loss of various interests and skills integral to traditional culture.

In the 1960s, Stanner produced a series of articles on Aboriginal ritual that were put together as an *Oceania* Monograph in 1963 (reprinted in 1963 and 1989). *On Aboriginal Religion* is considered by many as a seminal work (see Hiatt 1989; Keen 1986; Merlan 1989). In it, Stanner offers insights on indigenous ritual and mythology that seek to establish that these practices have an autonomous status as ‘religion,’ rather than being merely a function of social structure (contra Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown). *Punj* is interpreted as a rite of sacrifice, ‘a liturgical transaction, with a totemic idiom of symbolism, between men and a spiritual being on whom they conceive themselves to be dependent’ (Stanner 1989:4). Although Hiatt has argued convincingly against this account (see Hiatt 1971, 1975), nonetheless Stanner’s work is significant for its focus on representation and, ultimately, on ontology. Stanner was one of the first Australian anthropologists to be intensely interested in an Aboriginal experience of the world in the modality known as ‘the Dreaming.’ It is this concern that drives a significant part of his work but also turned his eyes from the ‘real time social acts’ that also inform rite and give rise to change (see Merlan 1989:vii).

From the point of view of this thesis, herein lies the paradox of Stanner’s work. He was interested both in ontology and in a transactional approach to the analysis of social life. Both these emphases implied criticism of the static analysis that Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functional method involved. For instance, in *On Aboriginal Religion* he observed that ‘if any Australian aborigines lived, as used to be suggested, in a stationary state of society with a static culture, the Murinbata were certainly not among them’ (Stanner 1989:154). On the other hand, he also emphasized the autonomy and the encompassing nature of cosmology in an order of experience that sustained the ‘continuous art of making the past consistent with an idealized

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4 This is also the case for Munn (1970) whose work is equally if not even more important.
present' (1989:40). As a consequence, Stanner gave prominence to the transactions between humans and the ancestral beings – sacrifice – that figured in the Punh and less prominence to careful analysis of the transactions of the everyday.

Therefore Stanner failed to address the interaction between clans that was progressively shaped by a mission presence at Wadeye. This, in part, was due to the timing of his fieldwork. He spent only two month in Wadeye in 1935, and yet the material of this fieldwork influenced his writing extensively (see Hiatt 1989). He then returned after the Second World War when parts of ceremonial life had contracted in the context of mission regime. He noted the general context, and also remarked on Wangga, one of the open-ceremonies song genres linked with circumcision ceremonies, and also widely used in mortuary rites today (1989:108). At the same time, Stanner made only a brief mention of the other genre, Lirrga, and no mention at all of the third genre, Dhanba, that together make up the tripartite ceremonial exchange that is a major focus of this thesis. It is likely that this latter genre, like the new form of Lirrga, had not yet been 'found' while Stanner was in Wadeye during the 1950s. Yet even following his last visit, in 1978, he did not mention it (see Stanner 1979d). This omission can be explained in part by Stanner's focus on restricted rather than open ceremonies. At the same time, it is fair to observe that his general interest in transaction did not lead him to focus in detail either on ritual transactions (exchange) between clans, or on the forms of daily social transactions that mark indigenous social relations and also the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous residents of Wadeye.

I do not intend with these remarks to criticize Stanner's accomplishments that were, undoubtedly, seminal. Moreover, his ethnography has contributed to mine in a wide range of

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5 By Lirrga, Stanner meant forms of music imported from the east, rather than to the open-genre song performed today by Marri Ngarr people in Wadeye, also known as Lirrga. The forms described by Stanner nonetheless provided the models for the new repertoire of Lirrga performed today (see below Chapter Four).
ways including his numerous remarks about change and ritual including, for instance, his account of circumcision ritual in the 1930s and 1940s. With this as a reference point, I have been able to make more significant observations on the practices that I observed in 2003 (see Chapter Seven). At the same time, I wish to emphasize that my focus on open ceremony and related performances, exchange and change, opens up new and complementary areas of research. Stanner’s work distanced him from the analysis of everyday interaction between clan groups that is extremely interesting for its heterogeneous character. The fragmented structure of the groups of people that participated in the ceremony he observed disappeared in the face of a ritual unity that became a shared property of all ‘Murinbata’ people.\(^6\) By privileging this line of investigation, Stanner, failed to note the dynamics of interaction between different language-groups – some of which were traditional enemies – that took place in the settlement. He also failed to pin down the transactional nature of social life in an extended period of change. Interaction and relatedness were extensively covered in the work of the Falkenbergs, who, in contrast to Stanner, did not deal with ritual life. The work of the Norwegian academics, albeit based only on a period of six months in the field in 1950, stands out as a thorough ethnography of people of Wadeye, defined by their clan, language-groups, moiety and subsection affiliations. The Falkenbergs moreover adopted a diachronic approach in their investigation, stressing how new forms of clan ‘aggregations’ were forming as a result of depopulation, and how the moiety and subsection system was spreading among other ‘tribes.’ Their discussion gave primary relevance to cultural changes occurring at the time and how different groups received and integrated new cultural elements (Falkenberg 1962:17). ‘Kin and Totem’ and ‘The Affinal Relationship,’ are rather different from Stanner’s investigation, yet they are somehow

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\(^6\) In this regard, it also must be noted that Stanner’s analysis does not provide the reader with information on the identity and clan affiliations of the people engaging in the rituals. It is difficult to imagine that only Murrinh-patha people were present to the ceremonies. It is more likely that these individuals belonged to different clans and even different language-groups, according to the patterns of regional ceremonial based on extended reciprocity.
complementary to it, for they provide key insights into the social structures, if not on the
dynamics of everyday interaction, between the various groups present in the mission.

A number of tribes formed the object of Falkenberg's investigation in his first monograph, but a
particular focus was placed upon the Murin'bata and the Mari’yar (Falkenberg's spelling).
Based in the mission, the ethnographers conducted a large number of interviews with
informants from different groups and collected an impressive genealogical chart, along with an
exhaustive list of place names and their totemic affiliations. This investigation covered not only
individuals who resided in the mission, but also those who lived in foreign territory or in
western settlements such as Darwin, Wyndham or Daly River, thus informing the reader on
people's patterns of intra-clan and intra-horde mobility.

'Kin and Totem' is organized in chapters, each of which deals with a particular structure of
social organization. People are first described as affiliated with various tribes, or language-
groups as they are known today. Falkenberg (1962:16) notes that the tribe is an important
identity marker. Even if people lived in a different territory and spoke a different language, they
still described themselves as members of their tribe. Such is the case of women who were
married into another language-group, but were still referred to as belonging to their paternal
group. Falkenberg notes that 'the majority of the population in one tribal territory belonged to
that one tribe, and it was this tribe's language and culture that marked all the population in this
area.' (Ibid.). This basic differentiation is still important today: people primarily identify
themselves as belonging to, for instance, the Murrinh-patha or Marri Ngarr 'mobs,' and in the
vast majority of the popular songs that I analyse in Chapter Six, assertions of identity are still
based on language-group affiliation.

According to Falkenberg (1962:21), the tribal territory was divided into a number of 'clan areas
and horde territories.' A clan area was 'composed of a number of totem sites,' whereas a horde
territory was a 'connected territory surrounding the totem sites of a particular clan' (1962:22).
Membership of a clan was expressed by referring to the totems of the group, whereas membership to a horde was expressed by referring to the camp where people live. Falkenberg notes that this distinction is important for it worked as a key identity marker. Even today the distinction between clan affiliation is stressed in regards to residency, that is, people would say that they are living at creek camp, one of the six areas into which the town is divided (see Chapter Five), but that they are Yek Diminin or Yek Nangu people.

Located in the clan area are totem sites, or ngu'mirgi, that are ‘life-centres’ for ngakumal, or Dreaming totems. They provide eternal life-springs for species, objects, or natural phenomena to which individuals of the local clan are connected. While a number of totems can be associated with a particular area, or site, particular totems assume the role of totem-boss. Such is the case of Tjita [Thitay], or Native bee, the main totem of Yek Diminin people. The list of totems and their associated Dreaming sites provided by Falkenberg (1962:51-80), bears many similarities with a survey done thirty years later (Ward 1983), and with my observations during fieldwork. Conversely, the phenomenon of totem sharing (1962:111-119) seems to have faded, replaced by an increasing emergence of separate clan identities.

As a result of clan exogamy, virilocality residence and patrilineal descent, individuals cluster in groups that Falkenberg called ‘hordes.’ For Falkenberg, hordes were groups composed of men of a local clan plus women of foreign clans who were married to individuals of the horde, children produced from these unions, and kin-related men of other clans who reside in the horde’s territory, for various reasons – among them the right to reside on mother’s country. The horde

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7 Native bee (Ku Thitay) totemic ancestors feature prominently as the main totem of Murrinh-patha people in Dharwa songs (see Chapter Four).

8 In Chapter Five, I discuss the differentiation of clan identities as a result of mission policy in the 1950s and as one of the key aspects of the outstation movement in the 1980s.
had no common totemic relation, and was related to its territory because of its economic resources.\(^9\)

Falkenberg (1962:141) notes that 'political controversies between hordes which often result in armed conflicts are primarily questions about rights over women.' These conflicts were a recurrent feature in the lives of the people of the area, especially before the settlement of the mission (see Chapter Two). On the other hand, peaceful relationships were maintained through the institution of *nandji kulu*, a ceremonial exchange of goods that covered the whole region. *Nandji kulu* (today spelled as *nonthi kulu*) was directly related to *merbok*, a similar exchange among Daly River people described by Stanner (1933-4), and to *wunan*, another form of exchange that occurred in the Kimberley region (see Akerman 1980; Akerman and Stanton 1993; Redmond 2001). From Belyuen on the Cox Peninsula near Darwin, goods passed through Daly River and then through the hordes of the Port Keats region to take either a southern direction, toward the Central Desert, or an eastern direction, toward the Kimberley region. Goods, such as ochres, iron-spear heads, mosquitoes nets, blankets, axes, bamboo spear shafts travelled from the north in exchange of boomerangs from the south and pearl shells from the east. When secret ceremonial artefacts were exchanged, women and children were excluded from the trade.

Falkenberg (1962:147) stresses that 'the goods which are sent in the kulu have value not only because of their usefulness. Through their mythology they are associated with certain local clans, and the main function of the kulu is to create friendship between widely separated people.' The ritual version of *nonthi kulu* still occurs to this day, on the occasion of secret male initiation ceremonies, however, the concept of engagement and relatedness expressed by this material trade is now associated with a wider range of social relations. Thus *kulu* describes the relationship between indigenous and western institutions of governance in the new *Thamarrurr*.

\(^9\) It was these issues, among others, that Stanner addressed in his 1965 article on estate, range and domain.
agreement (see Chapter Seven) or the exchange of recordings of indigenous popular music (see Chapter Six).

The organization of people into moieties and subsections is described in the final part of Falkenberg's monograph. Falkenberg follows Stanner (1936a) in his account of the acquisition of the subsection system from neighbouring southern tribes and, like Stanner, describes the difficulties that this system faced when new marriage regulations came into conflict with traditional cross-cousin unions. It is probably because of these difficulties and because of the changes brought by the mission (see Chapter Five) that the subsections are today no longer in use.

Moieties, on the other hand, were in place long before the acquisition of the subsection system. The main function of moieties was not to regulate marriages — although it was preferred that people marry individuals of the opposite moiety, if the union was in respect of kinship rules, intra-moiety unions were accepted — but rather to integrate clans into a group that provided protection and 'demanded co-operation,' especially in case of conflicts. Significantly, Falkenberg notes that the acceptance of the moiety system encountered difficulties among the Marri tribes and that there was a fundamental contrast with the Murrinh-patha, 'where the dual organization has been integrated into the society for a long time and [...] the local clan has to a certain degree lost its autonomous position.' (1962:203) It was therefore possible that 'reluctance to reduce the independence of the local clan has been one of the factors which has made it difficult for the Mari'djäbin and Mari'jädi to accept the dual organization easily, although pressure has been put on them by the Murin'bata' (Ibid.). If there is a link between the importance of local clans and the moiety system, then the re-emergence of the primacy of the local clans, as I note in Chapter Five, is likely to have led to the demise of this dual organization. Today people do not base their identity on moieties groups, but rather on family, clan, or language-groups (mobs) affiliation (see Chapter Four and Five). Alternatively it may
be, though in my view unlikely, that both Stanner and Falkenberg reified moieties to some degree, giving them a concreteness that was not always constant in daily life.

In their second monograph, 'The Affinal Relationship System' (1981), Johannes and Aslaug Falkenberg investigated marriages among the people of Port Keats. This work is based on the same period of fieldwork as the previous publication, even though it was published some thirty years later. In the past fifty years, patterns of marriages have been deeply altered, the main causes being the presence of the mission, an extraordinary demographic explosion, and the pressure of modern society. An example of these changes is the disappearance of the institution of tartar, or bride price.

To prevent polygyny and to regulate unions, the missionaries acquired rights over marriage of young girls from their parents. They did this by providing the parents with extra rations of flour or tobacco (see Chapter Two). Once these rights were transferred to the missionaries, the system of mutual obligations between the family of the bride and their prospective son-in-law began to dissolve, together with the enduring relations between groups that marriages used to sustain. Marriages were still arranged for a number of years, until the authority of the elders waned in the face of a growing number of youngsters who did not want to abide by their rules. Today, the freedom gained by youngsters through the attenuation of ritual life and economic autonomy is challenging other fundamental rules of marriage. Irregular unions between individuals who stand in kinship relations that are 'too close,' are increasing. This precipitates dilemmas concerning kinship identity; for example, in a case where an individual marries his own classificatory 'aunt' (FZ) and fathers his own 'cousin' (see Chapter Five).

Overall, the body of ethnography produced by the Falkenbergs and Stanner provides detailed insights into ritual and social organization in a period that is increasingly distant from the

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10 Informants reported that the practice of arranged marriages was discontinued about twenty years ago.
current milieu at Wadeye. Needless to say, in the forty-odd years that have passed since their investigations, the lives of people of Wadeye have changed profoundly. Inevitably, my research differs from these predecessors because it includes two subjects of enquiry that they overlooked. Stanner gave no account of the relations between the language-groups that came to live within the boundaries of the mission. As I have already pointed out, these relations were essential for the production of the new forms of ceremonial exchange. The Falkenbergs, on the other hand, recognized that these interactions between clans were significant, but did not pursue the subject to its full extent. They also overlooked the impact the mission had on the social organization and culture of the indigenous community. They acknowledged the erosion of ‘traditional values,’ but did not investigate in a systematic way the responses produced by Aboriginal people. It is on these very responses that my research focuses. Through consideration of these responses and the manner in which they embody both change and continuity, numerous dimensions of Stanner’s and the Falkenbergs’ work can be retrieved as subjects of contemporary interest.

It is also important to emphasize that in the period when Stanner and the Falkenbergs worked at Wadeye, most of the song genres I will analyse had not yet been composed. One genre, Malkarrin, almost certainly pre-dated the arrival of Fr. Docherty in 1935, and yet it did not figure at all in Stanner’s ethnography. The others assumed their current forms some years after his most intensive fieldwork. Moreover, neither Stanner nor the Falkenbergs realized that public ceremonial songs could mirror indigenous social life and change as aptly as they do.

Allan Marett’s forthcoming book ‘Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts: the Wangga of Northwest Australia,’ by contrast, investigates the manifold characteristics of Wangga, one of the three song genres that features in the tripartite ceremonial exchange of Wadeye (see Chapter Four). Stressing how Wangga songs articulate the relationship between the Living and the Dead,

11 I will deal with Malkarrin in Chapter Three.
between people and country, and also act as mediations of social change, Marett demonstrates the centrality of open ceremonial songs to an understanding of the dynamics of the community. His study is seminal because, through a detailed music analysis, he describes the complex social processes and exchanges among people of Wadeye.\textsuperscript{12}

Even though the main focus of this book is a musicological study of the various repertoires of Wangga, and the ethnographic focus is mainly on the northern coastal Marri language-speaking peoples who perform it, the processes of negotiation and the modalities with which musical production intervenes in the sphere of social organization, parallel those articulated by song production among Murrinh-patha people. Moreover, the underlying cosmology that sustains these genres is virtually identical across the region. Marett defines the performative reciprocity of the three engaging genres as a fundamental characteristic of the tripartite ceremonial exchange. In the case of circumcision and/or funerals, the group performing is not the one most directly involved in the events. This is to say that if, for instance, a person affiliated with the Dhanba group dies, it will be either Wangga or Lirrga group that will perform at his/her funeral. This reciprocity is the cornerstone of the regional ceremonial arrangements for it facilitates the interaction between different groups, thus creating the possibility for their cohabitation in the mission.

Marett also stresses the intervention of totemic ancestors as central for the production of Wangga songs. Like Dhanba, which I will investigate in Chapter Four, the composition of new songs is often inspired by dreams in which the composer receives the song from Dreaming spirits. These spirits are closely associated with the territory of the composer and therefore define his or her relationship towards it. Intentional variations in these songs, as Marett points

\textsuperscript{12} Marett points out that 'Even the fine details – the way a melodic phrase is turned, or a rhythm articulated – are shaped by the social pressure that exists at the moment of the performance.' (2005 in press, Introduction)
out, demonstrate how individuals are able to 'express complex and shifting relationships between groups and country.'

By the very act of marrying a Marri-ammu melody with a Marri-tjevin text in order to create his version of 'Walakandha Ngindji,' Ngulkur made a powerful statement about the commonality of interests held between the Marri-tjevin and the Marri-ammu. (Marett 2005 in press, Chapter Nine)

The case of Ngulkur's composition shows an adaptation to the social changes brought about by the settlement of the mission, when the northern groups clustered together as one cultural block in order to enter the tripartite ceremonial exchange with Murrinh-patha and Marri Ngarr partners. As Marett shows, a new repertoire of Wangga, the Walakandha Wangga, was created for this purpose, and soon took over from the previous Ma-yawa Wangga tradition in ceremonial contexts. Walakandha Wangga is in fact, easier to sing and dance. And therefore it better served the purpose of joining related, yet separate, groups.

Relatedness between different families within the same clan is also played out through performances. Such is the case when, in performances of the Walakandha Wangga song Truwnu, the difference between the melodic lines associated with each of the two families are erased in a public performance. Such actions reflect the 'ability of the repertoire to act as the focus of concerted social action with might otherwise be threatened, and the practice of ceremonial reciprocity potentially undermined' (Marett in press, Chapter Five)

Marett shows that songs have a social origin and rationale, for (i) they were specifically composed to sustain new social arrangements that favour adaptation to historical change, and (ii) they describe and provide the grounds for new patterns of relatedness between families, clans, and language-groups. Marett shows that songs are a central element of larger social processes and that by investigating them, we can understand these dynamics.

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1.2 Ethnomusicological Literature

1.2.1 Traditional Music

In his forthcoming book, Marett argues that the integration between the analysis of musical structures and social processes has rarely been achieved, despite being considered one of the fundamental tasks of ethnomusicology. On the other hand, the role of songs and dances in Aboriginal life, has been at the centre of only a small numbers of ethnographies (among the more recent ones see Keen 1994; Dussart 2000; Toner 2001). Yet, musical performance features virtually in all rituals, and it is often through song repertoires that the specificities of different groups are asserted, relationships are fostered, and traditional education is imparted. This echoes the description Seeger (1987) gives of Suyá musical practices where, through these practices, key aspects of social organization are recognized, ritual is constructed and the cosmological system is understood. It is clear, therefore, that in these cases, music cannot be written off as a thing that happens in society, but rather society ‘might also be usefully conceived as something which happens in music’ (Seeger 1994:69).  

This thesis is based on the principle that music performance must be understood as enactment of wider cultural forms, principles and historical circumstances, where songs must be considered as instrumental to the development of social processes and not only as a reflection of them. By investigating the production of new traditional and popular song genres, I will cast light on the social changes brought about by the establishment of Port Keats as a Catholic mission in the 1930s, the new patterns of relatedness articulated between different language-groups that came to live within the boundaries of the settlement in the late 1950s, and the revitalization of local clan identities that sustained the outstation movement in the 1980s. This research is a musical ethnography, where music is the key to understanding social processes.

Trelloyn (2003:208) recently pointed out that ‘patterns and rules, evident in performance/composition in contemporary time, can be seen to directly relate to and, in some way, perpetuate, other creative processes central to the music-makers’ world.’ Her affirmation derives directly from her methodology, which is in line with that of other researchers who believe that musical analysis is relevant beyond the boundaries of the discipline from which it originated. Following the lead of Catherine Ellis (1985), who investigated indigenous performances from the joint perspectives of musicology and socio-cultural form, a number of ethnomusicologists have embraced the task of explaining Aboriginal society through detailed musical analysis. The achievements of these authors have been inspirational for this research, for they reinforced my belief that indeed it was possible to explain indigenous social arrangements, relatedness, and even modalities of change through the investigation of the emergence of new song genres through time. I now turn to the description of these seminal works and the implications they had for this research.

Barwick (1995) demonstrates how melodic disagreements between men and women in a mixed-sex performance of Central Australian songs, could be explained in terms of gender power relations. In this case, the men participating in the performance challenged the authority of the women who owned the song by adopting and maintaining a different relationship between text and melody from that being sung by the women. In another account of gender relations, Mackinley (2000) notes that among Yanyuwa people of Borroloola, historical circumstance are at the base of general cultural disruption that have impacted more heavily on men, leaving the primacy of ritual activity to women. This imbalance was resolved by the transformation of a song genre from a restricted women song performance into an unrestricted, mixed-gender, public ritual. These two studies proved useful for the understanding of the modalities with which different groups assert their authorities through the management of musical repertoires.
A recent article by Toner (2003) has proved particularly useful for understanding the nature of indigenous sociality and how it can be investigated through musical analysis. Toner (2003:83) describes how among the Yolngu people of North-east Arnhem Land ‘a singer from one group sings a song using the distinctive melodic material and language of another, cosmologically-related group.’ Through this practice, Toner maintains, performers reproduce a system of multiple identities that operates dynamically, rather than as fixed model of social categories – a system that better describes Yolngu sociality. Just as Toner’s musical analysis demonstrates the underlying principle of Yolngu relatedness, my investigation of the tripartite ceremonial exchange put in place in Wadeye during the early 1960s (see Chapter Four) delves into the modalities of interaction between various language-groups in the area.

Knopoff’s work (1992) has been fundamental to an understanding of how new elements or, indeed, (as is the case of Wadeye) new genres of song, can be integrated into the preexisting musical repertoire. He gives examples of ‘new’ traditional songs (or yuta manikay) among Yolngu people, investigating the agency of the composer and the modalities of this adaptation. Knopoff (1992:144) states that these songs ‘are acknowledged as the creations of everyday, human singers; their creation is inspired by some contemporary event; and through a metaphoric or physical affinity, some aspect of the inspiring contemporary event is linked to an ancestral song subject, resulting in a juxtaposed or fused thematic content.’ A similar strategy of analogous correspondences is at the basis of the emergence of the Malkarrin genres (see Chapter Three) where incoming Christian elements have been incorporated into Aboriginal Dreaming experiences.15

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14 This bears similarities with the example of Ngulkur’s performance described above.
15 God and the Virgin Mary appeared, integrated with other indigenous elements, in the dream from which the composer of the songs had his inspiration.
On a similar note, Toner (2000) demonstrated that indigenous songs of North-east Arnhem land have numerous elements that can be traced to contacts with Macassan seafarers. This contact brought Yolngu many important material items, such as rice, knives, tobacco, alcohol and textiles that were immediately incorporated into large-scale organizations of ceremonial exchange throughout Arnhem Land (Toner 2000:26). As result of these contacts, Yolngu produced new songs with topics related to the material goods imported from the Macassans.

An article by Wild (1987) has also been fundamental to my understanding of how cultural continuity articulates adaptation and innovation within an ideology of stability. Wild describes how new songs were composed, and foreign songs were borrowed, as a means of adapting to changing circumstance allowing, in this case, the ethos of the Dreaming to be reproduced in a different settlement location. In this regard, a seminal study on the possibility of change and the essential adaptive nature of indigenous practices, has been conducted by Keen (1994). I will deal with Keen's work in the next section of this chapter. Suffice it to say here, that he identifies in the 'openness of interpretation' (1994:159) one of the fundamental characteristics of the indigenous system of belief. It is this openness that allows variation to take place, and different groups to interact - a strategy that can be transposed also to inter-cultural relations. Where Keen advocates an ideology of indeterminacy as a cornerstone of Yolngu being-in-the-world, Sutton (1987:88) proposes that 'contradictions may themselves be as systematic and integral to a society's means of self maintenance.' Both these hypotheses originate from the authors' confrontation with different or even contradictory versions of the same story. In the course of translating songs with indigenous performers, I have personally experienced such contradictions many times in the field. As with the songs described by Wild, the repertoires I investigate in this research are set in the uninterrupted space of Aboriginal tradition, while, at the same time, being

16 From some two hundred years before the European colonization until the early 20th century, Aboriginal groups form North Australia had constant contact with Indonesian traders and fishermen. The Macassans, from what is known today as South Sulawesi in Indonesia, seasonally visited Australia's coasts, harvesting sea cucumbers (or trepangs).
the result of changes influenced by historical circumstances. This circumstance, as Keen and Sutton explain, is possibly due to the real powers of adaptation in Aboriginal culture.

1.2.2 Popular Music

In the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in the analysis of indigenous popular music in Australia. This followed the popularity that indigenous rock-pop bands such as No Fixed Address, Blekhala Mujik and Yothu Yindi had gained locally, nationally, and in some instances, internationally. Rejecting the idea that Aboriginal rock music is merely an expression of assimilation into mainstream Western society, academic research has focussed on the production of popular music as an autonomous indigenous process. By analysing the song texts, investigating the composition of the bands and observing the circumstances around their performances, researchers have demonstrated that – to use Davies’ (1993:249) expression – ‘Aboriginal popular music is more than white stuff with the colour changed.’ Popular music must therefore be approached bearing in mind that it is the product of a complex indigenous cultural system that is not static, but rather constantly articulating changing historical circumstances.

Aboriginal popular music has been an integral part of the lives of indigenous people for the past five decades and has become, in more recent years, a powerful tool for describing the Aboriginal cultural system to an audience that comprises both indigenous and non-indigenous people. In addition, popular music has been employed by younger performers to rearticulate tradition in ‘modern’ terms. In the case of Wadeye, popular music works, as traditional music previously did, as an instrument for reproducing indigenous structures.

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17 A similar pattern may be found with regard to other indigenous popular music around the globe (see Regev 1997).
18 In most cases these songs are about the social context of indigenous Australians, and in particular social issues such as substances abuse, social disparity and the loss of traditional culture. Popular music is regarded as having a stronger appeal among younger generations, and therefore more likely to ‘get the message across.’
The literature on Aboriginal popular music has developed in recent years along two lines of investigation: according to one, popular music is considered as an autonomous indigenous practice and, according to the other, as an instrument for the reproduction of indigenous values. Key themes include: instances of locatedness related to the production of songs (Dunbar-Hall 1997), the tension between continuity and innovation within popular performances (Castles 1992), politics and policies in relation to the distribution of the final product into the mainstream Western market (Davies 1993), the emergence of digital technology and the appropriation of indigenous cultural tools, such as the didjeridu (Neuenfeldt 1997; Garde 2000), music as a means for re-claiming indigenous space in post-colonial Australia (Gibson and Dunbar-Hall 2000), music as an instrument in the creation of a unified front of Aboriginal ethnicity to present to the West and the engagement with new musical media in order to guarantee the continuity of Aboriginal tradition (Corn 2002). Many of these studies have drawn attention to processes of construction of ‘aboriginality’ based on musical practices – especially when the music is directed toward a non-indigenous audience – yet, with the exception of Corn’s work, they have not engaged with historical instances of variation in specific areas nor have they been based on a prolonged period of field research.

Corn, by contrast, engaged with a variety of subjects and themes, over several decades. His work traces the birth and development of the popular bands movement in Arnhem Land, and his orientation has suggested some of the areas of investigation of this chapter.

The popular band and the popular song have become media through which Arnhem Landers have intellectualized, espoused and effected the maintenance of their own culture, have stimulated debate about long-term social change in their own communities, and have sought recognition in broader public discourse. The extension of traditional concepts and values into these new media has been fundamental to these strategies (Corn 2002:76 electronic version)
Corn (2002:48) further describes these strategies as 'hereditary conceptualization of ancestry and continuity' that inform the production of songs, 'localized kinship networks' that constitute a template for the constitution of bands, and matrilineal and patrilineal kin relationships that form the basis of productive interactions between bands of the area.

Although significant differences exist between the field location investigated by Corn and that investigated in this thesis, common features are clearly recognisable. Indeed common elements are present in the works of the vast majority of indigenous rock bands around Australia. In particular, it is the relationship between songs and country and the performing relationship between the various bands that constitute the most fecund areas of investigation. On the other hand, the relative isolation that characterizes the community of Wadeye, and the fewer opportunities for interaction with non-indigenous Australians, compared to those experienced by other Aboriginal people around the country, make the subjects of the songs more strictly related to the indigenous milieu of that area. Unlike most Aboriginal popular music, there is no reference whatsoever to the relationship between Aboriginal people and white settlers, nor to the attitude of white people towards indigenous people. None of the songs collected can therefore be characterized as 'political' protests against such matters as social disparities, past practices of segregation, and lack of cross-cultural understandings.¹⁹

It must be noted, however, that popular music in Wadeye has, nonetheless, been produced in order to establish a dialogue with modernity, and, more specifically, with the version of modernity that they themselves experienced (see Chapter Six). Their reality did not include power-struggles with nation-state counterparts, nor were people involved with political issues or

¹⁹ Such 'political' songs are a key part of the repertory of virtually all other Aboriginal bands in Australia. Protests about past segregation are found in the work of artists such as Archie Roach, and bands such as B immediate My Country, and No Fixed Address. Exhortations for a better cross-cultural understanding are to be found in the repertory of Yothu Yindi.
land claims. White settlers in Wadeye were, for the first thirty-five years – that is, until 1970 –
a new model of exchange – during a specific moment of indigenous history, namely the ‘outstation movement.’

Reproduction of indigenous values in the face of changes is the fundamental focus of this thesis,
a theme with which a number of authors have recently been engaged. In the following pages I
will discuss how a concern with continuity and change in Aboriginal society has informed this research.

1.3 Adaptation and tradition: historical changes and the reproduction of Aboriginal values

In the past two decades, the debate on changes in Aboriginal culture has occupied a primary
position in the ethnographic literature. A number of studies have sought to show that indigenous
people have experienced dispossession, marginalization and various tentative assimilations, but
nonetheless maintained characteristic qualities, practices and beliefs, that define them as
Aboriginal people. Things have definitely changed, but they have also remained the same.

20 In other parts of Australia, instead, the struggle for recognition of indigenous sovereignty on traditional
land influenced deeply the composition of popular music. During the 1988 Sports and Cultural Barunga
Festival, Prime Minister Bob Hawke was presented with a Statement that requested the recognition of
indigenous land ownership by the Australian government. On that occasion, he promised that the
Australian government would sign a Treaty with Aboriginal people by 1990. As this agreement did not
eventuate, Yothu Yindi composed the song Treaty, criticizing the government on their failure to deliver.
(see Corn 2002).
This research focuses on the strategies that have made possible, and still make possible today, the continuation of an Aboriginal domain in Wadeye. The key point is not to evaluate how much of 'traditional culture' has been preserved, but rather to understand the modalities through which indigenous people have sustained and reproduced specific orders of value in the aftermath of contact with missionaries, and in the context of today's intercultural world. The transition from hunter-and-gatherer to domestic and subsequently to cash and welfare economy, inevitably entailed the alteration of patterns of relatedness and ritual practices but, nonetheless, new ritual structures have been created. This research aims to describe how new forms of performances (and song genres) became media for identity and different types of exchange, as local forms of social organization changed over time.

In the following chapters, I will analyse the elements of these narratives and performances, together with the ways in which people at Wadeye have implemented these strategies. Here, however, let me turn to the literature on change that has shaped the conceptual frame of this research.

As it turned out, the predictions made by Lauriston Sharp in his 1952 article, 'Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians,' did not eventuate. Not only did indigenous people not abandon their totemic ideology but, in many instances, they incorporated western elements into their system. Sharp saw the introduction of the steel axe as a disruptive element that was bound to undermine the very structure of indigenous culture. By taking the place of the traditional stone axe, the western implement impinged on male authority and trade arrangements. The problem, according to Sharp, derived from the inability of 'totemic ideology to support the intruding mass of foreign culture traits' (1952:22). As a consequence of this saturation, 'the myth-making process in its native forms breaks down,' and eventually 'the myriad new traits which cannot be ignored nor any longer assimilated simply force the aboriginal (sic) to abandon his totemic system' (Ibid.). Sharp's analysis is based on his view of a totemic system as one that is necessarily closed, to the point that it 'serves very effectively in inhibiting radical cultural
changes’ (1952:21). This study demurs from this point of view for, in Sharp’s terms, I believe that cultural change has also been mediated by totemic beliefs and images. I will argue that far from being closed, the indigenous system, by its very nature, is an open-ended and flexible one.

Here I liken indigenous ways to MacIntyre’s notion of tradition – ‘an argument extended through time’ (1988: 12). Far from being a static, taken-for-granted feature of the society, tradition is an ongoing process in which, as MacIntyre (Ibid.) underlines,

[...] certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose process a tradition is constituted (also cited in Austin-Broos 2003).

On this subject, Austin-Broos argues that traditions are ‘processural, open-ended and [ultimately] negotiated.’ (Austin-Broos 2001:190). Capacities to incorporate new elements in the practice of structured ways, so that the new is inherited as authenticated being, allow a tradition to change (also see Sahlins 1985). Indeed, forms of negotiation, appropriation and cultural embodiment have constituted, and still do nowadays, the very core of the last hundred years of indigenous culture in Australia. I am referring here to the inscription of Christian features in the Aboriginal landscape. Austin-Broos gives an example with the Western Arrernte’s impatye Jesuake, or Jesus’ footprint (see Austin-Broos 2001). After the arrival of the Lutherans, one of the responses of the Arrernte was to seek to inscribe the Christians’ story in the landscape. The riverbed on which other heroes traveled also became Jesus’ track,

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21 In this regard, see how a mixture of Christian and indigenous agents and elements feature in the dreams that inspired the composition of Malkarrin songs (see Chapter Three).
particular story that the Arrernte had forgotten prior to the arrival of the Lutherans. The Lutherans in turn became messengers, reminding the Arrernte of Jesus.\textsuperscript{22}

Kolig (2000) has argued that this type of inscription of change or modernity onto place in Aboriginal Australia is and can only be a passing phenomenon. Like Swain (1993), his view is that beyond a certain point of change the located ‘en-placing’ of experience falters. Kolig’s argument contests the views of Rumsey (1994) that, although the nature of inscription changes, there is great continuity in the mnemonics of place. This type of debate about change, and the nature of continuity in tradition, is also suggested by the divergent opinions of Keen (1994) and Myers (1986). Keen treats the changes involved in Yolngu engagement with the European other as tantamount to the types of variation regarding song and track that are integral to Yolngu culture. This view is also suggested in the work of Poirier (2001) regarding Western Desert people around Balgo. On the other hand, Myers (1986) argues that where social relations are concerned, the Pintupi face major obstacles in articulating their own social order with a powerful European one (see also Myers 1980). He notes that the authority structure of European ‘community’ that forcibly brings together numerous kin groups from diverse localities is very difficult for a kin-based sociality to interpret. This is also Austin-Broos’ view in her discussion of tensions between kinship and the use of cash and commodities (Austin-Broos 2003).\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} In this respect, Keen (1994:276) draws an interesting parallel between a regional traditional ceremony and two new religious movements: ‘The ability of Gunapi and other regional ceremonies to accommodate a variety of interpretation as well as incorporate a variety of elements made it possible to extend ties of amity through co-operating in a performance well beyond the social network of everyday affairs. […] The Christian Revival was an attempt to extend this amity still further, to even more distant Aboriginal communities, and like the earlier ‘adjustment movement’ to extend ties to the white community while again retaining local identity and control. The Christian movements were attempts to legitimize new social relations and modes of organization and to incorporate the white world.’

\textsuperscript{23} The situation is not dissimilar in Wadeye (see Chapter Five), where daring living conditions and the pressure of cash-economy fuel contrasts between families and clans that at times erupt in open altercations.
The influence of contacts and interaction with white settlers must necessarily be taken into account. It was the nature of the new social arrangements, influenced by the presence of a new order, which led indigenous people at Wadeye to repurpose their patterns of ritual relatedness in a new form. The dynamics of settlement are central to this investigation, in particular the process of construction of community identity that followed the establishment of the mission. A comparable process has been described by Meggitt (1962:73). He points out that the relocation of Warlpiri in settled communities implied that many residents were unable to ‘renew regularly social and ritual ties with their old homes.’ This involved a concentration of conception-dreaming sites in the proximity of the settlement and an expansion of ‘countrymen,’ of the numbers of individuals who might share a contiguous conception-dreaming place. At Wadeye, a bounded community was produced through the concentration of ritual concerned with male initiation within the boundaries of the settlement. Circumcision journeys that previously involved extensive travels to the south and east were now performed in the community, thanks to the presence of a number of previously separated language-groups (cf. Peterson 2000). This process was by no means an easy one, for along the way many aspects of what people considered the ‘proper way’ of doing things were either lost or modified. Yet it is through these modifications that an Aboriginal moral space has been preserved.

These Australian writings on change and cultural reproduction do not suggest one, singular model of cultural transformation. Rather, they present a range of possibilities mediated by regional and historical variations that have sensitized me to possibilities in and around Wadeye. This has also been the case with literature that considers Aboriginal culture in more comprehensive ways as the adaptation/reactualization of traditional forms in changed historical environments. This work comes from scholars such as Beckett (1978, 1993), Sansom (1982) and Peterson (2000).

This process is by no means concluded, as a recently launched scheme of governance (see Chapter Seven), based on the interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous agencies, demonstrates.
Beckett underlines that change is also reconstrual of traditional elements in new configurations. For example, the entire story of George Dutton, an Aboriginal drover, is a travel story in which his movements, due to his work in different places, mark out a landscape and articulate kin relations, in the way that ancestral tracks once used to do. As Beckett puts it, the country provided the link between George Dutton’s life as a stockman in white society and his life as an initiated man in black society. Travel was Dutton’s way of mediating between worlds to produce a coherent experience of country (see Beckett 1978). Tradition in this sense is constructed, but is never entirely arbitrary in its connections with the past.

Beckett gives another example of the relationship between indigenous people and the Western world. This comes in Walter Newton’s ‘story of the world’ (Beckett 1993). Newton’s entire Australian history, or world history, involves a repositioning, through an indigenous lens, of a vast concatenation of events drawn from the different myths and circumstances of white and black society. Newton constructs a ‘moral space’ whereby Dreaming stories and biblical event, as well as prospecting exploits around Broken Hill, all have a similar right to be. Walter Newton thereby constructs a diachronic sequence of myths in the form of a single narrative – enter ‘history.’

History, which has already entered the totemic landscape with the Jesus’ track, steps now into myth. Or better, history and myth begin to merge in a new form of chronotope that is Aboriginal tradition.25 Where history becomes a recognized medium like myth, the exhortation of Myles Lalor, for Beckett to record his ‘oral history,’ takes on special significance (see Beckett 1996).

25 In his literary critique, Bakhtin defines chronotope as the ‘intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.’ (Bakhtin 1981:84) This concept, adapted from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, is employed elsewhere by the author to stress the fundamental connection between ‘man and all his actions, between every event of his life and the spatial-temporal world.’ (1981:167) In these terms, I delineate Aboriginal tradition as the site that results from the convergence of myth, history and histories. This site is a chronotope in Bakhtin’s terms, inasmuch as it is frequented by indigenous peoples in order to make sense (explicitly and/or implicitly) of events that are the results of the ‘forces at work in the culture system from which they spring.’ (1981:425).
This is not merely the desire to find a place in the world of events that occurred in the course of Lalor’s life. It is also a desire to assert that autonomous presence of Aboriginal people in the narrative form of mainstream society. Events thereby become a history not only of Aboriginal people but of Australia, or even the World. This is the struggle to express the power and presence of indigenous people in historical terms and not only in terms rendered as ‘mythological’ in a European world.

Adaptation and negotiation do not occur only in the landscape, in mythological design, and in historical narration. They are also part of everyday life among indigenous people, including the use of ‘things’ in an Aboriginal way. Western commodities are used not to gain power through individual objectification but, rather, as tools for building social relationships (Austin-Broos 2003). According to Myers, therefore, the value of things should be understood as ‘being constituted in the process of reproducing social life’ (Myers 1988:54). This is the case with vehicle use in Aboriginal communities, and also with clothes, tools and houses. Peterson (2000) offers a striking example of the use of vehicles in the indigenous context. He notes that ritual practice has changed. The more specific regional place-based rituals of Central and Western Desert Australia have diminished. So too have the large and secular seasonal ceremonial festivals replaced today by sports and ‘cultural’ festivals. Initiation, however, has drawn on enduring forms of social relations, and the technology and commodities of European Australia in order to expand the indigenous domain. He recounts an initiation that took place in 1994 across Western and South Australia and the Northern Territory. Peterson calculates that more than 3000 kilometres were covered in an initiation journey which involved 1200 people and the use of cars, trucks, buses and planes. Tradition here was transformed and reproduced by being repositioned.

The use of Western goods in Aboriginal ways testifies to the manner in which indigenous people can transform the West as they reproduce specified aspects of tradition. Another example involves mobility as such, but mobility realized in a particular way. Beckett (1988c:19) stresses
the importance of mobility, and its particular mode, by pointing to a paradox concerning the ‘beats’ of New South Wales Aborigines:

Mere proximity need not be a major factor – an Aborigine may go 200 miles to a place where he is known, rather than ten miles to a place where he is not. Usually, being known means having kin who will receive him and act as sponsors in the local community. The area within which he moves – his ‘beat,’ as I shall call it – is defined by the distribution of kin. I shall show that the typical beat is gradually expanding.

Movement implies knowledge of the country in which one moves, knowledge constituted by a geographical and social lexicon. These movements, and variations in the location of people, are the phenomena that Sansom describes as ‘Aboriginal Commonality’ (Sansom 1982). This, Sansom proposes, is an emergent Aboriginal world-view based on common experience. Notwithstanding the impact of Western world, this commonality is based on the Aboriginal way of ‘doing things.’ Commonality implies the negotiation of change and exchange, the reassertion of places through social ties, and the construction of ‘identity’ in ways that both Beckett and Myers would acknowledge. This commonality involves an indigenous ‘identity’ in relation to the nation, and also the maintenance of Aboriginal kinship ‘identities’ through continuing relations with each other (compare Beckett 1988c and Myers 1986).

If Aboriginal sociality involves the testing and affirming of relatedness in an endless series of transactions that realize and objectify kin relations, then perhaps it is possible that Aboriginal people also deploy this mode of sociality in their engagements with whites. This mode of negotiation seeks to reproduce tradition by transforming (re-valuing) both Aboriginal ways and also the ways of Europeans so that an indigenous path can be re-positioned in a new world, in fact ‘Australia, or the world’ as Walter Newton would have it. This is an ongoing process that involves both meaning and material culture. The process gives history a place even as it sustains tradition.
Sustaining Aboriginal tradition is not simply a matter of structures reproduced within an inevitable post-colonial flux. Rather, tradition involves the transformation of past continuities in new forms (see Sahlins 1985) and attempts at the articulation of these ways with aspects of a European order. This sustaining of tradition thereby involves MacIntyre’s two types of conflict and also the gradual embrace of an intercultural world. As a result, Aboriginal tradition today is dialogic, and heteroglossic, in two senses: between indigenous generations and modes of experience, and between all of these and engagement with the West or, more properly now, with other modernities (see MacIntyre 1988; Bakhtin 1981). As Aboriginal people transform and even lose some capacities, they also expand others in innovative ways.

Bakhtin considers heteroglossia, that is ‘the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance’ (1981:428), as warrant for the primacy of context over text. In order to comprehend any expression in any given time, one must first consider the context in which this utterance takes place. In a ‘world dominated by heteroglossia’ (Ibid.) the process of comprehension is necessarily dialogic, that is, it is bound to an on-going negotiation since there is a constant interaction between different meanings. This negotiation takes place between three parties where, besides the speaker and the addressee, a third subject enters the scene. This third party, that Bakhtin defines superaddressee (1986:126) and has taken various ideological expressions in various ages (God, absolute truth, the people, etc), provides the speaker with an ‘higher instancing of responsive understanding’ (Ibid.). This, Bakhtin continues, ‘follows from the nature of the word, which always want to be heard’ (Ibid., author’s emphasis).

Leaving aside this last concept, in this thesis I define Aboriginal tradition as heteroglossic and dialogic for it is constituted around a process of negotiation of meanings. This process takes place within the dialogue between indigenous people, and between these latter and their non-indigenous counterparts. In this space of articulation, in Bakhtin’s terms, ‘heteroglot languages mutually reveal each other’s presence and begin to function for each other as dialogizing backgrounds’ (Bakhtin 1981:414). This is to say that in the process of communication, the speaker actively considers the ‘voice’ of the other, his/her potential response, before formulating his/her utterance. In this regard, Aboriginal tradition stands as a dialogic process involving an intercultural exchange.

Bakhtin’s concepts are thus relevant to the intercultural context of the frontier. Indigenous people produce multiple interpretations of the European order. In this process, they ‘receive the word’ (however, never as a captive audience) of their counterparts, reinterpret it and give it back in a new form. The Malkarrin songs described in Chapter Three, are a peculiar example of this process as far as the Christian order is concerned.

For this reason it is important to see these processes through an inter-cultural perspective, because as Merlan (1998:4) points out ‘the revision of socio-territorial identities and orientations among Aboriginal
In this regard, the musical panorama of Wadeye is an invaluable field of enquiry, with three public ceremonial song genres originally composed in the last forty years and a dynamic popular music scene with four bands composing and exchanging performances. These genres were instrumental to the re-orientation of indigenous people, and a vehicle for the reproduction of a specifically indigenous order of value.

The condition of possibility for this reorientation can be found in the intrinsic openness of Aboriginal culture and in the strategies by which innovations are used, not simply incorporated, to keep (re)producing an Aboriginal moral space (see Bourdieu 1977:42,70,72-73; Keen 1994).28 The openness of the indigenous system has been stressed by Povinelli (1993) and Merlan (1998). Povinelli notes how people constantly investigated the nature of events or signs while on hunting trips across the country. These events were connected with the deeds of ancestral beings, thus connecting individuals to their totemic country in a process of orientation that allowed them to move intelligibly across the landscape. Because they might have been ‘something,’ no signs were disregarded. Similarly, Merlan (1998:72) notes that even in places that had no clear mythic significance, there was ‘always the possibility of the ‘discovery’ of existing but newly revealed and interpreted significance, whether or not these be clearly attribute to a mythic dimension.’ Places, signs and events provide the possibility for the creation of meanings in contexts that require the affirmation of a cultural continuum that is independent, thus safe, from variable agency whether it be indigenous or non-indigenous. Denial of human agency is another of the key strategies for the production of innovations, where the acquisition of new rituals and/or songs, is seen as the initiative of totemic ancestors. It is often through dreams that ancestral beings inspire humans in their ‘finding’ of new rituals.

people can only be analyzed in the light of their long-term, changing experience with settlers and others who continue, in some ways, to be outsiders to them.’

28 In this regard, see how Christianity was used by people of Wadeye, through the production of Malkarrin songs, to facilitate the impending arrival of white settlers.
According to Dussart dreams 'serve a complex set of functions,' and different elements can be found in dreams that connect with a wide variety of social conditions and situations (2000:140). Similarly, Poirier characterizes dreams as 'an integral part of human action in the world' because 'dreaming, far from being a private and inner experience, is directed outwards, allowing one's spirit to open up to the world' (Poirier 2001:176), and also 'The dream appears as a mediator in human socialization' (Poirier 2001:181). Human socialization and – I will propose – social changes as well. New dreams are often associated with new social contexts.

As Wild has observed, dispossession and displacement are key agents of ceremonial adaptation (Wild 1987). It is therefore interesting that Western Arrernte also used dreams to mediate their engagement with settler society. People received messages from angels in dreams. These became hymns which they later transcribed. People also traveled and saw lost infants in heaven. (see Austin-Broos 2001).

One interesting feature of dreams is that they can alter ritual life. (see Mackinlay 2000) These kinds of dream contain new material such as new narrations, previously unheard song texts, and innovative designs. Dussart's example is especially striking: a woman under duress dreams as a women's song a form that previously had been part of the male corpus and explicitly denied to women. Dussart describes the process, social and ritual, through which Warlpiri women, and men, re-interpret this as women's knowledge (Dussart 2000:139-176). These types of ritual change involve a process of verification based on kin-based relations, and personal, performative power and exchange. This process intervenes in the decodification of the dream. It is not so much that the content of the narration is proven, but rather that participants determine how to relate to the event and how to deploy the narrative (also see Poirier 2001:258). Dreams re-enter the ancestral Dreaming through a process of interpretation and recognition, political negotiation and ritual integration.
This material suggests that many social changes enter the indigenous world through dreams and
dreamt songs. Their related rituals then re-enter the Ancestral domain acquiring eternal status.
This is a process that requires an extensive negotiation between people, because different actors
produce different stories and other participants provide further interpretations of these stories
based on their experience, their knowledge and the socio-political situation of the moment.

The work of Keen (1994) stresses how the variability and differences between people’s ideas
and rendering of stories/songs led to ‘delicate negotiations.’ This is so because ‘shared forms
of ceremony implied that people could co-operate to bring a ritual into being, but in doing so
people of each group enacted their own particular variant and their own specific beliefs on to the
common matrix’ (Keen 1994:162). Keen (1994:6) notes that relativity of perspective is a
characteristic trait of Yolngu beliefs, where people ‘constantly produce new variations of old
themes and innovative interpretations of old forms in response to unique circumstances.’ These
variations are sustained by a shared agreement over meaning. Similarly, innovations share
common characteristics with the practices they are substituting for, noted through the
recognition of homology. These homologies mean that when new practices are created — for
example, new song genres and rituals — forms of indigenous value are also preserved through
the construction of continuity. It is these forms of innovation and articulation maintaining an
experience of continuity, rather than a group of rigid norms, that infuse the new practices with
recognizable, manageable and negotiable meaning and value.

The relative value in new practices is judged in accord with their capacity to sustain an
Aboriginal commonality in the space of changed conditions. Many innovations do not survive
this scrutiny and therefore are disregarded, others are discontinued — such is the case of the
attitude towards Christianity in Wadeye today. In the past ‘being Christian’ meant sharing a
newly created identity, both between different language-groups drawn into the settlement and in
relations with non-indigenous people. Subsequently, when the influence of the church waned,
replaced by state bureaucracy, indigenous people progressively detached themselves from this
engagement because, through it, they could not manage the changed conditions brought by modernity and cash economy.\(^{29}\)

On the other hand, the song genres explored in the body of this thesis have proved able to reproduce indigenous value through time and in various social contexts: from the first contacts with Christianity, as in the case of *Malkarrin*, through new spatial arrangements of various groups, facilitated by the tripartite ceremonial agreement sustained by *Dhanba*, to the re-emergence of clan identities and the ‘Outstation Movement,’ expressed by popular music. Indigenous modes have proved in the end the better vehicles for sustaining tradition. These songs of continuity and change are therefore the central concern of this thesis.

\(^{29}\) A number of issues arose when they could not find a meaningful institution that could mediate their set of values with the new ones. The new *Thamarrurr* Regional Council has recently been implemented by indigenous people as this bridging institution.
CHAPTER TWO

WADEYE: STORY NARRATIVES AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SONG GENRES

2.1 Introduction

The history of Wadeye bears many similarities to other remote indigenous communities in Australia. Yet seen within the context of Australian colonial history, it is also unusual. Established as a Roman Catholic mission in 1935, Wadeye enjoyed a relative isolation from some of the more immediate effects of frontier colonialism. The mission did not rely on pastoralism for its support. Nor did Port Keats become a service centre for pastoralism in the region. A cash economy was consolidated at Wadeye only with the extension of social services there in the mid-1960s. Moreover, Port Keats was not a site of frontier conflict, unlike the neighbouring Victoria River Downs. Episodes of violence did occur, and those who engaged each other did sustain forms of colonial myth. Yet the types of indigenous critique reported elsewhere are uncommon among those who now reside at Wadeye (cf. Rose 1991, 1992 and Morphy and Morphy 1984). These conditions both shaped and reflect the relation between indigenous people and the missionaries: the mission community was founded at Port Keats with the active participation of local people with whom the settlers travelled from Darwin. Accounts of this founding act and subsequent events therefore tend to emphasise harmonious relations. They even project a sense of indigenous incorporation of the mission order. At the same time,
the passage from a hunting and gathering society to a mission-based domestic economy, and
thence to a social order infused with cash and commodities, shares many features with
comparable histories in other parts of Australia.

Wadeye's remoteness is also reflected in a distinctive series of local narrative forms. These
stories, dreams and songs have been central to the way in which people at Wadeye have both
manifested and interpreted change through the twentieth century. Wadeye song genres in
particular comprise a unique cultural 'registering' of a local experience. Stories of the frontier
provide a local and specific frame for the consideration of these genres. In conjunction with an
overview of the mission's development and its demise, these stories set the scene for later
chapters that examine these songs and their forms of performance.

2.2 Interpreting the Frontier

The records of the years before settlement at Wadeye include a corpus of explorers' logs,
articles and books that romance the frontier. They also include a series of stories recorded by
indigenous people themselves; Aborigines who were either present at the time or recollect
events on the basis of narrations they received from antecedents. These very different types of
record reference different cultures and are brought to bear in various ways on the events that
produced Port Keats. The mythology of explorers projects an image of a wild and threatening
natural environment. This image acted as an alibi for their civilising mission (see Barthes 1973;
Elias 1978). Later, settlers forged another form of representation: the 'bush outlaw' Nemarluk,
'King of the Wild.' He was a nobler savage, and also one embraced by Wadeye Aborigines.
Settlers' desires to render and re-render difference are reflected in these changing
representations.

Indigenous stories of the events of contact seek to incorporate new actors, things and events into
a familiar social-moral order. A sparse European presence and relative isolation made this
incorporation feasible. Moreover in this process of Europeans apprehending strangeness and
Aborigines seeking to incorporate strangers, there have been specific moments that mark the growth of dialogue – both within each group of protagonists, and between them. This process has been shaped by each party’s growing knowledge of the other and by the range of voices in each group (see also Austin-Broos 1994, Kolig 1981, Rose 1991). Most important, interpreting contact was never the sole domain of settlers. Aboriginal people too crafted narratives of the original encounter and made them, over time, explicit in performance.¹

2.2.1. The explorers’ story: passage to the unknown

Port Keats (Wadeye) appears for the first time in the nineteenth century chronicles in the Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coast of Australia by Captain Phillip Parker King. He sailed towards the area in the Mermaid on the 6th and 7th of September, 1819. The inland exploration was led by John Septimus Roe. King wrote:

As the bottom of this port had a river-like appearance, Mr.Roe prepared to examine it, and set out at daylight, accompanied by Mr.Cunningham: they did not return until the following day.

From his report it appears, that the shores are overrun with mangroves, and that the whole of the back lands are inundated at high water, which accounts for the very strong tides we experienced. The bottom of the port, which at Mr.Roe’s desire was named in compliment to Vice Admiral Sir Richard G. Keats, G.C.B., is divided into two salt water arms, extending towards the foot of a range of thickly-wooded hills, which were seen from the anchorage, over the low mangrove shore, and which, from their description, are probably connected with the Barthelemy Hills. Their summit was

¹ A consistent body of literature bears witness to this process. Other than those cited above, see Beckett (1993), Kolig (1980), Muecke, Rumsey and Wirramurnarra (1985) and Rose 1984. Captain Cook is recurrent throughout Australia as meta-figure in what Rose (1984: 31) calls a ‘saga of epic relations.’ The explorer is removed from his historically specific context to represent the totality of the settlers, and their morality. I have also drawn particular inspiration in this discussion from the work of Jean and John Comaroff on the settler narratives of South Africa. See Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:86 especially).
named Mount Goodwin.

The usual traces of natives were noticed; especially in one part, where the mark of a foot had been impressed since the last high water. Large fires were burning three or four miles off, but no human beings were seen. As our gentlemen proceeded up the river, a large flight of bats flew over the boat. (King 1827:277-278)

It was just a few years later that explorers and Aborigines made contact. In a well-known episode in 1839, crew from the H.M.S. Beagle were attacked by indigenous people on the shores of Pierce Point (Nangu). The expedition had set sail on its return journey after the discovery and exploration of the Victoria River.

They had weighed anchor on 5 December and sailed in light airs towards Point Pearce crossing and naming Mermaid Shoal, on which King had nearly been lost in 1819. They continued on to anchor half a mile off Point Pierce in what would soon earn for itself the name Treachery Bay. (Horden 1989:199)

Early on the morning of December 7th, the crew was engaged in onshore activities:

Helpman to make tidal observation, Bynoe, Tait and Dring to shoot; and Stokes to check his chronometer. The cliff here was wooded on top and, realizing that it could hide blacks, Stoke chose a spot about sixty yards from it. From such a distance, he thought, he would be safe from spears. [...] He failed, however, to notice a party of Murinbata tribesmen following them stealthily through the scrub, and was so confident that no blacks were nearby that when he returned to the ship at midday left Tait behind to botanize – despite standing orders which forbade lone wandering in areas inhabited by hostile Aborigines.

Early in the afternoon Stokes prepared to return to his morning observation spot with Tarrant. [...] As they approached the shore, all was quiet and still. The tide had ebbed,
and the boat grounded well out. Faced with crossing half a mile of reef, and reassured by Bynoes’s report that he had seen no natives, Stokes decided not to burden himself with his gun. Stokes reached the spot and scanned the cliff above him. Nothing stirred. Then, impatient at the others’ delay, he turned to hurry them along. (Horden 1989:200)

Stokes related the defining moment:

I was staggered by a violent and piercing blow about the left shoulder: and as the dart had ceased to quiver in its destined mark, a loud long yell, such as the savage only can produce, told me by whom I had been speared. One glance sufficed to show me the cliffs, so lately the abode of silence and solitude, swarming with the dusky forms of the natives, now indulging in all the exuberant action with which the Australian testifies his delight. One tall bushy-headed fellow led the group, and was evidently my successful assailant. I drew the spear, which had entered the cavity of the chest, and retreated, with all the swiftness (sic) I could command, in the hope of reaching those who were coming up from the boat, and were ten about half way. I fully expected another spear while my back was turned; but fortunately the savages seemed only to think of getting down to the beach to complete their work. Onward I hurried, carrying the spear, which I had drawn from the wound, and determined if, as I expected, overtaken, to sell my life dearly. [...] The savage cry behind soon told me that my pursuers had found their way to the beach. [...] I had fallen twice: each disaster being announced by a shout of vindicative triumph, from the blood-hounds behind. (Stokes 1846:108)

Eventually, the crew came to rescue Stokes, who survived the attack.

It is worth noting that in these narratives, the actions of indigenous people were not seen as caused by the behaviour of the explorers. Stokes was attacked while conducting scientific experiments. The attack was seen as an unprovoked event, somewhat like a summer rain that
pours down suddenly. Such was the nature of indigenous people who behaved according to their natural instincts. As the Comaroffs (1991:174) have put it with reference to settler views in Africa, 'the inhabitants of the wilderness shared its qualities, merging with it like feral children unaware of their own humanity.'

These narratives are largely univocal: they are cultural constructions in which indigenous people were described as treacherous not on the basis of sustained frontier experience but as an essential part of their being (see also Morris 1992:87). Cast as such, they are integral to the romantic rendering of the explorers' own being. This initial dramatization of indigenous person and environment is also underlined by the erasures that settlement brought. Austin-Broos (1994:138) notes that missionaries perceived themselves as travelling 'alone through a wilderness supported only by the guidance of their God,' in their journey to Central Australia. The mission narrative describes the landscape as vast, wild and desolate. The practice of settlers naming country as they moved along was directed at banishing this emptiness. It was also intended to register the arrival of moral order. Austin-Broos (1994:131) notes the irony of this as missionaries moving across the land were watched by indigenous people with an intricate and intimate knowledge of the land in which their social-moral order was objectified. This semiotic violence, oblivious to indigenous knowledge, created the context in which more tangible transgressions occurred. Physical, emotional and cultural violence intertwined, producing the 'savage cry' of 'blood-hounds' on the beach.

2.2.2 A settlers' story: bush warriors and outlaws

As the settlers' involvement with Aborigines increased, the native emerged as a willed and intentional agent. Rather than the feral being of nineteenth century engagement, twentieth-century literature credited indigenous people with rational behaviour – either positive or negative and imbued with particular purposes. This change in perception had a touchstone in indigenous responses themselves. Reynolds (1982) has shown how Aboriginal ideas about resistance evolved through time and adapted with increasing knowledge of the settlers'
behaviour. In turn, patterned action directed at settlers probably became more evident to them as the various colonies stabilized. In the Port Keats region, this phenomenon is reflected best in the corpus of writing developed around the figure of Nemarluk, ‘King of the Wild,’ head of the Chul-a-mar, or ‘red band of warriors.’ The latter name came from their habit of wearing red ochre when they engaged with whites.

The story of Daly River’s Constable Pryor and Constable Fitz of Timber Creek chasing Nemarluk is related in I.L. Idriess’ *Man Track* (1935). A few years later, in his famous book, *Nemarluk. King of the Wild* (1941), Idriess described Nemarluk as ‘the mightiest hunter from Victoria River to the Daly, from the inland mountains to the sea’ (Idriess 1941:2). The author provides a vivid description of the hero:

> He stood under a clump of pandanus palms, a magnificent young savage. Wild eyes deep-set under lowering brows, eager of face as he listened for answer to his call. Already six feet two inches tall, broad chested with a springy quickness of body, he was a picture of youth and strength, and of muscle and sinew in rippling relief. His chest, shoulders, and thighs deeply ridged by the weals of hard flesh that denote full warriorhood. (Idriess 1941:1)

Physical characteristics despised in the previous literature were valued positively here. Nemarluk’s image was now that of the ‘noble savage,’ an indomitable nature bound to clash with the colonial invaders. The most famous episode linked with Nemarluk was the killing of a Japanese pearler’s crew around the shores of Ngantermelli beach, some six kilometres south-west of Wadeye.

In 1931 the Northern Territory pearling industry was depressed. A Japanese crew that included three men – Nakata, Yoshida and Owashi – decided to embark on the lugger Ouida for a shark fishing expedition. They left Darwin headed towards the south-west (Idriess 1935:140). Around
Pierce Point, the vessel pulled on shore so that the men could search for fresh water and food. A few Aboriginal men approached them and seemed benign. Yet documents record that the Aboriginal party had already determined on a murderous course. It was led by Nemarluk. His men established relations with the crew through the exchange of women for tobacco. Then they lured some of the crew ashore with the promise of a good supply of game and water. There they killed them with their own weapons and then went to ‘finish the job’ on board the lugger.\(^2\) Three members of the crew escaped and, once safe at Melville Island, they reported the episode. A man hunt started immediately. Newspapers reported the story as it developed.\(^3\)

Much of the credit for Nemarluk’s capture went to an Aboriginal tracker, Bul Bul, who pursued him for two years. Bul Bul became another key figure in the literature of the time.\(^4\) Nemarluk was imprisoned in Darwin’s Fanny Bay Gaol. There he re-connected with some of his Red Band and eventually managed to escape. After swimming across the Darwin harbour, he returned to his country and roamed free for a period on the plain between the Moyle and Fitzmaurice rivers. On October 18\(^{th}\), 1933 he was traced and arrested again by Smiler, another

\(^2\) This episode took place around the 20\(^{th}\) of July 1931, according to the records of the court case reported in the Northern Standard (Northern Standard, 09.05.1933). The event is also recollected in an original recording made by J.C. in Magati Ke language around the early 1990s, stored in the WASA Archives [WASA Tape 294].

\(^3\) Reports of the patrols along the coast and inland filled the columns of newspapers, the story of Nemarluk’s capture and escape being central to the building of the epic tale of an outlaw against the justice of the Territory’s law: ‘Nemarluk evidently is making for his own tribal country on the Fitzmaurice River this side of the Victoria River, but he may continue to put a greater distance between himself and his pursuers by crossing the Victoria River to reach his former haunt on Legume Station near the West Australian border’ (Northern Standard, 07.10.1932), and again, ‘Nemarluk had evaded so frequently that the opinion was expressed that he would only be taken by shooting’ (Northern Standard, 05.05.1933). A report of the court case with indigenous witnesses to the Japanese murder can be found in the Northern Standard, 31.03.1933 and 09.05.1933.

\(^4\) Bul Bul’s role in the capture of Nemarluk is somewhat problematic. It is in fact highly unlikely that a foreigner, even an expert indigenous tracker, had a knowledge of the country sufficient to intuit the movements of such an able hunter as Nemarluk. Most likely, Bul Bul was helped by local people who advised him of the wanderings of the band. Several informants referred me to the names of different people from the Port Keats area who played a role in the capture of Nemarluk.
Aboriginal tracker. Now an aging man, Nemarluk grew ill in Fanny Bay Gaol. He was hospitalized, and lacking surveillance, escaped again. However, he was arrested almost immediately and taken back to the gaol’s infirmary. There Nemarluk died of tuberculosis on July 8th, 1940.

Idriess' account of Nemarluk presents him as a noble and rational savage entangled in and defeated by frontier civilization. This is also the manner in which he is recalled by numerous people at Wadeye today. Nemarluk is seen as the force that spared the region from the violence perpetrated by settlers elsewhere. Yet other oral history and missionary accounts describe Nemarluk in still another way: as a man dreaded by his closest peers, as a troublemaker and a ‘no-good’ (see Pye 1972:18). Pye even proposes that had Nemarluk been free when the mission was established, it could well have meant the death of Father Docherty and other early missionaries (1972:19). This judgment reflects mission values and could also have been a vehicle for the views of indigenous rivals to Nemarluk’s clan. As Morphy and Morphy (1984) relate, the wildness of frontier outlaws was often underlined by Aboriginal people on cattle stations and missions who wished to distinguish themselves from these ‘untamed ones.’

Contemporary positive indigenous views of Nemarluk are, at least in part, a product of Reconciliation and white Australia’s desire to construct indigenous larrkin heroes. A similar treatment has been given to Pigeon, the outlaw of the Kimberley (see Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985; Pedersen 1985). In sum, views of Nemarluk are heteroglossic and historically layered. They demonstrate the way in which narrative themes, supplied by colonists, can be valued and revalued both within non-indigenous and indigenous domains. From the earliest days, Aborigines in and around Wadeye thereby sought a dialogue with settler culture regarding contact and its significance. Moreover, people who resided at Wadeye also had their own, autonomous narratives.
2.2.3 The ‘Other Side’ of a frontier

There have always been indigenous stories of contact (see Lewis, 1997; Rose, 1991; Reynolds, 1982; Rowse, 1998; Shaw 1986). In particular, Reynolds (1982) has argued that far from being passive recipients of colonialism, indigenous Australians adapted to their increasing knowledge of the invaders. From the outset, Aborigines maintained a practical curiosity towards settlers. They ‘reacted creatively to Europeans ideas, techniques, language and commodities, [they] endeavoured to incorporate new experiences within the resilient bounds of [tradition]’ (Reynolds 1982:2). At the same time, indigenous people expected reciprocity from settlers. They expected settlers to learn from them, as they themselves were learning. When this did not occur, they attributed this to a ‘different law’ (Rose 1994). Rose argues that this has been the context for a ‘saga, an epic of race relations’ which casts Captain James Cook as a generic figure of settlement and its colonising events. She cites the observations of one Aboriginal man: ‘My law one law. Your law keep changing. [...] You, Captain Cook, [...] should have asked’ (Rose 1994:31. My emphasis.).

This passage invokes an indigenous understanding of the social relations that should obtain between men. Myers describes this indigenous sense in terms of the need to ‘ask.’ He proposes that this precept is fundamental to an Aboriginal world:

For the Pintupi, to own something is to have the right to be asked about it. The norms of kinship and general reciprocity (or compassion) force one to grant the request, but one should be asked. [W]hat they seek is prestige . . . to maintain personal autonomy [which is] satisfied when others recognize one’s rights. (Myers 1998:39)

Asking establishes procedural hierarchies that reinforce associative relationships between

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5 We know as historical fact that Captain Cook did not reach northern Australia in his journeys, yet he appears in the saga as the key Law-carrier figure. Rose also stresses that ‘people appear to regard the moral content of the Saga as applicable all over Australia’ (Rose 1994:25).
groups. In normative terms, every agent asks and is asked in turn, in the appropriate place. The colonists denied Aboriginal ownership of land and ignored this procedural ethic.\textsuperscript{6} Seeing these untutored strangers, Aborigines for their part sought to incorporate whites into their forms of associative relations. In the case of Wadeye this incorporation, or encompassment, has involved the genesis of new songs that anticipate as much as they respond to the advent of settlement. Through songs and narrative forms, people at Wadeye sought to establish dialogue among themselves and also with the settlers. One product of this century-long process has been a modern indigenous narrative of the beginnings of Port Keats. This narrative contrasts in crucial ways with the early colonial accounts.

2.3 A Port Keats Narrative

A critical perspective on the present can project in memory a golden past (see Morphy and Morphy 1984:459). And yet, from the early days of Port Keats, older people in particular have recorded consistently positive attitudes towards the mission. These attitudes might be ruled out a priori as dissembling or false consciousness. In the context of Port Keats, however, a limited mission with a modest infrastructure, these positive comments also may reflect something important: that the limited and isolated nature of the initiative allowed space for dialogue, that in fact the circumstance of settlement fostered forms of creative response.

In the 1870s European and Chinese enclaves were established in the Daly River region, and in the 1880s a copper mine began. The first Jesuit mission was founded at Daly River in 1886 and maintained its activities until, in 1899, a flood swept it away.\textsuperscript{7} In 1912 a new phase began in the region when local government turned to fostering small farming. This marked the start of more stable interaction between indigenous people and a Western economy. Peanuts were the main

\textsuperscript{6} The edict of \textit{terra nullius}, the legal fiction that declared the intrinsic emptiness of the Australian continent, was a central feature of the colonial agenda. It lasted until 1996, when it was overturned by the Mabo-Wik court case.

\textsuperscript{7} The mission was reestablished by the \textit{Missionaries of The Sacred Heart} in 1955.
crop (Sutton 1980).

During the 1930s there had been continuous contact between Aborigines and boats from Darwin trading at Timber Creek depot. Several men from Port Keats were reported to have travelled on these boats and among these were two key figures central to the founding and development of the mission: Harry Luke Kolumboort and Nym Bunduck. Many people from around Port Keats lived and worked in cattle stations in the Victoria River District, and also in the Fitzmaurice area including in particular Legune, Bradshaw, Lingara and Auvergne Stations.\(^8\) This distribution of Aborigines through various settlements, and their demands on the peanut farmers at the Daly, began to draw notice.\(^9\) The local Government's main concern was to stop the 'drift' of people and ease the pressure on 'the Daly.' Establishing a mission in the region was seen as the best solution.

In 1934 Bishop F. Gsell, M.S.C. was asked to find the right man for the project. He proposed Father Richard Docherty, M.S.C. From the farming district of Unwin in Western Australia, Fr. Docherty was ordained as a priest in Sydney and had been in Darwin since 1928 (Pye 1972). Notified by Bishop Gsell of his impending task, Fr. Docherty took the unusual step of tracing

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\(^8\) The history of the establishment of cattle stations in the Victoria River district and the interaction with indigenous people is well documented in Rose (1991), McGrath (1987), Shaw (1986), and others. The importance of these contacts transformed the indigenous culture of the area, forging new identities linked to cattle work. This was an early stage of contact for people living around the area. As we will see, a second wave of cattle workers from Port Keats was extensively employed in the 1950s and 1960s.

\(^9\) The craving for tobacco pushed people from the Port Keats area through the Moyle River plains to the Daly River mission and peanuts farm. The Moyle plains were home to Marri Ngarr people, traditional enemies of Murrinh-patha clans. Several fights occurred when Murrinh-patha people were intercepted on their way back from Daly River, the stealing of women and tobacco being the main reason for these outbursts of violence. The practice of visiting relatives residing in cattle stations and other settlements in pursuit of tobacco and other western goods seems to be a well-known pattern of Northern Territory history. People found it easier to deal with relatives than with Euroaustralian management. Read and Japajurrri (1978:146) report that Warlpiri men told Meggitt that they were content to maintain this pattern of sporadic contact with Europeans indefinitely, or as long as no pressure was put upon them by pastoralists, missionaries or welfare authorities to abandon nomadic life.
people from Port Keats who happened to be in Darwin. Some of these were in Fanny Bay gaol due to the events surrounding Nemarluk. Records in the *Kanamkek - Yile Ngala* Museum of Wadeye report that Fr.Docherty sought approval for the mission from the men with whom he spoke. In 1934 he sailed to Port Keats with a few Aboriginal men in order to survey the site. He left after a few weeks with a promise to return the following dry season. On the 6th of June 1935 Fr.Docherty sailed again for Wadeye and again Aboriginal men accompanied him. The following text is a translation of a recording featuring Harry Luke Kolumboort – one of the five Aboriginal men involved in the Port Keats expedition.10

This is the story I am going to tell when the first mission started, when we left Darwin. The bosses in Darwin had meeting then the bosses told them there was going to be a mission at Port Keats. We said “All right.” There were few of us. Then out of those few he [Fr.Docherty] took four first. Father said “I am going to have a look at the place first and where I am going to put the mission.” Then he took the four men. He took them on a boat called Saint Francis. He went and arrived at a place called Kirmmu. There were no people there except for few old people: my granpa Kampurt, granpa (mother side) Nalpu, my uncle Mapunanh, Thangmak. Those were the people Father saw first, those were the only people there. Some were at Daly River and some were over at Bradshaw Station and Legune. That’s where all the Murrinh-patha people were.

Then the four people who came with Father told the old people who were there: “This is Father who is going to build a mission here and put up a house, he is looking for a suitable place.”

The old people were happy. Then Father Docherty was looking for a suitable place and found Werntek Nganayi and said: “I am going to build a house here.” I am going to

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10 Transcript of a tape stored in the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive [WASA Tape 421]. This tape was recorded in Wadeye by Gordon Chula, probably around the early 1980s, and the text is an English rendition of the original Murrinh-patha by an anonymous translator.
plant a coconut tree here too. This is where the mission is going to be. He was here for a while, then went back to Darwin. (My emphasis)

This first section of the narrative employs characteristic motifs of a travel story. The narrator indicates his right to tell the story by indicating his relatedness to those immediately involved, his grandfathers, mother's and father's sides, and his mother's brother. 'Father [Fr. Docherty],' travels and arrives at a suitable site, Werntek Nganayi, where he makes camp and determines the plan for the future. Harry Luke continued,

When they got to Darwin the other mob who were in Darwin were still there. The other four who were with Fr. Docherty told the other mob that the mission was going to be at Werntek Nganayi and he had planted coconuts there already. "That's all right," we said. I was only a young boy. We stayed in Darwin for one year then, on the first dry season, Father left Darwin to go over to Bathurst Island to get timbers. He was cutting up the timbers himself at Bathurst Island. He [was] cutting it up for the new mission house at Wentek Nganayi.

My "brother" Doctor Stanner was over at the Daly River when he first heard the news about the new mission. He himself left Daly River and went to Darwin and waited for Father Docherty there. Father was still cutting timber at Bathurst Island. Then all that time the Murrinh-patha people were going back to Werntek Nganayi along with my father. There were only five of us left there. There were four young man and one man had a wife — oh — there were five men and two women and one child called Diana. When Fr. Docherty came back [to Darwin] we were living in a compound, the compound reserve. There were people living top camp and the bottom camp near the beach.

The progressive settlement of colonists in the area, since the end of the nineteenth century, drew indigenous people from various communities to Darwin and to other cattle station centres.
of the Victoria River District. In Darwin, Aborigines were living under the supervision of the Welfare Department. They were located in two compounds in proximity to the town's centre.

The boss of the compound was Mr. Dean White. He was a welfare officer. He was the one who looked after us. Then he told us that we were going home. Fr. Docherty was coming to pick us and take us back to Port Keats. We said, "All right." Father came back from Bathurst Island and arrived in Darwin, then he came to the compound and said to us: "Come, I am ready now". We then packed up our belongings and put them on Father's truck. From there we went to the convent where the old presbytery is. We arrived there, we saw Father. "What time do you want to leave?" we said to Fr. Docherty. "Tomorrow" he said to them [sic]. Then the next day Father went to say mass. We were still at the camp. Two of the men said, "We stop here, we come behind" they said, but Father told them two he was to take the whole lot of them.

The boat was the Saint Francis and Arriyeki. Arriyeki had the sail and the Saint Francis had the engine. Then the next day the easterly wind was blowing [and] the two boats left. We arrived at the lighthouse. That's where the wind stopped because we had sail and no engine. The Saint Francis had left us because it had engine. It kept going and the wind stopped again at an island and we camped there. We anchored there, but the Saint Francis just kept going. We drifted there till the westerly wind blew. We kept going and the wind stopped again at an island and we camped there. We anchored there but the Saint Francis just kept going.

Again Harry Luke shapes his account as a travel story, a ‘travelin through’ narrative where the protagonists 'just keep going.' This is a comment on engine-driven transport and also, typically, an idiom reserved for travel through the domains of unrelated clans.

I am going to name the two skippers of the two boats: Stephen and Alfie Marry was the engineer of the Saint Francis. The skipper of the Arriyeki was Alphonsus. There were
eight crew from Bathurst Island on the Saint Francis. The people on the Saint Francis were Fr. Docherty, Doctor Stanner, Cedric who was a stockman at Bathurst Island. Only Alphonsus was on the Arriyeki.

Harry Luke stressed that the anthropologist William H. Stanner was part of the expedition. This journey marked the beginning of a long-term association between Stanner and Murrinh-patha people. In the following three decades Stanner spent a number of periods in Wadeye where, particularly under the guidance of Harry Luke, he conducted ethnographic research. To this day, the large corpus of Stanner’s articles and books remains the central source on the cultures of the Wadeye region.

We kept going. Early in the morning the wind blew, we kept going. The Saint Francis was waiting for us at a place called Pagthalarr, that’s where it anchored for the night. I don’t know where the sun set for us, might be a place called Manththihaman, maybe. We were not travelling at night when the skipper of the Saint Francis was signalling us with a torch. We said to ourselves: “Ah, there’s the Saint Francis, at the point at Pagthalarr [Badjalarr (North Peron Island)].” We signalled back and he signalled back at us. When we got there, we anchored nearby and camped there.

The next morning there was a big wind, the sea was rough, very rough, the waves were really high. The one with the engine had a load of timber, the timber was everywhere, but us mob we had the sail and we were going faster. The Saint Francis was now behind. We were in front. We kept going till the place called Pumurryi [Pumurriyi]. That’s where the wind died on us. We kept going and anchored at a place called Thinphill. We waited for the other boat with the engine.

The skipper got the torch and signalled to the Saint Francis and it signalled back. It anchored behind us. The next morning we had the same strong easterly wind. We were still in the front. Then we got to a place called Kinmor Ngaliwe. The wind died down again. We on the Arriyeki dropped anchor at a place called Nalpu.
The Saint Francis had the engine, went straight past us and stopped at place called Witni. Some of the people with women got off and cooked damper on the mainland. The men went to get wallabies, the Tiwi mob went wallaby hunting. Then for us the westerly wind started blowing. We left from there and arrived at a place called Wikinh. The Saint Francis came behind and stopped at the same place and we camped there. The next morning the Saint Francis left first and arrived at Werntek Nganayi. The other boat was waiting for the tide to come up.

The two boats followed the coast to the south, stopping in various places (see below Map 2.1). It is interesting to note that the number of places named increases as the travellers draw closer to familiar countries.

The next day we were unloading the two boats, one boat at the time. We unloaded the Saint Francis first. The other boat Arriyeki was still waiting in deep water. When we finished unloading, we went to look for a place. We carried the cargo up to dry land, then we cut some rails for the big tent. That fly tent is the presbytery in which Fr. Docherty is saying mass in a photograph. [see below Map 2.1]

They set the tent up. When we had done that we started collecting the stuff we brought from Darwin, the motor car too. When we finished the first boat, we then unloaded the stuff from the Arriyeki. We unloaded many things, like flour and sugar and so, on the dry land. Five of us and ten crew from Bathurst Island and whites help each other. We finished everything from the beach.

Following the party's arrival, Fr. Docherty spent the first days unloading the two boats and organising the camp. He built a Presbytery with the wood collected in Bathurst Island. He reassembled the Model T Ford truck he had previously dismantled in Darwin. Tents for the white personnel of the mission were erected. When these tasks were complete, a party of men was sent out to 'call people in.' As more people arrived, Fr. Docherty organized them into
working groups for essential tasks. These included digging a well and clearing ground for a vegetable garden.

Then Father told us: “We wait for a while, there’s nobody here yet.” There was nobody anywhere, not even footprints. The people were all at a place called Piyirt and Kura Lenhin and Karntirnu. Some were not around the area, even Murrinh-patha people were not around. They were all at stations like Bradshaw, Legune, Auvergne and Daly River.

Then Father told us: “Before you go looking for people we are going to build a presbytery. When we finish you can go look for people.” When we finished he then said mass for us. Two of the men had already left from the camp, a long walk to Piyirt. They passed a place called Yawu. It was dark but they kept walking until they got to Piyirt.
Map 2.1 The Journey of the Arriyeki and the Saint Francis
Two men were sent out to inform people of the arrival of the missionaries. They headed south, through Yek Diminin country (Yewu) to Yek Ngudunimarn estate (Nimati). This party was looking for Murrinh-patha people who at that time had gravitated to the cattle stations on the other side of the Fitzmaurice River.

When they were coming close to the camp, the people would smell something different. They had put lots of hair oil on their hair. The people thought it was a buffalo. The people started running to the tree then one of the men called out to one of his cousins who was with the camping group: “Ah, cousin, it’s only me come from Darwin!” The people there thought they had travelled through Daly River to here. The people said to each other, “It’s only those two.”

They sat down, then told them Fr. Docherty had arrived at Werntek Nganyi with them. When the people heard this they were really happy. The same night some men left the camp to spread the news to another group of people who were camping at a place called Kura Lenhthenka and that same night some men left that camp and went to a place called Kerntirmu and told the good news. Two of the men from that camp had left before heading to Legune Station. They followed them to bring them back. They followed them till they caught up with them at a place called Nimati. The men looked back and saw two figures. Those two were thinking that something must have happened back, maybe spearfight they said to themselves. When they had arrived they told them that Father had arrived from Darwin. They then went back. They were walking all day till they got to a place called Nanthath [unidentified location].

The news spread quickly and soon people began to converge on the mission site. The first ones to come in were Murrinh-patha and Magati Ke people. Harry Luke relates that the first there

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11 The translation of Harry Luke’s expression theterdhe, the Murrinh-patha equivalent of ‘news,’ shows how a Christian motif has been blended into events. The arrival of Fr. Docherty marked the spread of the ‘good news,’ that is, the Gospel.
were *Yek Diminin* people (Naburup, Kurruwal), members of his own clan. It is interesting to note that *Wernteck Nganyi*, or ‘Old mission,’ is part of the estate of *Rak Kirmnu* people, yet this group does not appear in Harry Luke’s narration (see below Table 2.1 for people and places arranged according to clan affiliation). When this recording was made (1980) the mission had already moved to its present site, on *Yek Diminin* land. Harry Luke and his family had been closely associated with the missionaries, and had played a pivotal role in the development of the settlement. For this reason, the protagonists of this narration are closely associated with Harry Luke. Moreover, it is likely that his account involves a projection of the political present onto past events.

Some of the others were already back, arriving at the new mission. Dave Kurruwal and my granpa Nalpu and granpa Kampurt and my brother Napurup, they were the first mob to arrive there. They had young boys with them: Johnny Chula and his brother Paddy Chula and another one called Themath, they were the boys.

The next morning there were lot of people walking up the beach. Those were the people who got the news. They were from Kura Lenthinka, Kerntinu and Piyirt. But the other mob who camped at Manthathpe were still coming.
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<tr>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Clans/Estates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naburup</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurruwul</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Luke Kolumboort</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnny/Paddy Chula</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Yederr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weertek Nganayi (Old mission)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Kirranu</td>
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<td>Wadeye</td>
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<td>Nimati</td>
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<td>Yek Ngudunimarn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manthathpe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Naminin</td>
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Table 2.1 People and places in the narration arranged according to clans/estates affiliation
Some of these were different from Harry Luke. The difference stressed by Harry Luke between his group, the 'first mob there,' and people that had 'nothing on them,' reflects Harry Luke's rendering of the stratification of contact (see also Morphy and Morphy 1984). Harry Luke underlines his temporal and locational priority in the mission by describing other, later arrivals as 'naked people.'

Next morning they saw that group walking up the beach and arrived at the mission. They had nothing on them to wear, Father was ashamed. Next morning Father didn't work. Instead he cut up some calico for the people to wear. When he finished cutting he started handing it out to them. They were now wearing [clothes] for the first time.

After that Father told them to start work first. They started cutting down trees and some dug up a well for water and Fr.Docherty started to build a house, the presbytery. When he had finished then they started clearing the jungle. Some went hunting for wallaby because there were no cattle there. Father even had the wallaby to eat.

Harry Lukes’ account is notable in many ways. It is a valuable historical document, and also a record of indigenous attitudes towards settlement. One of its key passages is Harry Luke Kolumboort’s declaration that, when the ‘bosses’ told him and his companions that a mission would be established in Wadeye, they said ‘All right.’ This permission should not be identified literally with Myers’ (1998) account of the appropriate procedures for access to country. In formal ritual and procedural terms this would have been a more complex affair. However, Harry Luke indicates that at least Fr. Docherty had a sense of exchange, was prepared to help and be helped. Fr. Docherty’s asking and Harry Luke’s giving permission thereby become a generic event in true mythic form (see Turner 1988b:252). In this narrative, the ‘arrival of the

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12 The above narrative gives an account of people’s movements through the area, and it clearly states which clans were first to come into the mission. This has been extremely useful for the comprehension of strategies of alliances between families and clans at the present time.
missionaries’ motif is presented as a dialogue between two orders. ‘Asking’ may have had different values for Fr. Docherty and Harry Luke Kolumboort, but they concurred and cooperated in the actions taken. They were literally ‘in the same boat’ and, as Harry Luke relates, they communed in significant ways both physically and morally.

From the outset, this negotiation also had a pragmatic dimension for the Aborigines. A settlement in the Wadeye region that could be a source of commodities and the all-important tobacco was an attraction. In his own reflections, Fr. Docherty shows that he was alive to these engagements and the possibilities they created. Unlike the explorers, he did not assume that a violent reception would be his lot.

Doctor Stanner reminded me many times about the spears that came flying round our tent, and how apparently I took no notice. I don’t know that I even noticed them at all. It was not apparent at all; I wasn’t concerned with what the people were doing. If they wanted to kill us they could have done it, and that would have been that. But I didn’t think so: they received us, and apparently were very joyful about it. Here was the supplies (sic) they had asked for, and tobacco was much in their thoughts: “We will have plenty of tobacco now. Those people have come to help us.” (Docherty 1974:4)

Stanner’s ‘reminder’ very likely referred to the fact that violent intertribal fights had swept the area for decades before the arrival of the missionaries. According to Stanner’s informants, the majority of these fights took place as a result of the abduction of women, or over the possession of western goods.

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13 Indeed this narration has become an ‘Aboriginal tradition’ as it served as a template for the production of a number of songs on this subjects by the local indigenous popular bands. See the songs by Wakal Bengkunh Band Werntek Ngonayi and Song of Fr. Docherty [Wakal Bengkunh Band 07 and 09].

14 Harry Luke stresses that during the travel they camped together and that even Fr. Docherty ate kangaroo.
As pointed out earlier, the settlement of Daly River had attracted indigenous people who converged on the area in order to acquire flour, sugar and tobacco. There Murrinh-patha were confronted by Themirri and Malak Malak people, who were not willing to share the resources of the mission settlement (See Map 2.2, Conflict No.1). This often generated chases in which Malak Malak pursued Murrinh-patha people well into Marri Ngarr country. This latter group was also opposed to Murrinh-patha people and often confronted them as they returned to their country, in order to acquire the goods the Murrinh-patha brought from Daly River (Map 2.2, Conflict No.2). As reported by people at Wadeye today, many of these fights took place around the flood plains of the Moyle River. As result of these quarrels, Murrinh-patha people were constantly pushed back and resolved to live around the coastal area to the west. They abandoned the hill region of their country. Some people travelled to the cattle stations south-west of Wadeye and others moved to Darwin. Marri Amu people were also exerting a certain pressure on Marri Ngarr, coming down from the north, and forced the Marri Ngarr into Murrinh-patha country (Map 2.2, Conflict No.3). This led to the redistribution of Marri Ngarr to the southern part of the Moyle River plain.
The first groups to enter the settlement immediately after its establishment were the Murrinh-paptha, the Magati Ke, and the Marri Tjevin.¹⁵ At this time, Marri Ngarr people moved towards the settlement but kept their distance. Tension arose occasionally, mainly over the distribution of goods. They were contained, however, by the strong administration of Fr. Docherty. Possibly, Harry Luke and others saw the mission as a safe haven from the strife. Yet his narrative of exchange between cultures also marks a significant departure from all the European accounts of settlement in and around Port Keats. Moreover, Harry Luke’s story does not begin to exhaust the modes of interpretation that Aboriginal people brought to the advent of Port Keats.

In the final sections of this chapter, I introduce the three song genres – *Malkarrin, Dhanba,* and popular song – and the historical events that surrounded their creation. *Malkarrin* had its origins in a time that preceded the mission, *Dhanba* in the 1960s, when the mission was well-established, and popular song in the 1970s and 1980s when cash economy and secular governance came to Wadeye. Like the narratives discussed above, these song genres underline that ‘history’ is dialogue built from interpreted experience. Among Aboriginal people at Wadeye this experience has also been a highly creative process.

### 2.4 From Narrative to Dream-vision and Ritual Exchange

During the period that Harry Luke Kolumboort returned to Port Keats with Fr. Docherty, the Christian God was not unknown to people of the area. According to common belief, he first appeared in a dream-vision that Mollinjin, also known as Wunamparrkit, had. This occurred while he was residing in the bush in the coastal area south-west of Port Keats, possibly in the early 1930s.

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¹⁵ There are several recorded stories in the WASA archives that narrate the early days of the mission. These stories describe the close relationship between these groups. One of the reasons for this closeness is to be found in the links established by *nantji kala,* the traditional ceremonial goods exchange present in the area (see Chapter One, p.23). These three groups are next to each other in the exchange route.
2.4.1 Malkarrin and Mollinjin’s vision

Mollinjin, so the story goes, had a reputation as a sorcerer and violent man. Struck by a sudden illness, he was resting under a tree while his peers went hunting. During his sleep, a bird took him up to ‘a beautiful place’ and later, after turning into an angel, the bird showed him a city. On the outskirts of the city he saw a ‘beautiful lady,’ later identified as the Virgin Mary. She stepped on a snake that was trying to bite her. People in the vision were speaking a foreign language and the places Wunamparrkit saw were unfamiliar to him.

In the course of the dream, Mollinjin came into the presence of God, who was wearing a traditional paperbark hat. God gave him a song called Malkarrin, and urged him to stop his violent behaviour and to become a good man. The dreamer awoke a changed man and told everybody about his vision. People were puzzled and impressed by the places that Mollinjin described and the language he was singing. A few who had travelled to Western Australia recognized the places and the language but could not understand how Mollinjin had acquired this knowledge. He had neither been to these places nor previously heard the language. An explanation came when, during the first mass held by Fr. Docherty at the original site of the mission, people recognized a portrait of Holy Mary as the woman Mollinjin had seen in his dream. Mary and God were the givers of this new song genre.

Mollinjin’s dream-vision can be explained in terms of cultural diffusions that took place in the north-west part of Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As described above, Aboriginal people from Port Keats travelled on boats between Timber Creek Depot and Darwin. Moreover, some were working in cattle stations around the Victoria River district. These new settings favoured Christian diffusion to the point where specific elements, among them the snake-treading Virgin, were incorporated into indigenous domains. Even assuming that Mollinjin had not been to Western Australia, he might have interpreted the recollections of his travelling peers.
To receive a song in a dream means to receive a performance – songs are subsequently executed in a ritual context – through which relationships are formed and strengthened. Receiving a song from God allowed Christianity into indigenous cosmology and thereby provided a place for missionaries and their performances on Aboriginal land. From this point of view, it is not unlikely that indigenous people interpreted Christian liturgy in terms of particular types of performances, so that becoming a Christian meant to engage with the corpus prefigured in the dream related by Mollinjin. To this day, people at Wadeye base their Christian identity, as indigenous Christians, on this cultural configuration.¹⁶

The point to be stressed here is that possibly for much of the mission era, Aboriginal people thought that they could encompass the innovation that was Port Keats. Fr. Docherty introduced himself as a person open to relevant and desirable forms of exchange. Moreover, the Christian cosmology with which he was associated was incorporated independently into traditional practice through the medium of Malkarrin songs. The site of the mission was not a site of economic exploitation that extensively revalued the landscape. Moreover, the white settlers who came were vastly outnumbered by the indigenous population. Wadeye endured then and does so today as an indigenous community. Yet critical changes would occur as the mission became a European-influenced domestic moral economy and these changes would redefine a hunting and gathering society.

2.4.2 **Dhanba songs and the challenge of new ways**

The mission moved to its present site in 1939. The original site had lacked several features required for settlement expansion: abundant fresh water and soil appropriate for gardening as well as flat land suitable for an air strip. Fr. Docherty made several surveys covering most of the country between the Daly and Fitzmaurice Rivers. After several expeditions he fastened on a

¹⁶The commitment to Christianity strengthened, decades later, when a few local women were ordained as nuns and Boniface Perdjert became, in 1974, the first indigenous Deacon ordained in Australia.
suitable site close to a barge landing and at a place where one of two streams enters the port of Wadeye. The buildings erected along the coast were dismantled, packed and transported to the new location where they were reassembled.

By the end of 1939, a chapel and a clinic had been constructed. One acre of land had been cleared for gardening purposes and a number of other buildings were planned. Aboriginal people were employed in the clearing work for the airstrip and the gardens. They also assisted with the construction of three bores.\textsuperscript{17} Later in that same year, Fr. Docherty's right hand man, Brother Quinn, walked to Daly River with a few Aboriginal men and brought back a cattle herd. A sawmill was completed in the following months and this led to the construction of other buildings including a nun's house and a school, along with a kitchen and dormitory for girls. By 1941, all these projects had been completed. In the interim, the mission population had grown to a number between 200 and 300 people. Of these, around 120 actually lived at the station.\textsuperscript{18}

The year 1941 saw the arrival of some sisters of Our Lady of The Sacred Heart. Fr. Docherty considered their presence essential for the mission's success and had eagerly sought their recruitment. A dormitory system was established for girls who were now placed in the custody of the nuns. Barely a year later, the sisters were evacuated when the Darwin bombing began in February 1942. During the war, Fr. Docherty was an official coast watcher for the Australian Navy and the RAAF established a radar base on Mt. Goodwin, known today as Airforce Hill, just five kilometres west of Wadeye. Supplies were brought in via the settlement and the base provided additional employment for indigenous people.

This series of changes, intensified by the war, challenged people who lived in and around the mission. There was some abandonment of ritual practice as the settlement increased its influence on people's lives. In addition, the mission created new forms of social dynamic that

\textsuperscript{17} [Report Australian Archives 1938/533].

\textsuperscript{18} [Report Australian Archives 1938/533].
affected clans in significant ways. The settlement began to redistribute people from the region. Marri Ngarr people, traditionally enemies of the Murrinh-patha who were the land-owning group for the settlement area, were drawn progressively into the township. The tensions created by this joint presence erupted into regular skirmishes. Fr. Docherty took a personal hand in calming many of these, and subsequently introduced a significant social innovation – fortnightly shifts. One of the groups would be stationed on site working while the other camped in the bush. A temporary solution, it nonetheless reduced the pressures created by antagonistic clans living in close proximity.

By the time the Sacred Heart sisters returned in 1945, the school had been rebuilt and extensive gardens of banana, cassava and pawpaw had been established. In the same year, Father John Flynn, M.S.C. joined Fr. Docherty and Brother Pye at the mission and took up catechetical and language work. Two other brothers and two lay helpers assisted these three men. The additional male help allowed the maintenance of a dormitory for boys as well as one for girls. By the mid-1950s, a sawmill, a garden, a bakery, a small-scale cattle station, and a brick factory were thriving. Indigenous people were involved in every Wadeye enterprise. This industrial consolidation also meant a growth of the settlement’s permanent population. From the early 1950s, the Marri Ngarr settled permanently around the mission and the shift system was cancelled.

In terms of employment, residents of the mission had two broad options. They could either contribute to the development of the Wadeye or find employment in the pastoral industry. Both options rewarded indigenous people with rations – food, clothing and other items such as tobacco and blankets. Rowse (1998:4) has argued that the practice of rationing was ‘an ideologically fruitful practice; [...] a rich site of meanings, [and] a central generator of colonial ideologies.’ In Wadeye rationing was inextricably linked with the value of ‘work.’ People’s recollections of the period always stress that, despite various hardships, it was a time when people were employed and worked willingly. This view assumes further import in the light of
today's high unemployment rates and laments about 'lazy' youngsters. The basis on which the community was founded – a work-for-rations regime variously interpreted – was 'owned' by the indigenous participants, at least in some degree. The mission's domestic economy and Christian precepts fostered the concept of the 'hard day's work' which was rewarded with 'well earned' rations. Needless to say, there was no tobacco for those who would not work. Rations were not gifts.

It was cattle station employment, however, that became the Aboriginal work. Without doubt the entire Victoria River District pastoral economy was based on local indigenous workers. Although this work involved freedoms that were absent in the mission settlement, cattle stations still led people into semi-sedentary lives (see Lewis 1997; McGrath 1987; Rose 1991). Many people from Wadeye also travelled the region and spent several years employed at one locale or another. Their patterns of movement differed from Aborigines working in the Victoria River district. The latter actually resided on cattle stations whereas Port Keats people travelled to contract work and then returned to the settlement. Once again, this left Port Keats a relatively isolated place to which people returned when they were released from pastoral employment.

Notwithstanding its Christian mission, Port Keats might have remained a haven of traditional culture but for the dormitory system. Between 1946 and 1967, two generations of indigenous people spent their childhoods in the dormitories. While activity in the pastoral industry and even around Port Keats itself brought people together in new forms of engagement that would prove innovative in ritual terms, aspects of the dormitory system were highly destructive of traditional

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19 The adoption of Western values by Aboriginal people is a well known field of study; of particular interest for the region in which Wadeye is situated, cattle station work proved to be one of the most important cases. McGrath (1987) has demonstrated how indigenous people have combined culturally different sets of values in a practice that could overcome the sense of loss of colonial dispossession. Although different, the situation in Wadeye presents similar features. Community work around the mission became the practice on which identity was constructed at Port Keats.

20 Rowe (1998: 77) stresses that in Central Australia the Lutheran mission implemented the concept of work based on the fact that 'a Christian cannot be a parasite.'
culture. Betrothal practices and bride price payments were disrupted by the process Fr. Docherty called ‘the liberation of the girls.’ This was a well-planned system to ‘prevent polygamy.’ By giving tobacco and flour to the relatives of the girls, Fr. Docherty acquired their marriage rights as his sometime sponsor, Bishop Gsell, had done on Bathurst Island.21

Dormitories also affected the indigenous economy. Young women raised in a dormitory were unprepared for married life in a part-time foraging regime. Sweeney remarked at the time,

The method used gives a measure of effective control over the children but the sheltered life in the girls’ dormitory from 5 years of age to marriage cannot be suitable in preparation for the economy they must enter on marriage. The young men’s estimate of the girls is that they are useless as hunters, and some of them have had such difficulties in adjusting themselves to the hunting for, preparation and eating bush foods, that their health has suffered and they have had to be given extra nutritional help from the hospital. An attempt is being made to give the girls in the dormitory short outings in the Mission vicinity to give them some hunting training but the policy of supervision limits the range and scope of training. (Sweeney 1951:2)

As Falkenberg (1962) reports, years spent in dormitories also undermined the ritual knowledge and commitment among young men. Not Christian ceremonial, but the mission social order of relatively sedentary life, rationing based on work and the dormitories, ultimately changed indigenous life in and around Wadeye.

It is part of Wadeye’s fascination that this process of rapid change from the 1940s to 1960s both transformed people’s social relations and yet saw significant continuities in ceremonial

21 This system was introduced by Bishop Gsell, during his missionary years at Bathurst Island. He gives a full account of this practice, which covered the span period 1921 and 1938, in his book The Bishop with 150 wives (1959).
performance. While the mission worked against the maintenance of secret men’s and women’s initiation rites – the missionaries judged the ceremonies as ‘cruel’ and in contravention of Christian practice – the breakdown of secret ceremonies created a vacuum that was filled by the development of new forms of open ceremony. These performances also involved significant exchange among the various groups resident there. Three groups of people were especially important and can be characterized in terms of language: the traditional land owners of the area, the Murrinh-patha people; the Marri Ngarr speaking people from the Moyle River plains to the east; and Marri Amu, Marri Tjevin and Magati Ke people from the northern coast.

Of these three groups, only the northern coastal people already had an open ceremonial musical tradition, Wangga. This situation changed, however, at the beginning of the 1960s. Inspired by contacts with other indigenous groups brought about by pastoralism, Marri Ngarr people created a local form of the song genre called Lirrga. A few years later, Murrinh-patha people followed a similar path and ‘found’ their own genre, Dhanba.²² Performances of Wangga, Lirrga and Dhanba came to constitute a tripartite ceremonial exchange that fostered a new set of relationships between these three groups. Each one became identified with their particular song genre and evolved between them a system of ceremonial exchange. The system involves a range of reciprocal ceremonial performances that includes initiation, funerals, smoking and rag burning ceremonies.²³ For example, if a member of the Wangga mob dies, it is either Dhanba or Lirrga that is performed for him. Similarly, when a group of Dhanba boys undergoes circumcision, either Lirrga or Wangga will be danced for them.

²² The term ‘found’ is used by indigenous people when describing compositions inspired by dreams in which ancestors or totemic figures give the song to the composer, usually performing it. Once awakened, the dreamer will compose the songs that he found in his dream.
²³ Smoking and ragburnings are mortuary ceremonies performed a few months after a person’s funeral. During smoking ceremonies, the smoke of burning eucalyptus leaves cleanses the house of the deceased of his/her presence. During ragburnings, usually performed a year after the funeral, relatives of the deceased person destroy the chattels of the dead, definitely releasing his/her spirit which will then return to the person’s Dreaming estate.
Like *Malkarrin* before it, *Dhanba* represents a cultural transformation wrought by the presence of a Christian mission settlement. Whereas *Malkarrin* pertained to fundamental cosmogony, *Dhanba* restructured the ritual interaction within a community suffering loss of ceremonial life and struggling with settlement co-existence among three previously distanced groups. In terms reminiscent of Levi-Strauss, one might observe that the new song genres provided a system of ritual differences that discriminated between identities as it also sought to affirm a unity between them (see Levi-Strauss 1966:87-89). This unity involved a new pattern of settlement in and around the mission, which are mediated by the tripartite exchange.

### 2.5 Post-Mission Modernity and Popular Music

Changes in federal government indigenous policy had a further impact on the community in the mid-1960s. The Wave Hill strike for equal pay and the referendum that acknowledged indigenous citizenship in Australia also marked the start of Aborigines’ incorporation into the Australian welfare state (Chesterman and Galligan 1998; Peterson and Sanders 1998). It was felt that the colonized required training in order to become agents within the economy. With the advent of training allowances, the people of Wadeye had, for the first time, to deal with money as a universal currency. This circumstance was accompanied by the payment of various pensions (Sanders 1985). The full panoply of welfare followed with its own specific form of generalized economy. However, when the administrative role of the mission weakened and eventually disappeared with the inauguration of the era of ‘self-determination,’ people at Wadeye remained relatively unprepared for a cash economy and western bureaucratic structures.

A cash economy, and the weakening of structures that in the past sustained the relations between groups, has brought changes in the tenor of relatedness (see below Chapter Five). Identities based on clans and patronymic families within clans increasingly individuate groups and separate them from one another. Although affinal relations between groups and the

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24 I deal with the issues foreshadowed here more fully in Chapters Five and Six.
inevitable networks of daily association mediate this circumstance, it is still the case that sustaining relatedness has become, in the context of settlement, more testing and complex (see Peterson 1991, 1993; Austin-Broos 2003). At times the demands involved prove too demanding and tensions rise. Occasionally these conflicts culminate in violence and then people tend to take refuge within clearly defined families and clans. Identification with these groups fuels recriminations that lead to other tensions. Although peoples’ identities as relatives remain multifaceted, the nimbleness with which varieties of filiation might be deployed to mediate conflict has lessened at Wadeye.

Popular music in the 1980s and 1990s was a medium that both registered and acted to moderate this tenor of relatedness. Inspired by the revitalization of indigenous culture brought by the outstation movement of the 1980s, a number of performers clustered in clan-based rock bands the repertoires of which focused on the groups’ traditional estates. These bands interacted through an exchange of songs and performance that followed the routes of bilateral kin. For instance, people would compose a song for their mother’s country, thus strengthening relationships with their maternal ‘side,’ or respond to a request for a song from a father’s uncle.

In sum, the founding and growth of Port Keats, and its post-mission history as Wadeye, has been accompanied by a variety of narratives told in different forms. Among the narratives that have been recorded, European accounts came first, imputing different types of value to indigenous difference. Aboriginal people re-rendered these narratives and also furnished their own responses both in the form of song performance, and stories. It is important to note that Malkarrin and Dhanba preceded both popular music and Harry Luke’s narrative. Yet Harry Luke’s story is the creation of a man who lived through the relevant period and changed as his milieu changed. It therefore distils the central point of this chapter: that indigenous people in and around Wadeye have sought to incorporate the events of settlement within their own genres. This practice is alive today and possibly had its first expression in the subject of the following chapter, Malkarrin.
CHAPTER THREE
MOLLINJIN’S VISION AND MALKARRIN SONGS

3.1 Introduction
This chapter recounts the development of a new genre of open-ceremonial songs called Malkarrin. The genre facilitated an indigenous engagement with Christian cosmology by including it in the mythopoetic of an Aboriginal world.\(^1\) Strikingly, the production of these songs, texts of which contain explicit Christian imagery, predates the mission’s founding in 1935. The process of song production was initiated by a vision in which the Christian God appeared in a dream to Mollinjin (also known as Wunamparrkit), the composer. God ‘gave’ Mollinjin the first Malkarrin song.

Yet Mollinjin’s vision does not explain how Aboriginal people adapted to Christianity. Rather, it points to the way in which Christianity was incorporated into an indigenous world. The vision transposes the historical factuality of Christianity, which could have been interpreted in

\(^1\) It must be pointed out that the incorporation of Christian elements refers to certain aspects of biblical cosmology, and not to the whole moral (and economic) system. The limits of this incorporation became evident when the mission was established in Wadeye, and people had to negotiate the impact of these latter changes. New economic practices were particularly challenging for the indigenous order.
the first place as the product of the settlers, into the ‘everywhen’ of the Dreaming (see Stanner 1979a:24). Mollinjin’s vision thereby instantiates an indigenous chronotope that incorporated and transformed elements of Christian cosmology into the space-time and agential modes of an Aboriginal ontology (Bakhtin 1981; Bender and Wellbery 1991:4). Most important, Malkarrin songs were integral to this incorporation. They bridged the space between the dreamed inspiration of a single individual (Mollinjin, the composer), and the communal performance of rituals in which these new elements were made explicit. This process provided a later, socially and culturally elaborated Christian order with an initial indigenous legitimation – a fact that helps explain why the mission era was positively regarded. Whatever the moral and social tensions to come, at the outset Christianity was not simply imposed by the settlers. It was also generated from within the indigenous cosmology.

In order to address this innovation, it is important to note that a number of writers have underlined the openness in Aboriginal cosmology that has always allowed the incorporation of new elements within a system. Kolig (1972), Keen (1994), and Poirier (2001) in turn have stressed the importance of ambiguity and divergent forms of interpretation in facilitating innovation and the accommodation of changing political interests. In this, Keen’s account of varying clan interpretations of a song is paradigmatic, while Dussart’s (2000) narrative of gendered re-interpretation of once closed ceremony indicates contemporary flexibility within an enduring cosmology (see also Dussart 2004).2 In the discussion to follow, this innovation and responsiveness to changing indigenous contexts will be relevant to the Malkarrin complex and to its positioning within later settlement life. With regard to the latter, the song complex

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2 On this matter, Sahlin (1985:xii) has suggested a distinction between performative and prescriptive cultures. The former tend to reorganize themselves around historical events, the latter tend to incorporate external circumstances into their order. It appears that Mollinjin’s vision falls within the second category. Cultural practices of the first category are, however, also a fundamental part of indigenous cultural reproduction in Wadeye. As we will see in the next chapter, ceremonial life was restructured in the 1960s – again, through songs – around the historical circumstance of the relocation of neighbouring clans within the boundaries of the mission. Together with Sahlin (1985:xiii) we must note therefore that performative and prescriptive structures can be found in the same society, in different domains, at different times.
found its niche in indigenous life as a story and performances linked specifically with the
identity of the mission congregation. Yet, despite its peripheral status in clan-based ceremonial,
as a new element in ritual exchanges between groups that came to reside around Wadeye,.
*Malkarin* foreshadowed further innovation and forms of ritual exchange. It constitutes a first
moment in a continuing process.

The production of new songs is exemplary in understanding this type of innovation: these new
compositions are not merely the product of historical circumstance but, from the point of view
of Aboriginal people in Wadeye, the very condition of new events emerging. Naturally, this is
not to say that without the vision or the songs Christianity would not have arrived in Wadeye.
Its arrival is an historical fact. Rather, the point is that *Malkarin* was the vehicle for the initial
incorporation of Christian cosmology into an Aboriginal world and this is reflected in peoples'
remarks today. Wadeye residents stress that Mollinjin’s vision and *Malkarin* occurred prior to
the arrival of the missionaries by proudly asserting that they were ‘Christians before the
Christians came.’ This affirmation stands both as a political statement of autonomy and as a re-
affirmation of an indigenous moral and aesthetical order over the settlers’ one.

This analysis of *Malkarin* begins with the narrative of the vision of Mollinjin, and its various
elements of Christian imagery. The narrative is presented in a manner that conforms with other
Dreaming stories. This version of the narrative, taken from Stockton (1985), was recorded and
translated by Gregory Panpawa Mollinjin, Wunamparrkit’s son, and linguist Chester Street.
The original tape is held in the *Kanamkak - Yile Ngala* Museum of Wadeye.  

3.2 The narrative of Mollinjin’s dream-vision

Mollinjin’s vision has attracted the attention of indigenous and non-indigenous people alike
and therefore has become a key motif of the Port Keats area. Based as it is on such an

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3 This version was published as *Murrinh Nanthi Malkarin* [The *Malkarin* Story], Wadeye: Wadeye
Press in 1981, see WASA Tape 193.
important event, the story has been reified or, better, standardized as common knowledge. It has been transcribed, translated and published in various versions one of which has been used in the bilingual teaching program at Our Lady of The Sacred Heart school in Wadeye. Almost everyone in the community can recall it. Therefore, even though the story is specifically associated with Mollinjin’s clan, and Malkarrin songs more broadly with Murrinh-patha-speaking people, both are central to the identity of the wider community and especially that part of it which remains closely associated with the Catholic Church. This role as communal Christian symbol is reflected in the decoration of the local church, where the right mural panel behind the altar depicts Mollinjin in the presence of the Virgin Mary. Here the story of the vision stands as the communal foundation of a Christian identity for the whole community.

This is the story I’m going to tell is about my father going up above to Heaven when he was still alive. My mother Naya told me this story. The story happened at a place called Kudantiga in the Yirrmelinhu area. But at that time the people were actually camped at the Kurdumturnulu water hole. [see below, Map 3.1]

My father used to be a bad man. He was a kidney-fat man, always cutting the kidney fat from people. That and other bad things he used to do. However, he was stricken with a bad disease, God gave him that bad disease and there he lay.

While he was lying there a brown hawk descended from above. "Krrrr!! Krrrr!!" he cried on his arrival. My father then went into a trance. He had a vision where everything went misty, you know that sort of thing.

Then the bird called my father and they both ascended above, my father with his eyes closed. “OK, open your eyes now,” he said. “Oh! What’s this? What’s this glorious place?” “Hey, let’s look at this!” the angel said to him again. “There’s our brother standing there,” pointing out to my father. There He stood alone, tall, straight and

\footnote{This description indicates that Mollinjin had been a sorcerer or ‘clever man.’}
without a blemish just like a Kentia palm. His hair was smooth and neatly brushed back. That was probably Jesus he saw, my mother tells me.

After that he looked the other way and the angel said to him, “That’s our mother standing over there, the boss lady. She’s treading on a snake.” The snake was trying to get up, but then our mother would tread on it again.

Then he [Mollinjin] looked the other way. “Hey!” he said in amazement. “There’s all the people who have died walking over there.” My father watched them walk. Some were dressed in red, blue, purple and various colours, while others weren’t. They were just dressed in black. After that the angel said to my father, “Look over that way.” He looked and saw a fire burning. The road to that fire was straight and people were walking along that road towards the fire. After a short glimpse of that, the angel waved his hand across his [Mollinjin’s] eyes and he had another vision. “Look over there!” he [the angel] said to him. “Oh!” he said in amazement. “There are the truly good people dressed in all different colours. They’re good people,” he said.

After that vision, he [Mollinjin] squeezed his way along a narrow track and arrived at Our Father. He had a big white beard and was wearing a large headdress on his head. That was Our Father.

From there he went to Jesus. “I’ll give this to you” Jesus said to him. “No, I’ll give it to you later.” First of all there were those who danced for my father. That was the Malkarrin song and dance. That’s what Our Father called it. After the dancing, Jesus said to him “Here, take this one first” – the Mulum Kanarra song [Malkarrin 00]. That was the first song he was given. My mother told me that was the first song he received from above.

After that, Our Father said to him, “I’ll give you these songs now.” “You take them with you. They are called Malkarrin. That’s all,” Our Father said to him.

After that vision he was lying there awake at Kurduntullulul in the Yirminhinu area and from then on he was a good person. The others who were camped there were then
returning from the day's fishing and zamia fruit expeditions.² That afternoon he sat up and looked around. His face and hair were shining, he was radiant all over.

"Hey! Who's that?" the people exclaimed as they arrived back. He had been waiting for them and called them all together saying, "Come here! We're going to sing and dance something new now. I didn't get these songs from here but Our Father above gave them to me." Then he sang for them first all that Mulurn Kanarra song.

From that time on my father was no longer a kidney-fat man. Nor did he do any of those other bad things. But he prayed to Jesus and always sang those Malkarrin songs.

This story was told to me by my mother. That's all of it now.

² Zamia palm's fruits, left to soak for a few days in water, are regularly checked by women.
Although this is accepted as the ‘official’ version of events, discussion with Wadeye people about this text led to the addition of two further elements on which there was common agreement. These were elements ‘left out’ in the recorded version.

In particular, it was stressed that, once he had arrived ‘up in heaven,’ Mollinjin saw ‘a city.’ Over time, it appears that this city came to be associated with an image of the biblical Jerusalem. People also emphasized the extensive travels that Mollinjin undertook during his dreams. These travels occurred even in the first vision, but more so in the subsequent dreams associated with the reception of the majority of items that comprise the Malkarrin corpus. Mollinjin found himself visiting other clans’ estates that were often located at a considerable distance from his own country. According to people today, these were places that were previously unknown to him.

The order in which the events develop is typical of traditional Dreaming stories: the appearance of ancestral agents, in this case biblical figures that include an angel, Jesus, the Virgin Mary and God, the progressive revelation of new knowledge, and the communication of a new model of performance. As noted above, this narrative embodies both the reproduction of an Aboriginal cultural system (dreams, dances and songs) and the introduction of a new knowledge (epitomized by the figure of God). However, this new knowledge, which is engaged as an indigenous chronotope, is not presented as complete and self-consistent. It is not a bounded and explicit whole but rather a group of images and elements of iridescent quality. Some elements are explicit. Others rest implicit and will acquire specific value only as the light of other experience is cast on them. For instance, there is no explanation provided right here for the ‘fire’ towards which (apparently) bad people walk. The narrative also promotes ambiguity and suggests the possibility of alternative versions. Even the narrator of this version of the

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6 The same word city, which appears in [Malkarrin 02] and [Malkarrin 04], was foreign to Murrinh-patha language. According to one informant, for a long time people were puzzled about the meaning of this word.
vision, Gregory Mollinjin, is cautious when he states that ‘That was probably Jesus he saw’ (My emphasis). Moreover, when others tell the story, they tend to leave out or add minor elements virtually every time they recollect it. This is not the product of careless forgetfulness but rather a typical process of creating space for adjustments and/or innovations within the seemingly finite framework of events and narratives. Rumsey (1994:124) has described this epistemological orientation with regard to the meaning in country:

The Aboriginal set towards country as a store of meaning is not one which treats it as though its significance were already completely known, but one which instead assumes there is always more there to be discovered.

Alongside these elements of an Aboriginal logic, there is also an interplay of indigenous and non-indigenous elements. Here the boundaries between the two cosmologies are not clearly defined. On the contrary, they often blur. God is both an ancestral agent and an agent of a different type of knowledge. At the same time, he provides this knowledge in an indigenous way, by giving a new song to Mollinjin. Rather than describe this as an instance of syncretism, it seems more appropriate to interpret these Christian elements as engagement with knowledge identified by Mollinjin as part of a peripheral but nonetheless indigenous cosmology (see Kolig 1972). At this stage, a sense of Christianity as a systematic set of practices and beliefs was not apparent.

For similar reasons, the narrative should not be seen as an a posteriori construction of foreknowledge; for example, as a dream anticipating the arrival of the settlers who thereby receive an ancestral authorization. This is the situation described by Beckett (1993) when Walter Newton produced a narrative in order to find, using the ethnographer’s words, ‘what had always been there’ (1993:697). Newton’s narrative carved a place retrospectively in the Dreaming for an explicitly ‘white’ ancestor (the biblical God is equated to the Dreaming ancestor Guluwiru). In this way, Newton sought to make sense of the colonial milieu in which
he had grown up. By contrast, Mollinjin had not experienced the pervasive presence of colonists at the time of his vision. Therefore his narration cannot be interpreted as a strenuous defence of indigenous values or as an attempt to mediate the introduction of a new cult, made in the awareness of an inevitable arrival of missionaries. Mollinjin did not challenge Christianity or try to substitute his indigenous knowledge in lieu of Western history as happens in the various Aboriginal sagas reported by Kolig (1980) and Rose (1984). In the well-known Captain Cook complex on which they both comment, the historical character, Cook, is modified to fit into regional and, sometimes, national indigenous history. In these cases, Captain Cook epitomizes the figure of the white new-law-bringing settler. The saga is ultimately a description-cum-critique of colonialism and its imposed order. By contrast, Mollinjin did not contest the morality of settlers or Christianity as such, for their nature as elaborated social, moral and political orders, and as culturally antagonistic, had not yet become clear.  

Like other new cults that had come to the area in previous decades, this one with its elements now identified as ‘Christian’ was incorporated into local ceremonial life through the advent of Mollinjin’s vision. Christianity’s magnitude and its impact as an economy would not be under scrutiny for some time.  

3.2.1 Three moments of the narration: surprise, revelation and incorporation

There are three key moments around which the events of the narration develop: these are the moments of surprise, the revelation of a new knowledge and, finally, the incorporation of this

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7 The process represented by Mollinjin’s vision and Makkarrin songs produced a non-antagonist perception of Christianity that endures, especially among the older generations, to this day. Younger generations, namely those influenced by other practices such as the dormitory system, have formed a different opinion of the mission, which is based on a critique of the economic/moral order, rather than of the religious elements incorporated in Mollinjin’s vision songs.

8 After the termination of Daly River mission in 1899, Aboriginal people of this area – apart from the few individuals stationed in Darwin – had no first-hand experience of a mission order.
knowledge via performance. Each of these deserves some comment prior to a further discussion of the process of incorporation.

Mollinjin experienced surprise when the bird startled him. Although the narrative above does not mention it, the song below describes this moment.9

[Malkarrin 01]

Kumbangulum pana warrwpa ngulu

That wind, the fright [when being suddenly woken up]

The wind, blown by the flapping of the bird's wings, wakes up the dreamer. It is this awakening that produces Mollinjin's dream; that is, he begins his visionary journey after being startled by the bird.10 The bird is therefore a messenger and its arrival indicates that something significant is going to happen. After being taken 'up to heaven,' and finding himself in a place he has not seen before, Mollinjin exclaims: 'Oh! What's this? What's this glorious place?' This state of surprise is the acknowledgement of imminent change.11

As the narrative proceeds, Mollinjin comes face to face with new types of ancestral agents that appear in an unusual form. Their presence accompanies the experience of new places and images, such as the colourfully dressed people or the fire at the end of the road. Although not interpreted, neither are these elements familiar in indigenous cosmological. In this second phase, Mollinjin experiences new knowledge. These new elements are part of the Christian

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9 See further below. The first five Malkarrin songs are numbered as [Malkarrin 00-04]. This is the second of these songs.
10 Lucid dreams, or being woken up while dreaming, is a recurrent theme in indigenous revelatory narrations. The dreamer is woken up to a deeper consciousness, the space of the Dreaming, where he/she witnesses the 'unchanging truth' of the totemic ancestral world.
11 Indigenous people often describe with expressions of (formalized) astonishment the breaking of, for instance, an unexpected piece of news. In Murrinh-patha the expression used is 'nah,' which translates in Aboriginal English with the rhetorical question 'True?'
tradition of the white settlers though they are not initially recognized as such. The angel does not use the names ‘God’ or ‘Jesus.’ As noted above, these new elements emerge as though drawn from the periphery of indigenous cosmology. They are significant variations on the known but variations that can be tolerated due to the features that this story shares with more familiar ones.

Thirdly, incorporation occurs when the new knowledge is translated and communicated in the traditional form of a ritual performance. At this moment the peripheral ancestors become song-giving agents, beings that are part of the local cosmology. In this final phase, the group of people performs the dances associated with the song that God gives to Mollinjin. ('First of all there were those who danced for my father. That was the Maltarrin song and dance, that's what Our Father called it.')

The experience of the vision – ancestors, places, events – is shown through the songs and dances received. This performative space of ritual is, in Aboriginal culture, the prime channel for the communication of new knowledge and also the medium through which social relationships are constructed and negotiated. New elements of Christianity are translated into the language of performance and, in this form, they are regarded as indigenous elements. As such they can be communicated to other people and shared in ceremonial contexts with other groups. It is through these songs and dances that elements of Christianity appear in the area, incorporated within the indigenous cosmology.

3.3 The Poetics of Incorporation: visions, songs, Christian imagery and the mission
Although the originality of Mollinjin’s vision remains a little problematical – elements of Christian cosmology could have entered the area well before the advent of his dream – it is instructive to address the events as reported by indigenous people. In this account, the entire production of songs occurred before the settlement of the mission in 1935 and the religious images that appear in the song texts were the original production of Mollinjin.
Commencing here, one can learn from subsequent variations the way in which adaptations and transformations followed reception of the first song. The issue is not originality as such or even progressive accretions of doctrinal orthodoxy encouraged by the mission. Rather, the manner in which elements of the vision were valued and re-valued provides insight into Aboriginal subjects through time and their experience of historical events. Mollinjin’s vision is invaluable because it tells us not so much what ‘really happened’ but, rather, how Aboriginal people have rendered this process. The vision constitutes the ‘raw material’ for a poiesis of meanings that has assumed different forms, and served different purposes, over time. In this regard, transcribing the story for cultural preservation is different from performing the songs received in dreams. Different groups and agencies have been involved in these practices and they have drawn on different semiotics and even ontological fields. For this reason, investigating the narrative and the songs must begin with the acknowledgement that there are multiple meanings in the narration and a number of different actors who have played a role in its interpretation.

There are two types of religious element in the text of Mollinjin’s vision: on the one hand, there are (i) the biblical images experienced by Mollinjin in his vision and, on the other, (ii) a series of subsequent additions that can be attributed to the Christian teachings of the mission. Although, ultimately, they are both the product of contacts with white settlers, the former were instrumental in the process of incorporation of new cosmological elements into an indigenous order, while the latter were subsequent re-valuations of the narrative in the light of mission doctrine, but doctrine also interpreted by Aborigines who came in to Port Keats.

These factors create a variety of movements of Christian into indigenous elements and of indigenous into Christian ones even as the latter are re-interpreted within subsequent indigenous frames of reference. This ongoing dialogic\(^\text{12}\) is underlined by the fact that the

\(^{12}\) The dialogic nature of meaning in social life is emphasized by Bakhtin (1981). Also see Knauf (1996).
narrative reported above was not given by Mollinjin himself but, rather, by his son, Gregory Mollinjin. In turn, Gregory recollected the story of the vision as his mother told it to him, some decades after the events took place. By the time Gregory Mollinjin was involved in the translation, the vision had become part of the Aboriginal Christian identity of Wadeye and had been used by indigenous and non-indigenous people alike as an example of the close relation between indigenous people and the Catholic faith. The nature of this close relation, as discussion will show below, was interpreted in terms of homologies between ostensibly different forms of knowledge. Thus elements of a world distinguished from a settler one at another time were seen as overlapping or comparable to it. In this way, the religious vision of Mollinjin was also an Aboriginal dream.

The circumstances around the production of this particular narrative are instructive for this process of dialogic meaning mediated by the identification of homology: the narrator and the linguist who helped with the translation were both closely associated with the Church. One product of this reproduction is the apparently puzzling change in the behaviour of Mollinjin in the aftermath of his dream. This has been seen in missionary exegesis as the proof of Mollinjin's conversion to Christianity. It is therefore highlighted in the text with expressions such as the closing 'he prayed to Jesus' and the opening remark on a 'bad disease given by God.' However, as further discussion will show, the change associated with Mollinjin and his dream can be interpreted in a different, indigenous way but in one that also underpins the mission's modifications.

Even where indigenous elements seem simply to be replaced by Christian ones, the matter involves a dialogic process. A striking example is the messenger bird that suddenly turns into an angel. Even here, it is not the case that one element excludes another. Rather, the initial element is modified in order to accord with a reinterpreted version of events. In this case, a

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13 Eugene Stockton (1985:10) goes as far as considering Mollinjin as 'the first missionary of Port Keats.'
brown bird becomes a white one. The messenger bird coming down from the sky was a brown hawk (*Ku karrthin*), the totemic species associated with Mollinjin’s Murrinh-patha moiety. Given its strong totemic association, the brown hawk was, in all probability, the bird that appeared to Mollinjin.

The figure of the angel seems to be added to the narration at a later stage when, consciously, the indigenous element was substituted with another classic (Christian) messenger. However, this reinterpretation also led to the modification of the species of the bird referred to in the narrative. It becomes a Torres Strait pigeon (*ku bamanthamarl*) rather than the brown hawk.14 The pigeon has a distinctive white plumage, certainly closer to the wings of an angel than the brown feathers of the hawk. Subsequently, *ku bamanthamarl* was adopted as a key figure of Aboriginal Christian iconography and appears in the version of the vision painted inside the new Church built in 1974. Depicted in the act of descending from the sky, its wings spread open, the white bird decorates the lectern from which the priest reads the lessons in the Mass.

An element that appears to come from the original vision is the image of the threatening snake. As the narrative above tells us, the angel pointed out to the dreamer a woman figure, ‘*our mother,*’ that was treading on a snake.15 The same image is the subject of one of the *Malkarrin* songs.

> [Malkarrin 03]

> *Yinimala kukpi pana yinimala kayer kayer*

The snake is attacking, the tongue [is coming out]

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14 This alternative element was particularly stressed by T.D., a middle-aged woman closely associated with the church. When I noted the discrepancy with the recorded version, she dismissed it as wrong.

15 This element has been left out from the graphic representation of the vision on the church’s walls. In this case, the Virgin is carrying an infant Jesus on her shoulder and the threatening snake is absent from the picture. The motives of the ground, however, represent the area where the vision took place.
This song is said to be the third item composed by Molljinjin, immediately after his vision and therefore prior to the arrival of missionaries at Wadeye. This is one of the ‘proofs’ that people give of the originality of Molljinjin’s vision. Another proof relies on implications this originality had for first contact with the mission. In this case it is assumed that indigenous people of Port Keats were unaware of Christian images of the Virgin. Yet, in fact, it was only after seeing an early representation of Our Lady of Sacred Heart, precisely the Virgin stepping on the snake, during the first mass at the mission site, that people could finally explain the ‘beautiful lady’ of Molljinjin’s dream. This provided a common ground for subsequent engagement with the new mission order.

Another element that people might have taken as a homology between two cosmological orders is the figure of Nugemanh. According to my informants, Nugemanh, a superior spirit-being that dwells ‘above’ and ‘gives good things,’ was part of the indigenous cosmology well before the mission began. On this same subject, Stockton (1985:3) reports how Stanner ‘expressed his surprise that the early missionaries did not identify the Christian God with Nugemanh.’ This figure remains problematic though: a few people with whom I talked believe that the concept of this superior spirit-being goes back a long time, while others believe that this superior, father-like figure appeared for the first time in Molljinjin’s dream. In either case, it might have been the product of contact with neighbouring groups, influenced by the early settlers in the Victoria River District, or by the missionaries in the Daly River region. As constituted today, this figure, like the Virgin treading on a snake, has been involved in a process of dialogic

16 ‘Molljinjin already knew the word Nugemanh, but when he had his dream he actually saw the person. And knew who he was.’ (G.C. in Alberto Furlan, Fieldwork notes 18.06.2003)
17 Hiatt (1996) has described the literary debate around the cults of ‘High gods’ among Aboriginal Australians. As far as Wadeye is concerned, the argument was developed by Stanner (1989) around the figure of the Rainbow Serpent – Kunmangurr or Kanamkek – and the cult of the Old Woman that subsequently took over. These figures are closely related to male secrets cults, and they are cult totemic beings rather than high god figures.
interpretation drawing on different space-time co-ordinates and the changing experience of Aboriginal subjects.

Another image of biblical origin with a comparable dialogic interpretation involves the two diverging roads faced by the dreamer. The social-moral order of the mission produced a series of new values of which this redemptory tale is an exemplary expression. It stresses the necessity to choose God’s path and it offers an enduring reward. Those who follow the right path of redemption are dressed with colourful clothes. They are ‘the good ones.’ Conversely, those who go down the other road of damnation are walking, dressed in black, straight towards the fire. Yet, following the ‘right way’ or track is also replete with imagery drawn from Dreaming myth and performance.

The examples above not only suggest that there have been several interpretations of the elements of the narration by various groups with differing agendas. They also bear witness to the process of modification, adjustment, and juxtaposition that an indigenous narrative goes through over time. The intrinsic openness in the constitution and interpretation of indigenous stories has been stressed by Keen (1994) who also points to the existence of numerous versions of the same story reflecting relations between clans. Groups tell different versions of a story as they negotiate their identity and relatedness through time. Keen stresses the openness and adaptation in Yolngu ceremonies as a characteristic quality that allows the system to ‘accommodate different affiliations and perspectives, or to incorporate new elements’ (Keen 1994:166). The course of Mollinjin’s dream has involved a comparable process.

The central point here is that Mollinjin’s dream-vision provided the space in which new knowledge was acquired. And yet, as the social-moral system behind that knowledge became more and more influential in indigenous life, implicit elements of the vision were re-positioned and re-valued, in Sahlins’ term, ‘transformed’ (Sahlins 1985:138). As Sahlins argues though, this process of change proceeds in habitual ways, so that a particular cultural logic is present in
the mode of change (Sahlins 2000:476). As a consequence, for Mollinjin, Christianity was engaged first not as a new, foreign, dominant order but rather as an element in indigenous cosmology, as knowledge received in a dream and ultimately embodied in a performance genre.

This point is underlined by one further element in the vision: God was ‘wearing a large headdress on his head.’ This passage is particularly important because it defines the whole rationale of the vision. In the text, the Murrinh-patha term used for the headdress is kadhawula, a conical one-meter high paperbark hat. Significantly, this style of headdress features as ritual paraphernalia in the ceremonies of the neighbouring western tribes beyond the Fitzmaurice River. Why does it appear on God’s head, then? Kolig (1972:3) points out that, in the Kimberley, the indigenous process of understanding settlers’ culture was based on the concept of a ‘cosmological periphery.’ That is, the settlers were thought to have originated from the same domain from which the ‘exotic’ and the ‘unknown’ came, namely, the fringes of the indigenous cosmology. Albeit surprising, Kolig says, Europeans were not regarded as ‘fundamentally new’ because they were considered part of the broader Aboriginal world.

The forms of dialogic process discussed in this section work on the basis of homology – the highlighting of common traits between seemingly different phenomena. This use of a homology is a fundamental feature of indigenous epistemology exemplified in Mollinjin’s dream-vision: God, was not regarded as ‘fundamentally new’ because he appeared wearing the hat of a neighbouring tribe, and was therefore part of the indigenous – albeit peripheral – cosmology. For decades exchanges and borrowings of new cults had taken place between the people of Wadeye and these western tribes (see Stanner 1989). In terms that Levi-Strauss as well as Sahlins might endorse, the ‘concrete logic’ of people around Wadeye produced a series of homologies that transposed external elements into meaningful values in their world. In the days prior to Port Keats and its mission, as elements of Christian cosmology filtered into the
area, they were incorporated into an Aboriginal world as new knowledge from an indigenous source.

3.3.1 The figure of Mollinjin

Investigating the figure and role of Mollinjin is important in order to understand both the reception of the songs and their subsequent incorporation into the iconography of Wadeye's Christian community.

According to those with whom I spoke, Mollinjin had his vision before the mission was established in 1935. The event took place probably around the early 1930s. Eyewitnesses, M.M.D. and E.C., recall that they were young girls at the time that Mollinjin had his dream. They were born around 1920 and 1925 respectively. Pre-mission contacts with white settlers had occurred in the region on a sporadic basis since the 1870s. These contacts involved, however, only a part of the population of the Port Keats area. Some people were stationed around the cattle stations of the Fitzmaurice River and others were employed in the commercial maritime industry travelling between Timber Creek depot and Darwin. It is possible, therefore, that Christian influences had filtered either from these contacts or, previously, through the mission at Daly River. Nonetheless, people at Wadeye are quick to dismiss this hypothesis, asserting that what Mollinjin saw in his vision was totally new to him.18

Because Mollinjin was a ‘bad man’ who indulged in sorcery practices, he was driven away from the main camping area of his clan. He was living in the Yek Nangu clan area, some fifteen kilometres south-west of Wadeye.19 While many men were known to have travelled the coast

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18 Dismissing human agency or knowledge is a common process in the interpretation of narratives in which revelatory moments of Dreaming-like quality figure prominently.

19 The Mollinjin family belongs to the Yek Dininin clan, the traditional land owners of the area on which the township of Wadeye stands.
on board of vessels along the route from Darwin to Timber Creek depot, Mollinjin was known among his peers as the one who had always been in the area and had never travelled.

Informants stressed several times that Mollinjin could not have been familiar with the images and places of his dream. In Aboriginal culture, authoritative knowledge about places does not come from second-hand experience. It is always the result of 'having been there' or 'have walked on that land.' Such unusual images, and the knowledge of foreign countries, are precluded for a man who has not travelled around unless this knowledge comes directly from the source of all knowledge -- that is, from the Dreaming. The acquisition of new knowledge through a dream is a common theme in Aboriginal culture. Yet not all dreams bear new meanings. New elements can be readily incorporated into a local cosmology if they are recognized as coming from the Dreaming. When such acquisitions are confirmed to have come from the Dreaming, these new elements are often made explicit in songs.

It is therefore important that Mollinjin was and is believed to have been a total stranger to the knowledge conferred on him in the dream. In his peer's eyes, it is just this fact that made him the source of unchallengeable truth even while describing such strange events. The farther Mollinjin initially was from a possible experience (and understanding) of the elements appearing in the dream (God, the Virgin Mary, the 'beautiful place'), the closer his recollection was to something that is true. In this regard, these dreams are not a product of human

20 Tamisari (1998:249) reports that in order to express their incontestable knowledge of a place or event, Yolngu people of North-east Arnhem Land affirm: 'I know, my footprint is over there.'

21 The space of dreams is the locus in which the seemingly unchangeable Dreaming order meets the factuality of historical changes. Here the new knowledge's factuality dissolves in the eternal picture of the Dreaming. Dussart (2000) and Poirier (2001) have described the key role of dreams for the process of cultural changes. It is through dreams, and the subsequent process of their discussion, that changes in the cultural setting or practices of a group are articulated and accepted. Seemingly, incoherent images appearing in dreams acquire a 'value' in the light of subsequent experiences, in this way cultural adjustment can be made because they have been previously validated as they have been sensed in dreams, which, many times, are the result of Dreaming experiences.
experience or knowledge, but come from a visionary journey. Through his vision, Mollinjin engaged with ancestral (messenger) beings who guided him through a time-space experience of the Dreaming, showing him new places and providing him with knowledge in the form of new songs and a model for their performance. These dreams hold a character of ontological verity because they are understood as Dreaming experiences.

The change in Mollinjin that his son’s narrative relates thereby involves layered meanings of startling different types. Subsequent mission re-valuation figures Mollinjin as a sinner who is redeemed through Christian revelation. The enduring nature of this dream-vision, however, as a vehicle of Christian doctrine comes from the fact that its verity and Mollinjin’s role in sustaining it through songs and their performance is anchored in the Dreaming. This was the new and changed role that Mollinjin brought from his experience.

3.3.2 From dream-vision to new songs

Dreams are central to indigenous traditional life and in indigenous renderings of historical circumstance because they facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and the articulation of new foreign elements. Dreams are essential tools for redefining the present and the (ancestral and historical) past. In Mollinjin’s case, a dream served to constitute changes that were subsequently accepted via performance of the related Malkarrin songs. It is evident that dreams play a fundamental role in indigenous epistemology and that innovations enter the cosmological indigenous system through dreams. Their content is validated through a process of interpretation and recognition, political negotiation and ritual integration.\(^\text{22}\) The process

\(^{22}\) Dussart (2000: 163): ‘The integration of reclaimed narratives, songs and designs in ritual generally has less to do with the declared function of ritual than it does with the extraceremonial politics surrounding ritual events.’ Poirier (2001:270): ‘The activity of dreaming, like other human (and non-human) actions within the world (walking, talking, hunting or singing) is an important element in the dynamic reproduction and transformation of networks of ‘sharing relationships’, or connections that are at the same time social, territorial and ancestral.’ And also ‘revelation/innovation is unavoidably subjected to a
works because dreams are treated as a liminal space for the occasional negotiation between phenomena belonging to the Dreaming and those which pertain to the factual world. Through such a negotiation, Mollinjin’s vision provided conditions of possibility for the acceptance of Christianity.

Changes, however, are not only acknowledged but, in order to become effective, must be made explicit. There is therefore a final step in the process of incorporation of new elements. Changes must be performed and shared in the wider social environment. As new knowledge enters the local system, new performances are bound to take place. This was the case for Malkarrin songs.

3.4 Producing new songs

Throughout indigenous Australia, within the broad framework of traditional music, there is evidence of musical expressions that have posed the possibility of changes and adaptation consequent on contact with external elements. Knopoff (1992) and Toner (2000) have investigated innovative aspects of Yolngu ritual music, stressing the fact that innovations were not perceived as such by the performers. This apparent paradox does not constitute a problem from an indigenous point of view, since these variations are understood as part of the traditional, and therefore original, repertoire.

Innovative aspects of Yolngu ritual music (and religious practice more generally), Toner says (2000:34) are modelled after pre-existing musical forms, both in terms of structure and contents; and yet, these innovative forms become sanctioned, their subsequent interpretation considered as having their actual origins in the ancestral era. Aboriginal traditional music is continuously changing as Knopoff points out with regard to ‘yuta manikay,’ or ‘new songs,’ [which] ‘are not entirely new, but rather involve a combination of old and new thematic, textual

and/or musical elements' (Knopoff 1992:142; see also Keen 1994:166). These songs still have a foundation in traditional songs, which *yuta manikay* helps to preserve.23

Songs can also mediate the process of cultural adaptation in the aftermath of spatial redistribution. On this matter, Wild (1987) describes the process of borrowing songs from neighbouring groups in order to cope with displacement: as a group of Warlpiri was moved far away from its native country, they faced the necessity to adapt the ceremonial life, which was always based on specific territory, other than their new location. Wild notes that, although rituals associated with traditional country continued to be performed, new rituals were adopted.

Some localization of Warlpiri songs and dances occurred, but supplementary means were needed to legitimize what was, in traditional terms, the occupation of new country. One was the intensification of ceremonial activity whose local references extended beyond traditional Warlpiri country, particularly to the north. Another was to adopt songs and dances, and even whole ceremonies from their northern neighbours. [...] A more recent tactic has been to reorient ceremonial life to a regional movement which links Warlpiri at Lajamanu with the Western Desert Aborigines of the southern Kimberley. (Wild 1987:100)

Thus the production of new genres of song does not simply originate from social and historical reconfigurations but, rather, is instrumental in their development.24

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23 During lengthy informal portions of funeral ceremonies, the popularity of new song verse (particularly among young people and other dancers) helps to ensure continued active community participation in the proceeding. At the same time, the circumscription of new song verse within the confines of informal portions of ceremony helps to differentiate the relative importance of formal old song performance, and further promotes the role of ancestral ideology in Yolngu society. (Knopoff 1992:150)

24 We shall see in the next chapter, how the production of new genres of open ceremonial songs, that is *Dhanba, Lirrga* and *Walakandha Wangga*, facilitated the development of new patterns of social relationships.
The dream dimension is pivotal in this operation – since many of these new songs are dreamt – the act of dreaming and the interaction with the broader frame of the Dreaming reconfigures the social situation and allows the process of adaptation that external stimuli imply. The new genres of song are modelled around the newly acquired knowledge and these new elements can then be articulated in the broader social environment through ritual performance.

3.5 Malkarrin Songs

Stylistically, Malkarrin can be described as a clapstick-accompanied, unrestricted, 25 song genre generally performed by men and women together. This model of performance and other elements – cyclical text, isorhythmic setting and the relationship of beating to text-rhythm are similar to a cognate style, namely Balga, from the Kimberley region – bear witness to the likely Western Australian origin of this genre. The vocabulary of the songs’ texts also bears witness to western influences, as there are many words in Murrinh Nyuwan (also known as Djamindjung), the language of the neighbouring tribes beyond the Fitzmaurice River. Furthermore, there are several references in the songs text to kadhawula, a ritual item and the dance associated with it which, again, is known to have come from the west.

Mollinjin composed all the Malkarrin songs with the help of song-giving agents that appeared to him in dreams. This occurred at the beginning of the 1930s. Today Malkarrin is no longer performed in Wadeye as a ceremonial genre, however individual songs are occasionally sung, interposed with Dhanba songs, during funerals or other mortuary rites.

Previous discussion has established that new song genres are produced when new knowledge needs to be incorporated within a local cosmology. Malkarrin songs will thus be discussed as an example of how new knowledge is introduced and sustained through performance. Malkarrin songs constitute the space within which the process of incorporating changes takes

25 We will deal with the categorization of ‘open’ and ‘close’ ceremonies in the next chapter, here suffice to say that open song genres are related to ceremonies that are not restricted to an initiated audience.
place. New elements are performed as part of the indigenous cosmological system, and therefore accepted.

It must be noted, however, that Malkarrin songs do not occupy as major a place in the indigenous repertoire as later genres such as Dhanba or Lirrga. This is because Malkarrin songs have been associated principally with Christian iconography and the mission. It seems that this is not so much a matter of the content of the songs – the majority of the items do not refer to God but in fact to indigenous countries – but rather derives from Mollinjin's position in the dynamics of the clan at the time of his vision and subsequently.

Mollinjin was described to me as a sorcerer and as socially and spatially peripheral to his clan. It appears that being peripheral was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, his extraneousness to the countries that appear in his dreams gives his narration a Dreaming quality, which confers on him the authority to speak and perform for his peers. On the other hand, his peripheral position prevented his new knowledge from becoming a central part of the mainstream indigenous cosmology and performance. Mollinjin's vision and Malkarrin songs were institutionalized as indigenous knowledge when they were incorporated in the indigenous-missionary cultural order. Today Malkarrin is not regularly performed. Only about five songs of the twenty-eight that I catalogued and translated were recorded during this fieldwork. The rest were retrieved in the archives of the Kanamkek - Yile Ngala Museum at Wadeye. The last performance recorded (by Allan Marett in 1998) occurred during ceremonies on the occasion of a funeral.²⁶

²⁶ Marett DAT 98/8.
While *Malkarrin* was performed in the past for funerals, it was, according to informants, never performed for circumcision ceremonies, or ragburnings.\(^{27}\)

It must be noted that *Malkarrin* does not deal only with the first vision and with Christian images. The majority of the songs in fact describe the subsequent visionary journeys of Mollinjin through known and unknown countries. These two groups of songs will be analysed separately in the following pages, however, there is no separation in the indigenous discourse between these two groups of songs. Even if the songs referring to God have come to epitomize the genre, particularly in the light of the influence of the mission, the remaining songs are equally important in the eyes of informants. This is because they both facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge, the first group, of Christian elements, the second, of neighbouring areas.

The second part of the genre is rather different from the first part that comprises the first five songs. New indigenous cosmological elements enter the scene. The attention shifts from a major ancestral figure, the new-law giving god which resembles the creative totemic ancestors, to minor Dreaming beings known as the Little People (*Kardu Wakal* in Murrinh-patha) who are involved with the preservation of totemic sites, rather than with their creation. The Little People appeared, as song-giving agents, in Mollinjin’s visionary journeys across foreign countries.\(^{28}\) Their visitations mark the introduction of a new kind of knowledge, more concerned with local identities than with the ‘order of things,’ which will be fundamental for the constitution of relationships with neighbouring clans. The second part of the *Malkarrin* corpus thus foreshadows the constitution of reciprocity through ceremonial exchange. Yet,

\(^{27}\) On the other hand, Stanner (1989:108) refers to two young men circumcised with the *mulun* song style in the 1935-45 decade. *Mulun* could refer to *Mulurn kanarra* song [*Malkarrin* 00]. On ragburnings see Chapter Two, note 23.

\(^{28}\) Other ethnographies (Poirier 2001; Kenny 2004) have investigated the role of these spirit beings in the preservation of totemic sites. In particular Kenny (2004) investigates these ancestral figures in the desert area around Alice Springs. They bear several similarities with Wadeye’s *Kardu Wakal*, even though only the latter are known to give songs in dreams. Little People feature predominantly in *Dhanba* songs (see below Chapter Four).
Malkarin was never part of this system of exchange and never stood predominately as identity marker for Murrinh-patha people, in the way Dhanba did three decades later. The second part of the genre, which is quantitatively much larger than the first, became subsidiary to the God-related songs. Why?

Part of the reason derives from the fact that, as we have noted above, Mollinjin was too much of a peripheral figure to have the power over his peers needed to constitute a new tradition. This is perhaps why, when he died around the early 1940s, nobody else ‘found’ any more Malkarin songs. However, the main reason lies, I believe, in the dynamics of the area at the time. The arrival of the mission altered the balance between local clans which had now a new, powerful, interlocutor: the Christian order.

A new set of relationships needed to be established. It appeared evident that Malkarin songs could better be used to approach the new economically dominant order than to establish links with neighbouring tribes.\footnote{We will see in the next chapter how, a few decades later, new dynamics in the mission required the constitution of reciprocity. Malkarin songs could not have been used for the purpose, therefore another genre – Dhanba – came on the scene.}

Malkarin thus became the basis for the incorporation of Christian order and, consequently, for the constitution of a Christian indigenous identity. Even though Malkarin now ‘belongs’ to Mollinjin’s descendents, who are rightfully considered to be the ‘bosses’ for these songs, it is today still associated primarily with Christian imagery. There follows an analysis of the genre.

3.5.1 Malkarin and the performance of Christianity

The analysis will start from the very first song God gave to Mollinjin, as the literature records, the Mulurn kanarra song.
As recounted above, God gave this song to Mollinjin as a sample of a *Malkarrin* song. The text refers to the ceremony Mollinjin is said to have witnessed while on his visionary journey. A shed made of branches was put up and as soon as the song started two people came out from behind it in order to perform the dance of the song.

This dance is also known as *kadhawula* ceremony, *kadhawula* being the name of the conical paperbark headdress worn by the performers. The origin of this dance, according to the informants, is *Western Australia* way. This provenance matches with the Dreaming travels of Mollinjin, whose songs, as we will see below, report place names of that region. The narrative above explains how Mollinjin, once woken up, started to sing this song to his bewildered peers. People today remember how the performance carried on by Mollinjin and a few others at a later stage involved the construction of a bush shelter and the decoration with bush leaves around elbows and the knees. They still remember how the *Kadhawula* ceremony was performed at the beginning of the 1960s in Wadeye, a practice long disappeared now.

The key point here is that this song is about a performance. It is a model for ceremonial expression that brings the newly acquired knowledge – the images of Christianity – into the open forum of performance.

When God appears as song-giving agent in Mollinjin’s dreams, his intentions are clear: ‘*I’ll give you these songs now, you take them with you, they are called Malkarrin.*’ He provides the

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30 This description bears close similarities with the modalities of performance of another genre of songs, *Jumba*, from the Kimberley region (Treloyn 2003: 209).
dreamer with a new song genre to be performed in public.\textsuperscript{31} The communication of new knowledge is not only based on the narration of the dreamer, but also on engaging performances which connect the new cosmological elements of the vision with an indigenous rituality. In this sense, those images of Christianity are performed as part of the indigenous cosmology and as such they are incorporated.

While other songs describe moments of the vision, they are different from song item \textit{[Malkarrin 00]} because they were not explicitly given by God. They refer to the \textit{city}\textsuperscript{32} that Mollinjin saw as he arrived ‘up in heaven:’

\textit{[Malkarrin 02]}

\textit{Siti iana kalawurrka kalawurrka}

Going up! Here's the city.

\textit{[Malkarrin 04]}

\textit{Siti mana mawurkunha kulantharra mawurkunha}

Here's the city, going up and entering.

\textit{[Malkarrin 03]} describes the Virgin Mary in the act of treading on the threatening snake, as it was stated in the narrative. \textit{[Malkarrin 01]} refers to the wind the bird brought to Mollinjin in his dream when he was ‘woken up’ in his sleep and began his visionary journey.

\textsuperscript{31} Song-giving agents often exhort human beings to perform and preserve the songs they give them in dreams. One example is recollected by Marett (2005 in press) who reports the account of how a Wangga singer was summoned by the ghost of a deceased songman: ‘Don’t lose it’ he said. ‘You’ve got to remember properly, this good song.’

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{[Malkarrin 02]} and \textit{[Malkarrin 04]}.
Kambangulum pana wurrtpa ngulu
That wind, the fright when being suddenly woken up

Although G.C. refers to this song as the 'first one,' he also states that it is different from the Murlun kanarra song. "They are both the first, let's say this way: this song [Malkarrin 00] was the first song that was given to him by God, but that song [Malkarrin 01] is the first song that he made up about the dream." 33

The song referring to the bush shelter was given by God to Mollinjin. This second song was composed by Mollinjin recollecting the experience of the vision. It was 'made up.' This terminology recurred several times during the elicitation process. Songs were often sorted into two categories: those performed by the song-giving agent for the receiver who, once awakened, will reproduce them as faithfully as possible, and those 'made up' where the inspiration comes from the situation experienced by the receiver but not directly from a performance seen in dream.

These four songs form the basis for the ritual re-enactment of the events of the vision. This practice is typical of traditional Dreaming songs and the associated dances. During ceremonies the acts of totemic ancestors are sung and re-staged by the performers, thus sustaining the perpetuation of indigenous cosmology. In this case, the performance of these songs confirms the 'reality,' that is the Dreaming origin, of the new knowledge introduced by Mollinjin’s dreams. The rationale behind the second group of the songs is similar: it is about the inclusion of new knowledge, that is of neighbouring countries.

33 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes 04.07.2003]
3.5.2 Malkarrin and the songs of the country

Although the first five songs [Malkarrin 00-04] have come to epitomize Malkarrin, Mollinjin had several other dreams in the following years and composed many other songs. God was not involved in these but other Dreaming beings entered the scene. These are the Little People, or Kardu Wakah. Little People are human-like, a metre tall, Dreaming spirit-beings, which are known to dwell in the country around important Dreaming sites (see also Kenny 2004). These Dreaming beings are not associated with the creation of the landscape, as other totemic beings, but are rather involved with the protection and maintenance of each clan’s estate. Little People are also well known as song-giving agents. They occasionally perform new songs for the receiver during his or her dreams.34

The Little People that appeared to Mollinjin were those associated with his country, as well as those belonging to other countries. This is because the dreamer travelled during his dreams to foreign countries. The result of these experiences was a number of songs which were sung in a foreign language, namely the language of the country that appeared before the composer’s eyes. Many of those places were beyond the boundary of the Fitzmaurice River to the west. Consequently, those songs were received in Djamindjung (Murrinh Nyuwan), the language of the people of that area.

However, as for the new images of the first vision, these places and languages were unknown to Mollinjin, who often could not make sense of his composition. Meaning for these songs was found in the subsequent process of interpretations, when people who had travelled outside the area of Wadeye and could understand these languages, helped with the translation. A unknown place features in the item below:

34 Other Little People from Yek Nangu country, in the guise of mermaids, inspired the composition of the Wurthirri genre, a didjeridu-accompanied open ceremonial repertoire, probably around the turn of the twentieth century.
Kulugulu Kulugulu wabim pana wabim pana

[a woman] weaving [a dilly bag] there at Kulugulu

This song describes a place, Kulugulu, which is known to be between Bradshaw cattle station and Timber Creek, between the Fitzmaurice and Victoria Rivers (see above Map 3.1).

As Mollininin was known not to have travelled around the area, and knowledge usually comes from 'having been there,' people at times challenged the dreamer's stories. However, the presence of Dreaming beings such as the Little People and the fact that Mollininin produced songs from these dreams, confirmed the authenticity of his visions. G.C. explains:

In his real life he'd never been there, that's why people used to make jokes about him! "I know that country! You've never been there!" – Old Bunduck was telling him – "How come you know the name of that country! You've never been there, I have!"

He'd never been there, but in his dream the Little People were singing to him letting him know things and places. In these dreams Mollininin saw the countries and the Little People singing to him about those countries. I would say: "You can walk, you can swim across but in my dreams I've been there before!"

The description of foreign countries included particular fauna and natural phenomena, as exemplified in the items below,

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35 Nym Bunduck was one of the people who had travelled around the area and along the coast, and on commercial vessels.

36 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes, 04.07.2003]
Purrugupurrugu Purrugupurrugu kithparam -para
The king tide is coming in

Pinpinh malara yalarrarrangani
Bat, frog, lorikeet

and Dreaming spirit beings of other countries:

Thimpili –pili yemarranhkarrri
At Thimpili they are welcoming me

Thimpili (see above Map 3.1) is a small island near Thinti on the northern coast. It lies in the country of Rak Thinti clan speakers of Marri Amu language. In his dream, Mollinjin was welcomed there by Kardu Yawa, the Little People of that estate. This song is significant because it established a relationship between the dreamer and the Dreaming beings of a foreign country and therefore, by extension, with the owners of that estate.

In this sense, the songs of this second half of the Malkarin corpus can be interpreted as the strengthening of links with neighbouring countries. Relationships with foreign groups had always been part of the local economy, where material and ceremonial exchanges were integral parts of the life of people of the Daly River region (see Stanner 1933-34). Following the pressures exerted by white settlers in the Victoria River District, these relationships increased. It is possible to see these songs as a means of becoming better acquainted with neighbouring

37 This song is in Murrinh Nyuwan.
groups with which, most likely, a new set of relationship was going to be developed. The arrival of the mission, and the subsequent relocation of people around the area of Port Keats, changed these relations, but, as we will see in the next chapter, created others.

3.6 The open indigenous system sustaining change

Especially in the last two decades, the ethnographic literature has demonstrated how traditions, far from being static entities, are 'processural, open-ended and negotiated' (Austin-Broos 2001:190). The capacity to incorporate new elements in the practice of structured ways allows tradition to change by authenticating elements first encountered as strange. Indeed, forms of appropriation, negotiation and public embodiment through performance have constituted, and still do, the very core of indigenous culture. The dream-vision and songs discussed above are proper examples of this dialogic process that, especially in a context of diverse cosmology, employs homology as a tool of cultural incorporation. A sharpened sense of this is gained by a brief historical reflection on Australian culture.

The world as Aboriginal people know it was laid out during the creation era known as the Dreaming when totemic ancestors emerged from the formless land and roamed through the country shaping and naming it. Landscape features mark ancestral events and sometimes are the embodiment of totemic ancestors at their final resting-place. These totemic sites still retain ancestral generative power and are closely guarded as they are considered the source of life. There is undoubtedly a sense of enduring factuality in these landscape features and in the stories related to them. Yet, this does not mean that alternative or new interpretations cannot take place. Often, new segments of a story, and the relevant geomorphological features, are 'found' (see, for example, Merlan 1998:209-228; Myers 1986:64-65). These innovations can be generated by the desire to accommodate historical circumstances, group alliances, spatial relocation or to augment an individual's standing.
In this regard, an exemplary practice is the inscription of Christian features in the Aboriginal landscape. Austin-Broos (2001:189) reports how, after the arrival of the Lutherans, one of the responses of the Western Arrernte was to ‘re-discover’ the Christians’ story in the landscape. The riverbed of the Finke, along which other heroes had traveled, revealed among its shifting sand the footprint of Jesus.

The ‘eternity’ of the Dreaming is by no means belittled by this process that, on the contrary, appears to have always been part of its constitutive features. Stanner notes that ‘mythopoietic thought is probably a continuous function of Aboriginal mentality […] in the north, there is every evidence of painstaking adherence to traditions; but the traditions themselves are a continuous inspiration.’ (1989:85 Author’s emphasis.) Povinelli gives other examples related to everyday foraging activity (1993:33). According to her ethnographic account, Aboriginal women at Belyuen are ‘constantly finding stories’ during daily expeditions. Interpretation of events and parts of the landscape – previously unnoticed configurations of rock that connect with the ‘forgotten’ story of an ancestral being – are proffered according to the principle that everything around the foragers ‘might be something.’ This process of testing the efficacy of possible new insights means that many putative values are cast aside while a few are recognized and developed as meaningful.38

There is therefore an intrinsic openness in the constitutive foundation of indigenous ontology. This is not to say that reality is the product of subjective interpretations but, rather, that the system is rendered through a poiesis that can incorporate change and revalue it as continuity. For this purpose, ambiguities are consciously entertained as part of an indigenous aesthetic sense.39

38 The strategy, Povinelli (1993:32) says, is ‘to note all events, comment on their possible significance, and then wait to see if some connection develops between one event and another’

39 I must admit I was initially baffled by the number of different explanations that informants provided around the same topic. Often, the same person provided me with two different accounts of the same story
Keen's ethnography (1994) deals in detail with this issue, explaining the distinctive quality of the notion, 'same but different,' that is, to use implicit homologies in order to present a range of variation in a single context. Keen (1994:40) warns that,

These beliefs were constituted in the use of imprecise terms. Individuals were free to fill in some of the more concrete details in imagination if they wished, but much in Yolngu mythology seems to have been deliberately ambiguous. Religious mystery was created through ambiguity. [Author's emphasis.]

Ambiguity and openness also allow the pacific coexistence of different groups within an area. Cosmological variations are accepted and connect the groups related to the different segments of one ancestor's dreaming track. It also facilitates the cooperation between these groups on the occasion of ceremonies where each of the groups is responsible for their 'part of the story' that forms the totality of an ancestral narrative.

This openness constitutes also the basis for the negotiation of foreign elements. As we have seen above, Kolig (1972) stresses the fact that the indigenous system was open to the reception of foreign elements that were understood to come from the 'cosmological periphery.' In this case even the ostensibly very 'different' was interpreted as 'the same.' In fact, all the examples above suggest that the indigenous system is far from being static. On the contrary, it is flexible and constantly adjusting. And even in a context of marked historical
change, the ideology of constancy endures. The Dreaming is by no means weakened by Mollinjin’s vision. The Virgin Mary does not kill indigenous rituals.\textsuperscript{60}

Poirier (2001) suggests that there is a dialectic relationship between what Stanner (1989) calls the ‘forms of permanence,’ the existing mythological and ritual expressions, and the transformations that inevitably occur. This is the process I have described as ‘dialogic.’ New elements are not simply accepted, but are positioned in the indigenous cultural context and this incorporation culminates in a public and explicit statement, often embodied in performance. If Mollinjin’s dream-vision and \textit{Malkarrin} exemplify this process, it is also fair to concur with Sahlin that, in cultures that are predominantly ‘prescriptive,’ the capacity to incorporate is not limitless (1985:xii). As will be evident in Chapter Five below, cash economy and its object world did not find their counterpart in the Aboriginal world and therefore were not comprehensively incorporated into the indigenous cosmo-ontology.

One index of this ensuing circumstance is found in the corpus of Captain Cook myths that have appeared around Australia and discussed at length for regions that neighbour Port Keats area by Kolig (1980) and Rose (1984). These stories, or sagas, occur in historical time and explain the presence of settlers and their ‘law’ from an indigenous point of view. The most important feature of these stories is that they relativize indigenous and non-indigenous law, acknowledging that there are different and differently located ways of being in the world. This relativising of experience calls forth a defence of the Dreaming that Povinelli has discussed (1993:16-129). Links between the present and the past are sustained through ellipsis so that

\textsuperscript{60}I refer here to the items \textit{[Malkarrin 03]}. Kukpi, the black-headed python killed by the Virgin Mary, is also the name of a powerful being involved in secret men’s cults. One might interpret this song as Christianity displacing indigenous beliefs, but I believe it would be wrong. This is for two reasons: firstly, Christian elements were not immediately incorporated as such. God did not appear to Mollinjin as a Judeo-Christian revelation. Secondly, the incorporation of foreign elements – included as peripheral cosmology – does not treat the core of indigenous system. The Dreaming cosmo-ontology is still regarded today in Wadeye as the main framework within which the cosmos – Ancestral Beings, spirits, animals, humans – exists.
‘different’ practices can become the ‘same’ by the temporal use of homology. In this way contemporary experiences of country and performance that certainly have been transformed in the course of the twentieth century are taken to be the same as experiences in the past. As a consequence, the Dreaming retains integrity. The ongoing process of poiesis therefore continues to this day. The process initiated by Mollinjin is by no means concluded and the site of his initial dream-vision, Kudantiga, has been revalued again in the last two decades.

*Kudantiga* is today the destination of regular pilgrimages. The dark sands on which a statue of the Virgin Mary has been erected are said to have healing powers. As a religious reliquary, bottles of these sands can be found on bed-side tables of Wadeye people hospitalized in Darwin. Through this dark sand, people of Wadeye reaffirm the ‘uniqueness’ of their Christian experience. In the past Mollinjin’s vision facilitated the incorporation of Christianity into the indigenous moral order. Now his sand defines the specificity of an Aboriginal religiosity that involves a Christianity claimed as autochthonous to the region. In this regard, the reference to the statue standing at the place of the vision as ‘Our Lady of Kudantiga’ assumes a particular value. It sustains the idea of a Christian message that ‘came out’ from the landscape. (See below Picture 6.2)
Picture 3.1 People praying at Kudantiga. Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003)
Picture 3.1 People praying at Kudantiga. Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003)
But Kudantiga today is also an identity marker for people other than the Christian community, namely the Yek Nangu clan, the rightful owners of the site. Mollinjin’s dream has become part of the identity of this group through multifarious and ongoing interpretations. In 1998 Nangu Red Sunset Band, a popular music group whose members were drawn from this clan, recorded the song Kudantiga [Nangu Red Sunset Band 03]. Here Christian identity, assimilated through Mollinjin’s vision, charges the place with values that embody the reconstitution of clan identities in a post-mission era. As we will see below (Chapter Six), this is a trend of the last few decades that is epitomized in the production of Wadeye’s popular bands. It is interesting to note how the possessive adjective ‘our’ is employed several times in the text below, to define a group’s identity that is based on close association with key places and individuals central to Mollinjin’s vision.

**Kudantiga**

_Kanhi-ka da ngarra ngay wangu da Kudantiga_

_Ngarra thamunh ngay Wunamparrkit bangkanirn-yu_

_I da-ka lelung-ka-wa da pangu-yu_

_Darrimurn nganki pangu-yu_

_Ngarra Kale Neki pirrim-yu_

_Ngarra thamunh ngay bangkanirn-yu_

_I bangkarmurt da patha da pangu-yu_

_I nganki warda nganawath da pangu-yu_

_Nhirpemu ngani da pangu-yu_

_Kangkurl nganki panamngarapart da pangu-yu_
Da thingarru da nganki da Kudantiga

Ngarra Kale Neki pirrim-yu

Ngarra thamunh ngay bangkanirn-yu

I bangkarmurt da patha da pangu-yu

I am going to Kudantiga

Where my maternal grandfather Wunamparkit had the dream

That beautiful place over there

Where our sand is

Where my maternal grandfather had the dream

Where the Our Mother is standing [a Virgin Mary statue]

Over there, where he found that good place [Heaven]

And we are going over there,

I will always looking after that place

Our paternal grandfather left that place over there for us

Ah, my country! Kudantiga!

Where my maternal grandfather had the dream

Where the Our Mother is standing [a Virgin Mary statue]

Over there where he found that good place [Heaven]

This chapter has used analyses of Mollinjin’s dream-vision and the song genre Malkarrin to demonstrate how dreams and performances mediate the process of change. I have argued that this process realizes a poiesis that can be interpreted in terms of dialogic meaning, homology and ellipsis. Interpreted thus, Malkarrin can be seen as a major moment in a process of change that foreshadowed two different but related genres of performance – Dhanba and Wadeye popular music.

I am indebted in this formulation to discussions with Diane Austin-Broos.
*Dhanba* and its related forms emerged in the 1950s and 1960s to facilitate the constitution of a ritual system between clans from different language groups that relocated around the mission. Popular music groups emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as an embodiment of clan identities and as a medium of exchange in an increasingly commodified world. The following chapter discusses *Dhanba* and the mission social relations it responded to and shaped.
CHAPTER FOUR

DHANBA SONGS AND TRIPARTITE CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE

4.1 Introduction

Aboriginal music normally falls into one of two fundamental categories: 'closed' (restricted) and 'open' (public). The former is associated with performances of restricted ceremonies, the latter with public rituals. With reference to this distinction, Alice Moyle (1974) recognized nine categories of songs in the Aboriginal music of North Australia. Two of these categories pertain to songs at Wadeye, of which one (Punh) epitomizes the closed category, and the others (Wirlihirri, Malkarrin, Wangga, Lirrnga and Dhanba) the open category. Moyle defines these as cult songs and individually-owned songs respectively.

This dichotomy can be used in the context of this research, even if Moyle's categorization cannot be applied exactly to the genres performed in Wadeye. The songs investigated here fall within the category of Moyle's individually-owned songs. However, these Wadeye songs are group-owned and, as they are used in open rituals, they can also be allocated in another of
Moyle’s categories, as clan songs. Yet, as they do not specifically refer to the creative deeds of clans’ totemic ancestors, their place within this category is not wholly conventional.¹

According to Moyle, cult songs describe the deeds of totemic ancestors during the creative Dreaming period, name sacred places and are invested with the power of the ancestors. These songs are believed to have been sung first by the totemic ancestors to which they refer. They are associated with revelatory ceremonies in which the participation is usually restricted to initiated individuals, as adequate knowledge, and therefore rights to perform these ceremonies, come only gradually in people’s lives, through a series of revelatory stages. (For reasons of secrecy, the ceremonies and songs related to male (Punh) and female (Merrk) initiation rituals in Wadeye will remain beyond discussion in this thesis.)² Cult songs in Wadeye are only performed during ‘closed’ ceremonies. There are no public performances of ancestor-related songs in which the material is modified for a non-initiated audience.³

Individually-owned songs refer to items received by individuals during a state of altered consciousness, usually while dreaming. These songs are recognized as the work of contemporary composers and are normally associated with them and with their clan estate. While totemic Dreaming ancestors might appear in these songs, their presence does not usually involve creative action or the communication of restricted material.⁴ Rather, they instruct the receiver on the modalities of performance associated with each song. There is no secrecy

¹ One needs to bear in mind that Moyle’s category of Clan songs applies better to song cycles of Northeast Arnhem Land, such as Bunggurl, open ceremonial performances based on the deeds of clan’s totemic ancestors.

² This matter is also relevant to my treatment of circumcision below in Chapter Seven.

³ This is the case for some Central Australia genres – for example those described by Dussart (2000) – which include two distinct repertoires of songs and associated ceremonies, either performed in a restricted or in an open context.

⁴ The Wangga song Wulumen Tulh (see Maret 2005 in press) is an exception. Here a Dreaming being, Old Man Tulh, who belongs to the category of the Little People, creates a landscape feature. Usually this category of beings is not involved in the creation process, rather they act as guardians and preservers of the totemic landscape.
involved in these performances. Even children are encouraged to participate in the dances in order to learn their group’s songs. Performances of these songs occur during public rituals such as mortuary rites, circumcisions or for entertainment. Specific versions of these songs were also composed to accompany the Christian liturgy at the local church. It is also among this category that *Malkarrin*, with its particular trajectory, should be placed.

*Malkarrin*—as mission song genre—aside, there are three main traditions of public ceremonial songs in Wadeye today. Each of them is related to a different language-group (or cluster of groups, in one case). These are *Dhanba*, performed by Murrinh-patha speakers, *Lirrga* belonging to Marri Ngarr people and *Wangga*, owned by speakers of *Magati Ke*, *Marri Tjevin* and *Marri Amu* languages (see below Map 4.1). These three macro language-groups, which are composed by a number of different clans, identify themselves on the basis of the genre they perform. In fact they are known today as *Wangga*, *Lirrga* and *Dhanba* ‘mobs.’ *Mobs* are social groups that constitute the basis on which these ceremonial interactions operate.

As indicated in Chapter Two, these mobs were constituted through the impact of the Port Keats mission. Sedentarism, which resulted from the progressive incorporation of people into the mission domestic economy, modified the traditional patterns of relationship between individuals based on clan affiliation, smaller foraging bands distributed across a larger area, and small-scale ceremonial exchange. (see Falkenberg 1962, Stanner 1933-34, 1937).

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1 Open songs are even performed at more mundane occasions such as the opening of new community facilities, graduation ceremonies, and others.

2 Each one of the three traditions has a number of songs associated with the Christian liturgy. These compositions were usually not dreamt, but, according to the composers, specifically ‘made up’ for the occasion. These repertoires are known as *Church Dhanba*, *Church Wangga* and *Church Lirrga*.

3 Murrinh-patha speaking people also perform two other genres of songs: *Malkarrin*, a body of songs associated with a dream/vision about the God and the Virgin Mary occurred before the settlement of the Catholic mission in 1935, and *Wurlthirri*, four songs associated with a particular area south-west of Wadeye which were composed at the turn of the twentieth century.
Map 4.1 Language groups’ spatial distribution in the Wadeye area
Large language-group distinctions had always been present, but had not been employed as socially distinctive categories. However, in the course of the 1940s and 1950s, as the region’s population came to cluster around the mission, these mobs became the prime factor in defining both identity, and the distinctions, between heterogeneous groups. Indeed, some of these groups had been traditional enemies. These new residence patterns had to be addressed: the coexistence of different groups and the cultural homogenization brought about by the mission fostered a reconstitution of difference that sought to produce familiar forms of social relation within the new circumstance. A system of tripartite reciprocal exchange between mobs or language groups, sustained by the production of three new songs genres, was the result.

This system is based on reciprocal performance of ceremonies. The group emotionally involved with the ceremony delegates the performance of the ceremonial ritual to one of the other two. That is, when a person from the Wangga mob dies, either Lirrga or Dhanba mob sings at his or her funeral; similarly, in the context of circumcisions, it will be either Wangga or Lirrga to perform for a boy of Dhanba mob; needless to say, Lirrga mob will ask either Wangga or Dhanba to sing at one of its members’ reburning (see below Picture 4.1).

The main difference between Dhanba and Malkarrin lies in the forms of relatedness for which each song genre became a vehicle. As performance, Malkarrin assumed a peripheral position in ritual exchanges between clans, possibly due to Mollinjin’s limited political influence among Murrinh-patha. As a consequence, Malkarrin songs over time assumed a different role, relevant to those closely associated with the Catholic Church and with the mission settlement. Malkarrin became a vehicle of identity for them, and for enacting relations between local indigenous and non-indigenous Christians. It was performed for the church and, occasionally, at funerals. To the extent that the mission and its staff did not engage with indigenous modalities of relatedness through exchange, Malkarrin could not be included, except in a peripheral way, in ongoing adaptive relations between clans and language groups.
Dhanha, on the other hand, reaches back to pre-settlement practices of ceremonial exchange between clans on the occasion of circumcision, initiation and the like. At the same time, the emergence of this genre also depended on the development of more sedentary relations among language groups and their clans that post-dated Mulkarrin by some 20 to 30 years. In this period, the mission consolidated, and the meanings given to clan identities shifted in the multi-language context of settlement so that language identity in performance assumed a more prominent role.

The newly implemented system of residence transposed these smaller scale, seasonal practices into a community context. This, in turn, generated a process of reciprocity and recognition that not only served ceremonial activity but also defined the groups’ identities through association with one song genre or another in the tripartite exchange.

This process has been fundamental in the development of the relationships between different groups in the township of Wadeye. Community-based associations involved with the church, school, council management and women’s centre, draw people from all three language groups. At the same time, a clan identity, in conjunction with an identity in a patronymic family, remain central pivots of social interaction, co-operation and antipathy. This confers a particular and important role on the song genres associated with mobs, a role that is characterized best by reference to closed and open genre and the conditions of settlement.

Viewed from the perspective of open and closed performances, we can separate songs which pertain to a ‘closed’ domain of ritual, and to hierarchical levels of knowledge maintained through secrecy, from those that are composed specifically to enhance a shared social space that is negotiated through performances. The agendas of these two types of songs are different, almost opposed. If secret, individual, and gender-specific knowledge is at the core of restricted ceremonies, it is models of social relations that underlie and are the outcome of public

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*The subject has been investigated by Stanner (1933-4, 1989), see below Chapter Seven.*
performances. This dichotomy is by no means absolute, because negotiations between groups, modifications of affiliations, do sometimes occur during Punh ceremonies and, equally, localized knowledge may be imparted during the exchange of public performance. Yet, it is evident that the songs concerned with this particular tripartite exchange are part of the process by which explicit and implicit aspects of social dynamics come under scrutiny in the public domain.

These factors underline that investigating open ceremonial songs is central for an understanding of Wadeye and its dynamics of settlement. This is because the system implemented by the production of new open song genres allowed the reproduction of groups' identities as different, but also as incorporated in a definite system of relationships. This system of clans within language groups (mobs) was shaped by the spatial redistributions that came with the growth of the mission and peoples' involvement with it. The ceremonial exchanges created an open forum of interaction to which the different groups could come with the conscious intention of exchanging the 'commodity' represented by their song performance with an equal counterpart of services. Through these exchanges the reproduction of future relations and group identities was ensured. For example, in the case of rag-burning ceremonies, the performing group is rewarded instantly with the payment of material items, such as pieces of cloth and food, but also holds a 'credit' of performance which will be 'cashed' in when the occasion arises.

The outcome of the ceremonial exchange, in many cases, is the exchange itself. Yet, these performances also represent a locus of interaction wherein not only are services exchanged, but differences among groups are reasserted and sustained. In the arena of public performance, any ceremony – for instance a circumcision ritual – is not the only focus of the efforts of the performers. The 'work' carried on for another group is taken into consideration. The performance itself is subjected to the scrutiny of the audience and the relatives of those who undergo the ritual. An accomplished, spectacularly executed performance involving a
substantial body of dancers is highly valued. Conversely, a performance which does not reach the expected standards of dramatic effect, can be the cause of tensions between the group of performers and their counterpart.

Each performance is political in its own way, as it brings to the forum of interaction not only the factuality of the ongoing ritual, but also the history of the relationship between the two groups involved and their positions at the moment of the performance. Investigating open ceremonies in Wadye can lead not only to an understanding of social dynamics at the time when these genres were composed, but also can provide an insight into ongoing relationships. Initially, and still today, these relationships have counter-balanced the homogenising force of settlement by sustaining modalities of identity and difference that are ‘same but different’ to pre-settlement days.

I will now address the historical conditions in which these genres emerged, and the way in which the system of tripartite ceremonial exchange is sustained and works today as public performance. In this account, Dhanba songs provide the primary basis of my analysis.

4.2. Circumstances around the emergence of new songs and the tripartite ceremonial exchange

We have seen in the previous chapter, how Malkarrin came to terms with images of Christianity by incorporating them into a narrative form mediated by dreaming. Mollinjin’s dream-vision and subsequent, related dreams became the source of a new but assimilable form of song performance. Malkarrin legitimized Christianity through a dialogic process that incorporated elements of Christianity into an indigenous domain.

The songs analysed in this chapter are different from Malkarrin for a number of reasons: they are closely related to the country of the composers; there is a greater focus on the performative aspects of the songs; and finally, there is also a correspondence between the themes articulated in each of the genres that forms the tripartite exchange. As for Malkarrin, however, in all three
genres the process of ‘finding’ is facilitated by Dreaming agents. In the case of Dhanba, these are known as Kardu Dhanba, a group of song-giving agents that also belongs to the class of Dreaming beings called Little People discussed in the previous chapter.

Because the songs come from the realm of the Dreaming, they are regarded as having a quality of incontestable truthfulness. They are the very words of the totemic ancestors. They provide individuals with paradigms for new social interaction seen in dreams. These paradigms are played out by Kardu Dhanba as they perform for and interact with the corresponding Little People of the other groups. These dreams translate into a social pattern of interaction, fostering a process of social reciprocity that, initiated at the moment of composition, reproduces itself in each performance. The relationships/obligations between Kardu Dhanba and the living are reproduced in social relationships and obligations between the mobs. Changes in social relations are thereby negotiated within a traditional framework that confers meaning on historical events. These events are acknowledged, but assimilated to values that recognize cultural differences between the groups and create an arena of ritual reciprocity in which these differences can be administered and thereby sustained.

Three main factors brought about the emergence of these genres and the tripartite ceremonial exchange. These are: first, the contraction of regional ceremonial exchange, secondly, the need to accommodate tensions between formerly hostile clans now living together, and finally, the need to respond to the homogenization imposed by Christianity and the mission’s domestic economy. I discuss each in turn.

Historical precedents for group exchange in the Port Keats area have been discussed in the literature, particularly by Stanner (1989), who describes a system of ceremonial ritual and economical exchange between the people of Wadeye and the groups to the south in the decades

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9 In many cases, the Little People speak or sing to the receiver the words of the songs.
10 See [Dhanba 18] and [Dhanba 43].
preceding the foundation of the mission. By the time Stanner arrived at the research location in 1935, the pressures exerted by the presence, since the 1870s, of white settlers outside the Daly and Victoria Rivers boundaries, had led to a regionalization of cultural contacts. Relations became more far-flung. This, in turn, had led to the acquisition of the subsection system and to the introduction of new cults associated with restricted men’s ceremonies.\textsuperscript{11} Stanner suggests (1989:110), however, that in a second phase these pressures bore in turn on these new cult ceremonies that grew increasingly difficult to perform. On the other hand, a considerable effort was made to preserve circumcision ceremonies which, regularly performed in the region before the settlement of the mission, became associated with other material exchanges.\textsuperscript{12}

The foundation of the mission in 1935 brought a third contraction of ceremonial activity in the area. Exchanges began to falter – commodities could be obtained easily from the missionaries – and circumcisions were suppressed in the mid-1940s.\textsuperscript{13}

A few years later, the potential for the rebirth of ceremonial activity occurred when groups to the east and north were progressively drawn into the mission as the latter became multi-language and ‘multicultural.’ Wadeye itself became the place of interaction of different groups

\textsuperscript{11} Around the turn of the century, old and new elements were fitted together in a way that accommodated the previous system, which was formerly of the Kariera type, and did not include the subsections. This led to the formation of four pairs of subsections, each pair consisting of two subsections which had reciprocal brother relationship (Falkenberg 1962:211). This solution, however, presented a series of difficulties and was discontinued to the extent that today the subsection system is virtually non-existent (see above Chapter One). Stanner (1979b:61) proposes also that the decline of the cult associated with the Rainbow Serpent and the rise of the new ceremonial repertoire, nowadays still performed, is associated with the response of indigenous people to the pressures of colonialism.

\textsuperscript{12} Circumcision rites can be interpreted as instrumental to the creation of relationships, since boys are in fact ‘given away’ to be circumcised under the group with which a preferential relationship is being sought.

\textsuperscript{13} The missionaries, seeking to limit the risk of infections – this was the explanation given to Stanner (1989:110) – took to circumcise the young boys, eliminating the need for traditional ceremonies, and with it, the exchange between neighbouring tribes.
that were no longer engaging with distant peoples, but had their ceremonial counterparts at hand—within the boundaries of the township.

The location of the different groups within the mission took a clear shape at the beginning of the 1950s. At this time, the fortnightly shifts that allocated different language-based groups to either bush life or settlement residence was stopped. The community now had a consistent economy based on the production of food from a thriving garden and a small cattle herd that produced enough for the enlarged population. The dormitory system, inaugurated by the *Sisters of Our Lady of The Sacred Heart* in 1942, had restarted its activities at the end of Second World War. New married couples could now build their own tin-shed house with timber provided by the local sawmill.

However, the presence in the mission of groups such as the Murrinh-patha and the Marri Ngarr, who were formerly tribal enemies, created a series of tensions. Spear fighting was a common practice at night around camps, the trigger of the brawls being disputes over women and supplies of goods, above all, tobacco.¹⁴ Undoubtedly these problems needed to be addressed within an indigenous framework.

Before Fr. Docherty established the mission, several different language groups had foraged in an area between the northern coastal region, the valley of the Fitzmaurice River to the south, and the plains of the Moyle River as far as the Daly River settlement in the east. There had been a number of contacts with cattle station settlements around the area of the Victoria River District and a number of people had travelled further north, to Darwin. Yet, despite these

¹⁴ Brother Pye recalls his first spear fight: 'It was the early hours of the morning. Bro. McCarthy assured me that as long as I stayed in the hut, there was no danger. Shortly afterwards, Fr. Docherty looking like Ned Kelly with his enormous beard put his head inside and said to me "Come up to the camp and we will break the spears, and so break up the fight. It is going too long and getting serious." Fighting with outside tribes was fairly frequent.' (Pye 1972:30).
contacts, the people of the region maintained their traditional economy virtually unaltered until the mid-1930s. When the mission’s domestic economy became the predominant system, the patterns of subsistence changed radically, and people became partly sedentary. The secular organization of life based on communal work and the Christian organization of sacred life – the equality of people before one God – threatened the cultural differences between different cultural groups within the settlement.

Differences needed to be addressed in a way that both the secular and sacred life administered by Christianity was not able to satisfy. It is in this context that new song genres emerged, specifically to implement a system of exchange that could restructure traditional patterns of reciprocity – based on each group’s acknowledged uniqueness – within a radically changed social and economic environment.

4.3 Cultural contacts in the creation of new genres

As noted already, the people of Wadeye participated in the pastoral industry of neighbouring regions, either to the east around the township of Barunga (formerly known as Bamyili and Beswick Creek), or to the southwest, in the Kimberley region. The latter included the Victoria River District and a few stations in Western Australia, around Kununurra. The cultural contacts between different groups of indigenous people employed in cattle stations rekindled relations that had been interrupted years before (see Stanner above) and fostered a new process of cultural diffusion.

The main locus of this interaction was night corroborees in which each group would play its repertoire for the other groups. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who investigated Aboriginal labour in the Northern Territory, dedicated a section of their research to indigenous strategies for cultural continuity. They stressed that:
The allocation of a reasonable amount of ‘private’ time not only enabled card games to flourish, but importantly, encouraged traditional forms of entertainment. That reinforced the common cultural perspective component along with the presence of a mixed range of common cultural perspectives that existed side by side and on equal terms in any one settlement.

There was also an obvious element of pride in displaying song-and-dance combinations to others (“This is what we have!”), and comparing and discussing what was going on, at the time or on later occasions. (Berndt and Berndt 1987:207)

Many informants have told me that they participated in these ‘after work’ corroborees and that they ‘exchanged songs’ with other ‘mobs.’ At the time, however, the only genre that people of Wadeye performed was *Wangga*. These exchanges proved to be a fundamental inspiration for the composition of the new *Lirrga* and *Dhanba* genres. Claude Narjic recalls the circumstances around the first composition of *Lirrga*:

It was in 1956, 1957. We were all grown up then and Dennis [Narjic] went out working at Tipperary station and saw this man: Wippie [unknown Barunga singer]. Then Dennis went to Litchfield, working, then he came back and this another one, the Old man passed away. The blind one and Tommy Moyle, those two and Dennis I am pretty sure, they were out bush, around here, around the mission. They were out bush to camp at airforce creek and talk about this thing, talked about it. In 1961, 1962 it started to come out, *Lirrga*. It was because they talked amongst themselves and they said: “You know like Bamyili [Barunga] singing, they are talking in their language and they are talking about birds, talking about fish, and everything”. They were talking, and then what happened was: “Well, we have to try ours, in Marri Ngarr” These two old men and Dennis said:
"We start in Marri Ngarr." They made their own tune. It belongs to Wudipuli [a Marri Ngarr outstation], it didn’t come from Banyili.\textsuperscript{15}

A few elements make this recollection quite extraordinary: first of all it identifies quite precisely the moment in time at which the composition of the new genre started. This is unusual as the origins of traditional music are often quite difficult to determine, but it also tells us something more important: that the composition process was conscious and driven by a desire to try their ‘own way.’ This does not mean that the songs are exclusively a product of men – as for the other genres, Lirrga is also given in dreams by song-giving agents in the shape of mermaids – but it demonstrates that clear human intention is behind this production.

The intention is expressed in the above text when the narrator refers to the birds and the fishes sung by the Barunga performer. Singing the birds and the fishes means to sing one’s own totems, which are embodied in the country of the clan that is performing. It is an assertion of identity that helps to place the group within the social environment, and fosters the very differences that risked being annihilated by mission life.

A similar process to that described for Lirrga fostered the development of Dhanba. It too was inspired by contacts with neighbouring groups, Kimberley clans to the west, that performed a related genre called Jumba.

It is worth noting, also, that a few years after the introduction of these two new genres, the group associated with the third genre, Wangga, produced a new repertoire Walakandha Wangga, probably to enter the new tripartite exchange with a corpus of songs specifically composed for that purpose (see Marett 2005 in press).

\textsuperscript{15} This narration on the origin of Lirrga, is on WASA Tape 323, narrated by Claude Narjic and recorded by Phil Costigan in Wadeye (10.02.1995).
4.4 Dhanba: the origins

There is no recorded narrative of the origin of Dhanba that is comparable to the one for Lirrnga. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that the circumstances associated with the development of this genre were similar. Although informants are adamant about the independent origin and uniqueness of Dhanba – the circumstance of its ‘finding’ and the subjects of its songs are incontestably attached to Murrinh-patha land – there is good reason to assume that some sort of cultural contact also played a part in the composition of this genre.

In the 1950s, many people belonging to the Murrinh-patha language group were employed in the cattle station industry of the Victoria River District and Western Australia. Indeed, Murrinh-patha people had had a long history of relationships with such places prior to the establishment of the mission. In these cattle stations, the night corroborees, performed on a daily basis, comprised, among others, the execution of Junba, a Kimberley style of clapstick accompanied songs performed by men and women together. A number of informants recalled these performances. Moreover, another genre, cognate to Junba, namely Balga, had been introduced and performed at the mission by individuals who worked on commercial boats that called into Port Keats while travelling from Western Australia to Darwin.

As was the case with Lirrnga, however, this inspiration led to the constitution of a very specific genre that is closely linked with a geographically defined estate. Lirrnga is associated with the area around Wudipuli, Dhanba with Kunbinhi, an area within the estate of the Yek Diminin clan. Walakandha Wangga, in turn, is associated with the land around Nardirri, an outstation at the mouth of the Daly River.

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16 As we stressed in the Chapter One, at the time of the foundation of the mission, many people resided around cattle station of this area, such as Legume and Auvergne.

17 Balga was still performed in Wadeye in the early 1980s by Murrinh-patha clans whose territory bordered with Djamindjung language groups to the west. (Ward 1983:44)
Dhanba is a clapstick-accompanied song genre performed by men and women together that belongs to the Murrinh-patha speaking group, traditionally associated with the area around the township of Wadeye. More specifically, Dhanba was first composed by Robert Dungoi Kolumboort, of Yek Diminin clan, probably around the first years of the 1960s. Yek Diminin clan is the traditional land owning clan of the land on which the community stands. Since its origins, Dhanba has been closely associated with this clan, to the point that its main composers and male performers are all its members. Today the main performers are Lawrence Kolumboort, Matthew Pultchen, Felix Bunduck, Steven Bunduck (of Yek Diminin clan), Leo Melpi (of Yek Marinin clan), Elizabeth Cumaiyi and Lucy Tcherna (of Yek Nangu Clan), Mary Bunduck (of Yek Yederr clan).

During this research I collected over sixty different Dhanba songs, about a third of which are still performed today and were recorded during the period of fieldwork. The rest were retrieved from the archives of the Kanamkek - Yile Ngala Museum. The process of elicitation of the song texts was done with the invaluable help of these elders, composers and performers of the songs. These sessions focused on the origin of a song, and the 'story behind it.' In almost all the cases the informants could identify the composer of the song and give a gloss translation of the lyrics. Informants also identified the first Dhanba song composed, and recalled the circumstances around its 'finding.' L.M., Robert Kolumboort, and G.M. were camping in the bush, on top of a hill called Yilpi, south of Wadeye, near a place called Kerdengbe, in the area of the Yek Nangu clan. In his dreams, Robert Kolumboort received a visit from Thimarrarr, a senior Nangu man and holder of the Wurlthirri song genre. He was in the company of the Little

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18 Other now deceased composers and performers were Harry Luke Palada Kolumboort, Joe Malakunda Birari, Kevin Bunduck (of Yek Diminin clan), and Gypsy Jinjair (of Rak Nuthunthu clan).
19 These women, who are not part of Yek Diminin clan, are however closely related to it, either by marriage or by kinship relations. Normally, wives learn their husband's songs and dances, in the case of Dhanba some of them also participate in the performance.
20 This material included in the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive (WASA), which comprises about 700 audiotapes, is now completely digitized and accessible to the public of the community.
People who were performing unknown songs and dances. Thimarrarr approached the dreamer with the phrase ‘Wurithirri wurda, Dhanba warda’ which literally means ‘Stop Wurithirri, Dhanba now,’ and indicated to him the Little People – Kardu Dhanba – from which Robert Kolumboort received the following songs:

[Dhanba 00]

Yiliyi nganala ngurbaram baram

I am climbing the hill Yiliyi

*Wurithirri*, together with *Malkarin*, were the only genres owned by Murrinh-patha people before *Dhanba*.

Once awake Robert Kolumboort told his peers about the dream. They were puzzled in the same way that Mollinjin’s dream had been puzzling. However, this time Thimarrarr’s message was clear: Murrinh-patha people had been given a new genre that they should use in ceremonial contexts. Lawrence Kolumboort was not present at the time but remembers the events:

I was down at Spring Creek [a cattle station in the Victoria River District]. They sent a letter for me and they told me: “We’ve got a new corroboree. Like *Malkarin* but this is *Dhanba,*” that’s what they told me in that letter. All right! “When you come back, we give you a concert, when you come back you got to listen!” The whole lot of them was there, Joe Birari, old Patrick Kaigayi, and old Kuruwurl and old Jumbo, and old Nym, and old fellow Perdjert. They were there. The old people gave me a concert when I got back. Harry Luke was there too, Robert there. It was 1961.21

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21 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes, 08.07.2003]
Although this declaration must be considered with caution, as it seems unlikely that people would choose to write a letter to communicate the matter, it does reveal something quite important. The date of 1961 places the events in the same period in which the other genres, *Lirga* and *Walakandha Wangga*, started to be produced. Moreover, the fact that Lawrence Kolumboort mentions such an event stresses the fact that people clearly place the composition of these genres in a defined *historical* time. Yet, the composition and the modality of reception of this new genre follows a traditional pattern: the denial of human agency in the production of new rituals.

Robert Kolumboort's position as first receiver of *Dhanba* songs is similar to that of Mollinjin's with *Malkarrin*. According to all the informants, in fact, Robert had never been to the cattle stations and had never heard anything similar to *Dhanba*. However, there are recordings made by Stanner in 1957\(^2\) that support informants' comment about the presence of *Balga* in the Port Keats area. Robert could therefore have heard this style before his first dream. The fact that informants stress his unrelatedness with the area from which similar styles came reinforces, from their point of view, the originality of the *Dhanba* genre and its Dreaming origin.

Moreover, it is Thimarrarr, the traditional land owner of the place in which the three peers were camping, who appears in Robert's dreams and introduces him to the new songs. This undoubtedly shows a sense of continuation of tradition in the pattern of song reception – the same Thimarrarr was the one who first dreamt *Wurthirri*.

This first dream also features *Kardu Dhanba*, song-giving agents. These Little People, whose main activity consists in guarding each clan's area from the intrusion of foreigners, also have another important role. They sing and perform during these dreams and it is from these

\(^{22}\) These recording are stored at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies in Canberra (AIATSIS, Stanner A8200A; see also Marett1999).
performances that the composer gets his or her inspiration. Different Little People had also inspired the composition of Wurlthirri, but these ones were specifically from Yek Diminin country.

There is a difference: it seems that there is overall a clear consciousness of the object of these compositions. The composer knows from the first dreamt inspiration that the song will be performed in a ceremonial context. He knows it, because he has already seen it performed there by Kardu Dhanba.

It therefore seems that Dhanba songs are composed to be performed. The essence of these songs must be understood in the light of their performative use. In this case, Dhanba songs will enter an arena of tripartite exchange in which each of the groups plays out its specificities, singing and dancing their own totemic country. The song-texts also focus on performance, on exchange and on relations between neighbouring clans. Performance is the arena of exchange, both in the actions of people involved in reciprocal exchange and in the dreamt ‘corroborees’ of the Little People.

4.5 Tripartite exchange sustained

In order to understand the dynamics of the tripartite ceremonial exchange, it is necessary to know the composition of clans that forms each of the three macro-language groups or ‘mobs.’ These are set out below in Tables 4.1-3, see also below Map 4.2. The genres involved in the tripartite ceremonial exchange and the clan that provides the majority of the songs are shown in

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23 The Little People’s contribution to the composition process is clearly stated in one song [Dhanba 48]. The text of this songs, ‘Dhanba Wadeye banpark dim,’ was glossed by the informants as ‘The Little People brought Dhanba to Wadeye.’ The Little People also provide the proper template – ancestral precedent in Marett’s terms (2005 in press) – for performance. In fact, men and women sing together in Dhanba because they were performing in this way when they saw them in their dreams. The joint performance of men and women is another marking feature of Kimberley genres and reinforces the view that cultural with the Kimberleys influenced the composition process of Dhanba.
The names of the clans are those officially reported on the Thamarrurr constitution document, 21st of March 2003.

Map 4.2 Mobs' traditional spatial distribution in the Wadeye area
"Dhanba" mob [Murrinh-patha speaking group, geographically associated with the area around Wadeye and to the south, up to the Fitzmaurice River border].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clans</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Genres</th>
<th>Composers</th>
<th>Singers/ Didjeridu players</th>
<th>Dancers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Murrinh-patha</td>
<td>Dhanba</td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Maninh</td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Nuthunthu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Kimmu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Maninh</td>
<td>Rak Kimmu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yek Maninh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
<td>Rak Nuthunthu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yek Ngudanimarn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
<td>Yek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuritiirri</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Nangu</td>
<td>Yek Diminin</td>
<td>Ngudanimarn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Dhanba mob clans, genres and performers

149
*Lirrga* mob [Marri Ngarr speaking group, geographically located to the east, around the area of the Moyle River plains].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clans</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Composers</th>
<th>Singers/Didjeridu players</th>
<th>Dancers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Rak Wudipuli</em></td>
<td>Marri Ngarr</td>
<td><em>Lirrga</em></td>
<td>Rak Wudipuli</td>
<td>Rak Wudipuli</td>
<td>Rak Wudipuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Kubiyrir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Wunh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Kungarbarl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Kungarbarl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Kulingmirr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yek Wunh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Merrepen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Nemarluk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 *Lirrga* mob clans, genres and performers
Wangga mob [Magati Ke, Marri Amu and Marri Tjevin speaking groups, geographically located around the northern coastal region].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clans</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Composers</th>
<th>Singers/Didjeridu players</th>
<th>Dancers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rak Nadirri</td>
<td>Marri Tjevin</td>
<td><strong>Wangga</strong></td>
<td>Rak Nadirri</td>
<td>Rak Nadirri</td>
<td>Rak Nadirri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Perrederr</td>
<td>Marri Amu</td>
<td>Walakandha</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Perrederr</td>
<td>Rak Perrederr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Angileni</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Angileni</td>
<td>Rak Angileni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Thinti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Thinti</td>
<td>Rak Thinti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Nganthawudi</td>
<td>Magati Ke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Nganthawudi</td>
<td>Rak Nganthawudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Kuy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rak Kuy</td>
<td>Rak Kuy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yek Yederr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yek Yederr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Wangga mob clans, genres and performers
These groups are represented as patrilineal clans with a membership inherited at birth according to patrilineal descent. Each cluster of clans constitutes the mob that shares a common language (or a group languages in the case of Wangga mob). Each is associated with a specific song genre. Each of the mobs draws its performers from members of these clans, although some clans are more active than others in ceremonial life. Virtually every clan is involved in the dance performance though a few individuals act as musical performers.

Historical changes have played a major role in the constitution of this tripartite exchange. In fact, the aggregation brought about by the new patterns of residency within the mission fostered solidarity between clans of the same language-speaking group. The system of shifts instituted by the mission helped to define the mob identity by separating same-language speaking clans in periods of fortnightly residency either inside or outside the settlement. When the shifts were discontinued, and all the clans were drawn inside the mission, these song genres emerged as an indigenous social construct in order to mediate social interaction in the new circumstances. The point to be stressed, however, is that this tripartite ceremonial exchange sustains both the constitution of each mob's identity and the articulation of social reciprocity between them.

Mobs became both primary loci of identity and social agents in matters within and beyond the ceremonial arena. New songs which emerged from the inspiration of individuals of a particular clan, became the epitome of the whole mob because they were composed specifically for ritual reciprocity within the broader community, and not for the celebration of a single clan's estate.

This system is based on parallels of corresponding differences. The reciprocity between the three mobs works on the basis of three distinct cosmologies that are constituted around homologous elements, where the internal relationships between clans within each mob is reproduced externally in the pattern of relationships between the three mobs in the ceremonial context. Thus, as one clan's estate stands for the other clans' countries, and the songs related to

24 I am indebted in this formulations to discussions with Allan Marett (see also Marett 2005 in press).
that country come to epitomize the whole mob, so Dhanba comes to stand for Wangga in the context of ceremonial reciprocity. Thus difference is defined in terms of balanced relations of identity and opposition at different levels of encompassment. What is different at one level becomes identical at the next level in relation to a more encompassing difference.

The repertoire of each of these genres refers principally to the estate and Dreaming sites of one particular clan, and that composers and main performers come from that clan. Yek Diminin clan thus provides the Dhanba songs for all the other clans listed in Table 4.1, similarly, Rak Wudipuli and Rak Nadirri clans compose, respectively, Lirrga and Wangga songs for the other clans in their mob (see Tables 4.2-3).

The estate of these clans stands for those of the other clans, in fact, for the whole area of the macro-language group. Therefore, Kunbinhi, the main Dreaming site of Yek Diminin country epitomizes the Dreaming estate of all Murrinh-patha people. The same goes for the other three mobs, with Nadirri standing for Wangga, and Wudipuli representing Lirrga estates.

Within each mob, a combination of cosmological, geographical and sociological parallels make this system possible. There are clear homologies between the respective clans in the mob with regard to Dreaming sites (ngugumingki) and Dreaming beings (Little People) associated with them. These parallels are structurally similar in all three macro groups. Since the system that regulates the relationships between the clans within each mob is based on cosmologies that are structurally identical – as we will see below, this is based on the relationships that each clan has with its territory and the Dreaming beings that protect it – this pattern of relations can be reproduced in the broader ceremonial context.

Nadirri is the official name given to the area of the Rak Nadirri clan, however, the key place for Wangga that often appears in song text is Yendili.
This is possible because, although the patterns of internal relationships within the mobs are based on identical circumstances, fundamental differences are acknowledged between these macro groups. This is to say that, although the theory around sites and Dreaming beings is identical, the particular elements of each mob’s cosmology are continuously reasserted.

Spatial distribution is one of the prime sites of identity. Before the mission changed the patterns of residency, each mob inhabited a well-defined area: the Dhanba mob was stationed in the hilly south-western region, the Lirrga mob inhabited the eastern Moyle River plain, and Wangga mob foraged around the northern coastal area. These groups described themselves as freshwater, saltwater or in-land people.26

The environments of these regions were quite different, and therefore people also had different economies based on the particular variety of animal and vegetal species of their area. The association with these different spatial distributions came to represent one of the strongest markers of identity when people converged on the mission. Each of these mobs, moreover, spoke a different language (or a group of cognate languages in the case of the Wangga mob) and this clearly represented another factor of difference. Finally, the cosmological specificites of each mob, their Dreaming sites and the associated beings, their totemic ancestors and stories, were clearly distinct and constituted another site of association within the clans of each mob and differentiation between them.

Table 4.4 below represents these relationships graphically. The smaller circles represent the clans composing each of the three mobs, which are represented by the larger circle. The darkened clan-circles represent the song-producing clans of each mob. The lines of relationships between these clans (of which only a few have been represented here in order to

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26 Images and metaphors associated with these different environments extensively used in the song texts of traditional and popular music, as we will see below. See Map 4.2 above for the areas traditionally occupied by each mob.
simplify the scheme) within each mob are graphically identical, because they are based on a similar pattern of parallel cosmology. The relationship-lines, representing the ceremonial reciprocity that join the mobs, have been represented with the same type of line because they also are based on the same cosmological parallel, but because they express broader social relationships, they are in bold.

![Diagram](image)

Table 4.4. Internal and external reciprocity of the mobs.

The rationale behind this reciprocity must be understood in the light of the broader ceremonial engagement of the groups in the community context. This issue can be considered from two perspectives: one to do with principles of ceremonial action, the other with specific ceremonies. The tripartite reciprocal exchange constitutes a system in which each group's identity is brought to the performance in order to be sustained by its performers, but also to be acknowledged by the audience. This reciprocity, which is an extraordinary binding element of
the social community, works because it is based on homologous cosmologies and acknowledged differences. These differences, in turn, allow each group to sustain its own identity within the broader social life of the community. We have seen above how this system was a direct response to the pressures that the mission domestic economy was exerting on the cultural uniqueness of each group. The reciprocity at the core of the ceremonial exchange was the answer to these pressures and those brought about by the relocation of previously inimical groups within the boundaries of the community.

This system also gradually became influential within kinship arrangements. For a time at least, it seems that the three groups tended to become exogamous units in the regulation of marriage arrangements. At the time, the moiety system was faltering as a basis for marriage, and could not work in a changed milieu that discarded the bipolar division of its members. Never a complete or stable transition, nonetheless informants suggested relations between the macro-groups for a while became a new ground for exploring dimensions of political alliance in marriage once sustained through the moieties.

This reciprocal ceremonial exchange operates according to principles of kinship relations that privilege distance rather than closeness. For this reason, the group involved with the ceremony, the family of the deceased in the case of a funeral or mortuary rite, is regarded as ‘too close’ to the dead to perform, hence one of the other two groups is asked to lead the ceremony. Each one of the three groups can perform for the other. The decision on which one is to perform is made on the basis of actual kinship relations, on the availability of performers, and/or on the circumstances developing at the time of the performance.
Table 4.5 Tripartite ceremonial exchange reciprocity pattern

The decision about which mob will perform is often a matter of discussion within the group. Different people have different ideas on who should perform although eventually the most authoritative individual decides. The following is a good example of how the power relations between groups and individuals influences the decision on the performing group.

The wife of an important man of the Dhanba group passed away in September 2002. She belonged to the Wangga mob. This ruled out a performance by this group as it was considered too close to the deceased to perform. So was Dhanba, the genre associated with the group of the deceased’s husband. It seemed that Lirrga was the only option. However, the husband of the deceased, instead, chose a performance of Wurithirri, a minor genre related to the Murrinhpatha speaking people. This demonstrated how the agenda of a man was put forward in a ceremonial context, but still within the boundaries of the appropriate procedures: the leader of the Dhanba mob wanted to celebrate his group power as homage to his deceased wife, but could not perform the main repertoire. He therefore decided to ask a related group within the same mob, to act on his behalf.
Having considered the broader principles, I now turn to specific ceremonial acts. Reciprocity is particularly striking in the case of other mortuary rituals. During ragburnings, the songs performed are not those referring to the dead person's country, but those referring to the country of one of the other two traditions. In the context of the performance, the primary focus of attention is not the specific country of the deceased, but rather, the relationship that people have with their countries and the modalities by which individuals connect with them. As these relationships are based on cosmologies and methodologies that are homologous across the region, they can be expressed with reference to countries other than those of the deceased. For this reason, it is possible to sing Kunbinhi – the Murrinh-patha totemic country of Dhanba songs – while sending away the spirit of a Wangga individual to his totemic country at Yendili.

As far as funerals are concerned, informants explain reciprocity by referring to the need of the group most closely involved to grieve. 'We can't sing, because we might cry' was the answer to the question I put on this matter. The process of grieving involves a certain amount of organized ritual: for example, the bereaved will rebuke the crowd for their (unintentional) involvement in the loss of the beloved, or inflict a blow on the tip of his or her own head with a stone, causing profuse bleeding. Delegating another group to perform, allows the relatives of the deceased to concentrate on their mourning.

The reasons behind the reciprocity involved in circumcisions are in some ways similar, but also different. People stress the fact that parents, especially the mothers of those to be initiated, are too 'worried' about their offspring to participate in the performance. Yet, reciprocity during circumcision ceremonies is clearly based on another principle: the possibility of expanding family relations in fruitful ways. It is said that young boys are 'given away' – almost as material goods – in order to establish a relationship with the receiving group. It is the receiving

27 See footnote 23 in Chapter Two for an explanation of this rite.
group that will perform for the boys and thus become the basis of a relationship that will last a lifetime. Naturally, both groups benefit from this exchange, as ties are always bi-directional.

The direction of reciprocity – ultimately a decision of the boy’s father – is decided on the basis of the most fruitful solution. The following case demonstrates this: D.K., a Wangga man, decided to circumcise his son during the 2003 ceremonies. J.K., his first son, was the result of marriage with J.J., a Lirrga woman. J.K. was therefore circumcised under the Dhanba group, as Dhanba was the missing group in their family relations.

In other cases, what determines the choice is not a sense of a gap, but the desire to strengthen old links, or generally extend social networks. A young man then assumes the name of the group by which he has been circumcised. From that moment on, he will be addressed with this name by his relatives, especially by his sisters (either real or classificatory) and first female cousins, according to the taboo that forbids opposite-sex siblings and close relatives to address each other by name. Thus, a Wangga boy becomes either a Lirrga or a Dhanba young man, similarly a Dhanba boy will be circumcised under either Wangga or Lirrga, and a Lirrga boy will take either the name of Wangga or Dhanba. This attribution does not give him the rights to perform for his ‘name’ group, but it does expand his connections outside his mob.

In the following section, I will give an account of these homologies, investigating common feelings of attachment to places and modalities of relations with totemic countries that can be found across the three genres.

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28 On this matter, Marett (1991:41) states: ‘Robert [Daly] chose to have one of his sons circumcised to Jolly Laiwonga’s Bongaling-bongaling song set because Robert’s older brother had been married to a woman from Beswick, Jolly’s town and the home of Bongaling-bongaling.

29 This practice is sustained even in non-traditional circumstances. A boy who goes to Darwin to be circumcised in a hospital environment, a common practice in these days, will be referred to as doctor when he comes back.
4.6 Dreamings, Dreaming sites, people, places and sentiments

Images of country feature as a common trait in the repertoires of the three genres engaging in the ceremonial exchange. Attention is particularly focussed on parts of the territory, namely Dreaming sites, that are known to hold the power of ancestral beings.

Ngugumingki, (Murrinh-patha for 'Dreaming sites'), feature in virtually every Dhanba song. These sites resulted from the wanderings and actions of Dreaming totemic ancestors, or ngakumari, during the formative era known in Murrinh-patha as the Dreaming, or Da Marra-re. Particular sites are the final resting place of totemic ancestors. It is here that ngakumari transformed themselves into a feature of the landscape. These sites are considered the most important, as they are source of eternal life from which human beings, natural species and other phenomena are continuously generated.

Some of these sites are also regarded as the final resting place of the spirits (ngepan) of deceased individuals who have been successfully liberated from their links with the world of the living during the rag-burning ceremony. One of these places is Batuk, in the Kunbinhi area, in Murrinh-patha country, possibly the most important site in the whole area, which is considered the place where the spirits of deceased people, after the connection with the realm of the living has been successfully severed through funerary rites, re-enter the realm of the Dreaming. As sources of life and the residence of the spirits of the dead, these places are invested with a sentimental attachment that manifests the fundamental importance of totemic country in indigenous cosmology.

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"On this subject, Falkenberg (1962:85) notes: 'A ngugumingki is the permanent life-centre of all the ngakumari which are associated with that ngugumingki. Here are a multitude of spirits (ngepan). A single specimen of a ngakumari is a single ngepan which has been temporarily torn loose from its ngugumingki and assumes substance as an animal, plant, or spear. The animal, plant, or spear, is the vessel of a specific ngepan which will return to its ngugumingki when the vessel disintegrates' (Author's emphases)."
4.6 Dreamings, Dreaming sites, people, places and sentiments

Images of country feature as a common trait in the repertoires of the three genres engaging in the ceremonial exchange. Attention is particularly focussed on parts of the territory, namely Dreaming sites, that are known to hold the power of ancestral beings.

Ngugumingki, (Murrinh-patha for 'Dreaming sites'), feature in virtually every Dhanba song. These sites resulted from the wanderings and actions of Dreaming totemic ancestors, or ngakumari, during the formative era known in Murrinh-patha as the Dreaming, or Da Marrare. Particular sites are the final resting place of totemic ancestors. It is here that ngakumari transformed themselves into a feature of the landscape. These sites are considered the most important, as they are source of eternal life from which human beings, natural species and other phenomena are continuously generated.

Some of these sites are also regarded as the final resting place of the spirits (ngepan) of deceased individuals who have been successfully liberated from their links with the world of the living during the rag-burning ceremony.39 One of these places is Batuk, in the Kunbinhi area, in Murrinh-patha country, possibly the most important site in the whole area, which is considered the place where the spirits of deceased people, after the connection with the realm of the living has been successfully severed through funerary rites, re-enter the realm of the Dreaming. As sources of life and the residence of the spirits of the dead, these places are invested with a sentimental attachment that manifests the fundamental importance of totemic country in indigenous cosmology.

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39 On this subject, Falkenberg (1962:85) notes: 'A ngugumingki is the permanent life-centre of all the ngakumari which are associated with that ngugumingki. Here are a multitude of spirits (ngepan). A single specimen of a ngakumari is a single ngepan which has been temporarily torn loose from its ngugumingki and assumes substance as an animal, plant, or spear. The animal, plant, or spear, is the vessel of a specific ngepan which will return to its ngugumingki when the vessel disintegrates' (Author's emphases).
A number of songs, in each one of the three genres, express this attachment. The following items are, respectively, from *Dhanba*, *Lirrga*, and *Wangga* songs:

**Kunbinhi, Kunbinhi, thingarru -ye**

*Batuk mani nangarrangkardanungine*

Kunbinhi, Kunbinhi, Ah, my country!

Show us Batuk!  

**Karra Yendili Yendili karra mana nidin-ngina**

**Karra Yendili Yendili karra mana nidin-ngina**

**Aa karra mana nidin-ngina**

Yendili Yendili, karra Brother! Ah, my country!

Yendili Yendili, karra Brother! Ah, my country!

aa karra Brother! Ah, my country!  

**Wuyi ngina. Wuyi ngina. Yennura. Yennura.**

**Wurdipuli.**


Wurdipuli.  

The expressions *da thingarru* and *wuyi ngina*, translated with the vocative: ‘*Ah, my country!*’, are common in everyday discussions when people express their feeling of attachment for their country. This is so especially if an attachment is different from their current place of residence and some time has passed since their last visit there. The expression conveys a yearning for their totemic country, the ultimate source of life from which they themselves originated and to

31 [Dhanba 23].

32 This *Walkandha Wangga* text is from Marett (2005 in press).

33 The *Lirrga* repertoire has been investigated by Linda Barwick (2003, 2005 in press).
which in death they will return. (A common translation of this expression which is recurrent in Aboriginal English is also ‘Poor bugger, my country!’)\textsuperscript{34}

From these examples one can see how the expression of sentimental attachment towards one’s own country features equally across the genres. This commonality of feelings, therefore, explains why, when listening to songs that describe another estate, people can be brought to tears when reminded about their own country, where the spirits of their beloved ones finally rest.

The following remarks concern the role of the Little People as an example of ancestral precedents for social relationships and ceremonial acts.

4.7 The paradigm of relations with country and within human beings: the performance of the Little People

During the dream in which the composer receives the songs, the Little People engage in a series of actions that epitomize human beings’ social and ceremonial life: they look after their country, they visit other peoples’ estates, and they perform ceremonial dances. It is from these dreams that people learned how to interact and constitute the ceremonial exchange.

The site known as Batuk is also the place of residence of Kardu Wakal, Little People in Murrinh-patha language. While these beings are Dreaming ancestors, they stand out as a unique class of totemic beings. Unlike those who roamed the land at the beginning of time, they are not involved with the creation of any of the Dreaming sites. Instead they came out from those sites and are closely associated with them (see Kenny 2004). Often, Little People are also regarded as Dreaming embodiments of dead relatives. In this case, the spirit of a dead person

\textsuperscript{34} Poor Fellow My Country (another variation of this expression) is also the title of one of Xavier Herbert’s novels, a tale of the struggle of indigenous people facing disposessions and difficult conditions of life brought by white settlers in Northern Territory of Australia in the early 1940s.
rejoins the Dreaming realm as a result of mortuary ceremonies and 'reappears' in the form of a little person.

Little People are not only found in Murrinh-patha territory, but they are also part of other countries and appear also in the musical repertoire of the other two genres: Walakandha are totemic beings of this class associated with Wangga, Kanybubi those associated with Lirrga. As a matter of fact, virtually every clan lays claim to unique forms of such beings in its territory, but only some groups own songs that describe them.

Little People are usually human-like figures about a metre tall, hence the name, although in some cases they assume other shapes. For example, those related to the Rak Kubiyrirr clan's country have animal-like attributes such as claws. Those related respectively to the countries of Rak Wudipuli and Yek Nangu clans appear as freshwater and saltwater mermaids. The Little People associated with Murrinh-patha country, act in similar ways, protecting and nurturing their country, and inspiring the composition of songs. What is said below for Dhanba Little People is largely true for the other members of this class of totemic beings.35

The Little People that appear in Dhanba songs are also known as Kardu Kunbindhi, that is the 'Men from Kunbindhi,' which is the proper name for the Yek Diminin dead. Kunbindhi is the name of the general area where the majority of the Dreaming sites of the Yek Diminin clan is located.36 A few of these Kardu Kunbindhi, who appear in dreams as human-like beings, can be identified, as they maintain certain features and behaviours in all their appearances. These are: Batuk, an elder man, main singer and leader, Ninit, a middle aged man, Mayamungum, a

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35 This class of Dreaming beings that interacts with humans, and often inspires their compositions, is broadly diffused throughout the northern region of the Northern Territory. Corri (2002:133) makes reference to Gumbulopula, a north-eastern Arnhem Land 'metaphysical ancestor whose deeds, sacra and interactions with coevals has informed popular song composition.' See also Marett (2005 in press).

36 Kunbindhi features many times in the lyrics of the songs as the epitome of this clan's land.
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³⁶ Kunbinhi features many times in the lyrics of the songs as the epitome of this clan's land.
younger man who is left-handed and is the main dancer, and Ngurumilhen, a child. All these names also correspond to place names of the clan’s estate.

These Little People cannot be seen by humans, except in dreams, although signs of their presence can be intuited at night when people see distant fires glittering in the dark. It is their nature to remain aloof, although they are willing to help their own ‘countrymen.’ Conversely, they are considered dangerous if they sense the presence of a stranger approaching their territory. For this reason, people avoid travelling in a foreign country without the company of the rightful owners. When entering the area, the owners will ‘call out’ to the Little People to advise them that they are coming with a stranger. Occasionally people will smear these strangers with their sweat so that the Little People will not smell ‘something different.’

4.7.1 Looking after the country

Overall, the Little People are in charge of the preservation of important Dreaming sites and consequently they act, sometimes violently, producing sudden climate changes such as wind whirls or thunderstorms. At other times they act more subtly disguising totem sites so that people will not be able to find them. This is the case for the song below:

[Dhanba 17]

Yele -le, Kunbinhi mani nangarrangkarda
a mulumulu Kunbinhi, thingarru, kardamardurdaydimnuye
Kadha wula kadha wula ye, milindirri -dirri -dirri

Father, show us Kunbinhi

I am a son of Kunbinhi, Ah, my country! they turned it around

37 They are well known for throwing rocks at strangers. A flat tyre on the road, or getting bogged can also be attributed to their ‘cheeky’ actions.

38 ‘Turned it around,’ in Aboriginal English, means to alter the aspect of something in order to make it disappear, or to temporarily disguise it.
Paperbark hat, paperbark hat.

This song was composed by Lawrence Kolumboort, a senior Murrinh-patha singer, after he participated in a unsuccessful sacred sites mapping expedition, led by other elders in the presence of anthropologists and other personnel from Canberra. The composer recalls the events:

We'd been looking for that Batuk [the most important dreaming site, in the Kunbinhi area], the first time, but we couldn't find it. Because people were mixed, the people looking around there, that mob from Canberra. [Kardu] Kunbinhi said: "No, we can't show that place." That's the song: The Little People covered it up, the Little People don't trust them.39

Even the rightful owner, the 'son of Kunbinhi,' the one that wears the paperbark hat - a piece of the ceremonial paraphernalia familiar to Murrinh-patha people - could not have access to the site, so much did the Little People distrust the motley party.

4.7.2 Interacting with other mobs

The Little People are not simply stationary around these important sites. They are also well known for travelling the country at night to visit both their human countrymen and their fellow Little People such as Walakandha, from other countries, as the following songs explain.

[Dhanba 25]

*Dhanba kuku wangu ngaram nangkuwegait namme nhim-ka
Ngakumari nhiri da ngamrunuyhime Bathuk ngunu kathu-yu
Dhanba are gathered around us, they are surrounding us

39 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes, 17.03.2003]
I am your totem, I am visiting you from Bathuk

[Dhanba 43]

Palyrr nubangkardu pangu kunungamtumpe kem, da ngarra kardu walakandha, pigunu punada neme tek perrkenkumme, punadangume Pirrini.

Padanjkawurlme tara, tek perkenkumme, kardu dhanba perrkenku kibim-ka mamay pelpith-nu, ngarra kala.

Look that hill in the mist, the place of Walakandha people, those three black cockatoos are coming back, coming back from Pirrini.

They are coming back, those three cockatoos, those two other Little People are waiting on top, beside the coolabah tree.\(^40\)

4.7.3 Ceremonial precedents

Another key characteristic of their behaviour is their eagerness to perform. In each of the dreams that inspire the composers, Little People sing and dance with great intensity, thus providing the composer not only with the song, but also with the action for a complete performance.

[Dhanba 38]

Kardu dhanba bamperar wurrun pelpith-nu Kunbinhi kathu

Ngarrim thakunh nhinida kunbara warra wurran-yu

The Little people are going up and down [dancing] on top of Kunbinhi

The Left-handed one is there: you are leading now\(^41\)

Their style resembles the movements of the totem animals of the clan, especially birds:

\(^{40}\) Often Little People are metonymically associated with the totem animals of the country they come from.

\(^{41}\) The Left-handed one is Moyamungum, the leader dancer of the Little People.
HANBA 19

Dhanba pirrim Ngiparl ngakumarr kurlurnturuk manthart wurran

Kurlurnturuk kurlurnturuk kurlurnturuk

The Little People standing at Ngiparl are imitating the movement of the peaceful dove.

Peaceful dove, peaceful dove, peaceful dove.**42**

Indigenous performers, in turn, will imitate the style of dancing the Little People performed in their dreams:

HANBA 50

Kardu wurnagat mange pana kanam kurran-yu

Wunamparrkit, nhinhi thamanu-yu! Yukoy, ngay warda nguparlu-yu

Ngakumarr ngay, kurlurrtururk, mangartart wurran dhanba bamperar wurran

Everybody was there, doing it [dancing].

Wunamparrkit, you do it now! Right, I call my

Dreaming, the peaceful dove, I imitate the Little People going up and down.

In the dream that inspired another of Harry Luke Kolumboort’s songs, the Little People were calling Wunamparrkit to join them in the dancing. He stands up and calls his Dreaming ancestor, and then acts like it, imitating the movements of the other dancers. The performative dimension of action is a prime focus in most of the examples that I gathered. This is indicative of the character of the genre, which is primarily composed to be executed in a ceremonial context.

The point to be stressed, however, is the clear homology that is drawn between human beings acting like Little People and Little People, who, in turn are imitating totemic ancestors. This

**42** The peaceful dove dance is the main movement of the women’s dancing repertoire performed today, the up and down motion of their arms copies the movement of the bird’s wings.
does not mean that ontological distance (outside the space of performance) between human beings and Dreaming spirits is bridged, nor that human beings are the direct descendants of the Little People. Rather, it suggests that they behave in similar ways and pursue the same goals concerning the well being of their estate, a sought interaction with other groups, and a specific model of action in ceremonial performance.

Indigenous people pay regular visits to Dreaming sites, cleaning and taking care of them, and so do Little People when they ‘straighten the site up.’ Little People also visit fellow totemic beings and so do human beings when they travel across the country through neighbouring clans’ territory. Finally, human beings act in ceremonies in the same way Little People do in dreams.

In sum, Little People are the paradigm for the relationship that human beings should have with their country, guarding and nurturing it, and between themselves, interacting socially. In the context of performance, this paradigm is expressed by performers who act like, and indeed become, Little People. What the audience sees is a class of Dreaming beings that, by their own nature, hold a special relationship with the territory. The audience is therefore not only confronted with the specificities of the cosmology described by the performers – the song and dances referring to their country – but, more importantly, by the prototype that articulates the relationship between country, Dreaming beings and, by extension, human individuals.

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43 When asked what their ancestral totems are, people associated with this clan, mention native bees, black cockatoos, echidnas, eucalyptus flowers, hooked ironspars. Although they point out that Little People are in fact Dreaming beings, they do not mention them in this list. Kardu Kumbinhi are referred to as elder brothers, rather than fathers.

44 The lyrics of [Dhanba 57] are exemplary: ‘Dhanba dhanba dirimu thithay ngakurru punahtith tibin-puidhanba kumbinhi pandarlaath warran pirlin-yaa,’ The Little people are straightening up the design [the site] of the native bees Dreaming/A whole lot of Little People are coming [to help].

45 When a composer see the Little People performing Dhanba in his or her dreams, he or she receives not only a new song, but also a template for a performance in real life.

46 For a discussion of the mediation of differences between performers and totemic ancestors in the space of performance see Marett (2005 in press) and von Sturmer (1987).
This paradigm extends across the genres. For this reason, the performance of Dhanba song and dances in the context of reciprocity, stands for the relationships that individuals associated with either Lirrga or Wangga hold with their countries.

4.8 From formative to performative ancestors: Dhanba as social and historical phenomenon

When ancestral heroes appear in Dhanba songs, it is only to identify the site where they dwell. There is no reference to their ancestral journey of creative acts as one might find in other totemic songs across Australia. Nor is there any mention of the site being the place of their final rest. These creative deeds are the subjects of Dreaming narratives or paintings that are occasionally produced for educational purposes. This omission is striking because the totemic sites that the Little People are guarding also have ‘big’ totemic stories associated with them. Yet, they do not feature in any of the songs. This omission, I believe, is intentional and is a key point in understanding Dhanba.

Dhanba songs deliberately shift the focus of attention from formative ancestors to performative ancestors. This is because this genre was explicitly born out of the performative needs of a particular historical time: that is, the need to establish a forum in which ceremonial interaction could sustain and regulate the developing relationships between different macro-language groups.

The themes of Dhanba song do not consider creation, or creative beings. Instead, they highlight the actions of Little People who are Dreaming beings of an unusual nature. They do not create, but rather protect the totemic sites and interact with the living, performing songs for an audience, like their human counterpart.

47 These are stories such as the one on how Native bee (Ku Thithap), who was once a man, left his eggs at one site around the Kumbinhi area, after having created the plain around Nganamangari.
Dhanba originated from circumstances that called for an active forum of inter-group negotiation. This space was provided by ritual performance and this is why the ancestral beings that appear in these songs are performative ancestors – just as beings that appear in totemic, restricted, ceremonies are totemic ancestors. They provide a paradigm not only for performance but, through performance, for contemporary interrelations between groups. The historical dimension of Dhanba becomes evident when we analyse two specific songs and the explanation that performers have given of them.

[Dhanba 05]
Nganani, Dindin, Malarmararri

[Dhanba 06]
Matinki, Kolumboort, Parrkit, Nantha

Both songs were composed by Robert Kolumboort, probably in the mid-1960s. These songs are effectively a genealogy of members of the Yek Nangu and Yek Diminin clans. Malarmararri is Thimarrarr, the man who appeared to the composer in the first dream. Nganani and Dindin are his sisters. Matinki is the forebear of the Pultchen family, Kolumboort, the father of Dhanba’s main performer, Lawrence Kolumboort. Parrkit is Mollinjin, the composer of Malkarrin, and Nantha, the father of D.K. another deceased Dhanba singer. L.K. discussed the origin of these songs:

It’s from the Bible, he says their names so we don’t forget them. That’s for the mob of young blokes that are growing up, they got to know. The old Diminin people. It is a

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46 It seems that this composer, the first to receive Dhanba, was particularly active in the early stages of the production of this genre.
family tree, like the book of Genesis, with the long list of ancestors. Like the old Bible
book, old stories. 49

This explanation is striking in many ways. The influence of Christianity on song production in
Wadeye, as we have seen for Malkarrin, has been quite strong. For this reason, one might
speculate that the composer, acquainted with the list of forebears written in the Book of
Genesis, reproduced that template in these two samples. However, the central point is that
whether or not the Book was template for his composition, the informants chose it as the
reference for the song. In doing so, they not only attributed to Dhanba songs an authority
similar to the one of the Book – the ‘old stories’ are true because they are like the Bible,
truthfulness expressed through values of a new and forceful cultural group. They also
demonstrate that the composer’s intentions were similar to those of the Bible. These intentions
were to formulate a genealogical chart that places ancestors in history, and in the history of the
community.

In this case, it is the history of difference that is played out in the song texts. These two songs
provide a list of clan ancestors that is by no means accidental. They are all from Yek Nangu
clan, and among them are Thimarrarr, the holder of the Wurlthirri tradition; Mollinjin, the
composer of Malkarrin; and Kolumboort, the father of two of the most prolific composers of
Dhanba. All the genres performed by Murrinh-patha people are thus indirectly referenced in
these two songs. These lyrics do not simply answer the question: ‘who are our ancestors?’ but,
seen in the context of open performance, declare which genres the Murrinh-patha people
perform and who is entitled to participate in these performances.

A similar assertion is found in another song:

49 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes, 13.01.2003]
Dhanba kuku wangu, Mayamungum ngarrim ngay,
Dhanba wuru ngay, the ngangibatmu, kuku wangu ngurrarn
Batuk da nguru kathu-yu

Dhanba, I am coming, I am Mayamungum
I am Dhanba, listen, I am going
From Batuk, I am going [to Wadeye]

Mayamungum, the left-handed little dancer, appeared in Harry Luke Kolumboort’s dream and introduced himself. When informants explained this song, they glossed the expression ‘the ngangibatmu’ (lit. the vocative ‘listen’) with a more significant ‘You’ve got to know me.’ What is the meaning of Mayamungum’s utterance and who is the recipient of his exhortation? There are two answers to this question.

In dreams – which is the first instance of performance – the left-handed Dhanba sings to the composer who is his human counterpart, his flesh-and-bones countryman. When he utters ‘You’ve got to know me,’ he means: ‘You’ve got to know me, [because we are the same].’ Emotionally, physically and ontologically attached to the same territory, human beings and Little People are part of a commonality that is determined on the basis of localized attachment to a specific estate. When the Little People appear in dreams, they reaffirm this commonality.

On the other hand, when this song is performed in the ceremonial context, both the messenger and the receiver change: the performers themselves, embodying their totemic counterpart, are speaking whereas those exhorted to listen are in the audience. When the singer utters ‘You’ve got to know me,’ he means: ‘You’ve got to know me, [because we are different].’

Differences are the focus of attention in the forum of performance. The group that performs ought to be different from the group in the audience. The reciprocal structure of ceremony is
based on differences, and these are continuously reaffirmed in the course of the execution. Social interaction, indeed, would falter if differences were obliterated.\(^5\) When the performers sing the words of Mayamungum, they reassert their group uniqueness and place within the wider social community.

*Dhanba* songs are inspired and structured around Wadeye’s peculiar social milieu, where the articulation of social relations between groups that came together as result of the spatial redistribution implemented by the mission, is sustained by the production of differences. This unique transposing of ceremonial exchange and social relations into the setting of settlement, and from cosmogony into history, has endured at Wadeye to this day. It is a moment of negotiation that contrasts both with *Malkarrin’s* dialogic incorporation of Christianity, and with the popular songs that came with modernity. As a route into the third of these song genres, the next chapter considers some social dimensions of the passage from mission to secular community, from ‘Port Keats’ to ‘Wadeye’ - once again. Here the focus will be on the emergence of new patterns of identity and relatedness and on the community organizations of settlement.

\(^5\) One needs to remember, however, that these differences, as seen above, are based on homologous cosmological systems.
5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the way in which contemporary Wadeye has supported both Dhanba and the tripartite exchange and the emergence of popular music of a country-rock style. Although it is easy to assume that these two song genres simply reflect the orientations of different generations, discussion will demonstrate that a set of complex and countervailing forces provide different possibilities for social, and performative, relations at Wadeye. The division is not simply generational although that is a significant part of it. Rather, it reflects the transformation of important social categories over time so that one kin relation – patrilineage, for example – can retain and project different types of value.

My proposal is that this circumstance is indicative of the social flux that modernity has brought to Wadeye, one that residents address employing an unusually wide range of representations. This response, sometimes a desperate response, to ‘play’ with different possibilities in social organization has a precedent in the circumstance that both Stanner and Falkenberg remarked upon: the movement from a clearly defined moiety system to a subsection system as the pre-
minent means of organising marriage relations (see Stanner 1936; Falkenberg 1962). Stanner emphasizes that even in the 1930s men discussed the variable kinship terminology and outcomes produced by marriage systems that respectively required cousin marriage and marriage between the children of cousins (the subsection system). Having been introduced in the early decades of the century, the subsection system is now, largely, in disuse. Only a small number of elders, and their immediate relatives, have a commanding knowledge of the eight skin names and their implications. Marriage rules are stated in kinship terms. It is therefore not surprising that Wadeye residents sustain other ambiguities in social organization linked with the passage of events, albeit types of ambiguity different from the past.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the song genres involved in the tripartite exchange reference and reproduce ‘mobs’ identified with language groups. Each of these macro-groups is in turn comprised of a number of patrilineal clans associated with the performance of their mob and with clusters of ritual estates. At the same time, forces in the mission have fostered the emergence of patronymic ‘families’ defined in terms of patrilineal relations that extend back to a named antecedent. This form is integral to a Christian culture wherein a baptismal name is linked with a ‘family’ name passed through successive generations of fathers. However, these families, conceived in a Euro-mission culture, bring with them none of the expectations regarding forms of exchange, and especially marriage and ceremonial exchange, involved in the Wadeye clans. Therefore, more than one social and cultural trajectory is feeding into the interpretation of patrilineal relations and into the understanding of clans. Families have not replaced clans. Rather, at least for the moment, clans and clan identity encompass families.

1 This involved an attempted shift, in broad terms, from a Kariera to an Aranda system.
2 I use the term ‘patrilineal clan’ mindful of the debate sustained by Keen (1995, cf. 2000), Morphy (1988, 1997) and others. The issues in this debate do not dissuade me from using a term that seems to capture best the cultural unit that people at Wadeye acknowledge, irrespective of the variability of its membership. As I indicate clearly here and below, where I also make a reference to Sutton (1998), I distinguish patrilineal clans from modern, Aboriginal patronymic families, although their memberships overlap.
However, the salience of a clan identity rests significantly on engagement with country and on the continuation of the tripartite exchange. Were ceremonial exchange to falter it may be that patronymic families associated with outstations would become Wadeye’s principle social identity.

Sahlins’ (1985:138) account of the nature of transformation fits this circumstance well. He describes it in the following terms:

[...] in action or in the world [...] the cultural categories acquire new functional values. Burdened with the world, the cultural meanings are thus altered. It follows that the relationships between categories change: the structure is transformed.

Sahlins is referring to the longer term, but his account is evocative for Wadeye today. In general terms, one might say that Wadeye clans are attuned to countervailing values. Clans address both a ceremonial domain of exchange that promotes an interplay of commonalities and difference that was once closely associated with marriage exchange. At the same time, they also engage families, more generally associated with the figure of a western individual identified in singular ways by the institutions that address that individual: the Church, and a variety of government and non-government agencies providing rights to Aboriginal people as individuated citizens. The clan with its families is thereby a site of competing and not always compatible values, a unit of ceremonial performance and also of community relations.

Along with sedentarism and a relative density of residence in and around Wadeye, the influences just mentioned encourage the elaboration of ego-centred networks. On a day to day basis, Wadeye residents have a broad range of contacts with cognatic or bilateral kin, kin traced through both ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers.’ These developments tend to encourage the management over time of a multiplicity of dyadic, univocal relations among people who identify most strongly with one or another family and clan. While the variety of relatedness involved in these
ego-centred networks brings an elaboration of possible identities, at the same time the
individuation of persons and families undermines the forms of etiquette and negotiation
characteristic of a more traditional milieu of exchange between clans. Spatial proximity means
that individuals experience very heavy demands on each other. Conflict between individuals is
common. These conflicts are fuelled by family solidarities and families and clans become
estranged from each other as, removed from regular exchange, effective means of mediating
conflict diminish. Whilst the experience of a clan milieu is located in continuing ceremonial
practice, individuation is promoted through the everyday world of cash, goods and the
allocation of government resources. Moreover, it is in the organizations of community
governance that these two domains and modes of experience meet, making it a turbulent and
hotly contested area of social relations.

Popular music has been intertwined with this milieu at Wadeye. To begin with, bands that were
initially composed of members affiliated with different mobs became, over time, more squarely
based on one clan. For those concerned, this development involved a reinvention of tradition as
patrilateral and patrilineal relations were interpreted in terms of one band, one clan, and one
‘paddock’ or estate (with a less complex set of interests and personages attached to its sites). At
the same time, and also over a period of years, the practice of individuals and bands writing and
performing songs for each other gradually diminished. Between the mid-1980s and the mid-
1990s, popular music production helped people to address some of the strains in their social
relations. More recently, however, it appears that the tensions between different families and
clans have become so strong that even spontaneous exchanges between individuals have
become less common.

This is not to suggest that exchange between bands and members and their relatives have
ceased altogether. The medium, however, is more likely to be recorded tapes than public
performances and performances, when they occur, are more like isolated or individuated
events. Nonetheless, they are still a powerful idiom in which people evoke country as an
emotional attachment and focal point of identity. The following account of socio-economic conditions that brought a particular modernity to Wadeye provides the context in which these issues of social relations and performances have intertwined.

5.2 Wadeye and its surroundings

Today the township of Wadeye is the largest Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, home to about 2,400 people and also the Territory’s sixth largest city.

The settlement, which lies on the traditional land of Yek Diminin clan, is divided into six areas, called camps, each of which maintains a unique identity. Further subdivisions of these units occur. Single dwellings are regarded as family camps and other divisions are juxtaposed (i.e.: juvenile gangs’ territories). However, these six zones are the prime indication of locality. The names of the camps are taken from indigenous localities associated with their location or its immediate surroundings (see below Map 5.1). Wadeye camp rests on the side of Wadeye Creek while Nguminhik camp lies in the direction of the homonymous place. The same goes for Nillit and Kempinhingkal camps. Yidiyi and Yelmugam camps take their names from the localities on which they stand.

The spatial organization of the town is marked by the distribution of the three macro-groups (mobs) which occupy quite distinct locations. This does not mean that their boundaries are absolute. Different domestic groups associated with different mobs do live in the same camp, but a survey of the households clearly showed that each one of these zones is predominantly associated with one mob.
Map 5.1 The township of Wadeye (Camps and Services)
Wadeye, Yelmugam and Kempinjinkal camps are associated with Dhanba mob; Yidiyi and Nillit camps is where most of the Lirrga mob resides; and Nguminhik is the camp of Wangga mob. Further analysis of this distribution shows that these three zones of residence are consistent with the geographical directions of these groups' traditional estates. Their town camps lie on the same trajectories each mob followed to 'come in' to the settlement from the bush. This is clear if one compares Map 4.2 (see above, page 147), the regional distribution of the three macro groups, with Map 5.2 (see below), the mob-based township plan. Note that the geographical specifications are consistent, with Dhanba mob occupying a south-westerly direction, Lirrga mob an easterly direction, and Wangga mob residing in the northerly part of the community.3

The various services for the community are located on the main road, in the middle of the township. These are the Women's Centre, a supermarket and fruit and vegetable shop, the Dirrimu Ngakumarl Art Gallery, the newly opened Rural Transaction Centre (which includes the Mi Patha food takeaway, a butcher shop, a post office, a Traditional Credit Union agency, a Centerlink office, and the Wadeye Knowledge Centre), the Thamarrurr Mechanical Workshop, the Thamarrurr Housing Office, the recreational music and sports hall, the Thamarrurr Council Offices and the church. Our Lady of Sacred Heart school ground, a swimming pool and the airport are all towards the southern end of town. Beyond the airport, the main road becomes a wide dirt track that becomes in turn a 180 kilometres journey to Daly River. From there, a sealed road continues for another 230 kilometres to Darwin. All the main roads are sealed while a few dirt tracks cut into the bush at the back of the Ngumingnik and Nillit camps. The road at the back of Yelmugam camp, to the south-west, leads to the new Manthathpe subdivision (see below) and to the western beaches.

3 This geo-directional pattern of Aboriginal residency has been noted by other authors (see Dussart 2000, Hiatt 1965a, Williams 1987, Bell 1983).
Map 5.2  Mobs' spatial distribution in Wadeye
Housing for the white population – around one hundred individuals – is located mainly at the northern end of the town, in a contiguous, yet markedly separate, area. Aboriginal people do not perceive this area as spatially independent. Rather, it is said to be part of the Nguminhik camp. It is not an area of particular interest to indigenous people who seldom frequent it. It is simply understood as a part of town where all the houses of the white staff are. With the exception of the local Museum manager, some of the teachers of the local school, and a few other white Council employees, engagement between the white and indigenous populations is not fostered by either party outside working hours. I have not heard many people at all question the ‘naturalness’ of this situation. Each group bounds themselves to a degree, but the social dynamics that have conferred this situation are more complex than they might first appear to be (see Trigger 1986; Austin-Broos 1996).

It is evident that Wadeye is perceived first and foremost as an Aboriginal community, where the white component is secondary. There are a number of reasons for this. Historically, the Port Keats mission was always isolated from other towns. The closest town is Nauiyu Nambiyu (Daly River), a three hours dry-season-only drive away. Second, the white Euroaustralian staff have always been outnumbered by the indigenous population. Finally, the services are located in the middle of town, surrounded by Aboriginal camps. They are perceived therefore as part of the Aboriginal domain and are frequented regularly by indigenous people who do not perceive them as part of a separate ‘whitefella’ domain. Still, these service areas are open only during business hours. With the exception of the recreation music and sports hall, where disco nights are held at weekends, and the football oval where the four Australian Rules Football teams play on Sundays, people spend most of their time around their camps or visiting those of their relatives.

\footnote{White staff, however, occupied – and continue to occupy today – key positions in the administrative and economic and organizational management of the township.}
In April 2003, a few groups relocated in the new Manathape subdivision located six kilometres from the centre of town, on Yek Maninh traditional land. The families that now live in these eight new houses belong to this clan and to the Rak Kinmul neighbouring clan. The subdivision has its own water bore and barge landing but, given its proximity to Wadeye, people drive or walk daily to buy supplies in town. The rationale behind the construction of the new subdivision is a notion of 'delocalization.' The initiative began in the 1980s with the construction of several outstations on various clans' traditional land (see below Map 5.3). The outstation movement, a widespread process across indigenous Australia, was initiated with the idea of seeking more viable conditions of life on traditional land, where the pressure created by the aggregation of different groups in colonially-created settlements could be eased (see Commonwealth 1987). People could be closer to their Dreaming sites. Maintaining an outstation proved to be a difficult and expensive task since there are a number of services that need to be provided. As people must travel to the main centre in order to buy supplies, roads need to be built and maintained even in the rainy season. A water tank must be provided and also a power generator with a regular supply of fuel. Houses must be built and maintained. Only a few of these outstations have an airstrip. Only one (Kuy) outstation has a school for primary pupils. For these reasons only a small number of outstations are inhabited all through the year, while most people reside in Wadeye during the wet season (November through May). The new born Thamarrurr Regional Council is actively seeking funds and solutions to realize this delocalization which many see as the only solution to Wadeye's acknowledged social problems.
Map 5.3 Outstations in the Wadeye area
The solution of Manthathpe subdivision proved to be immediately effective. People reported an improvement of conditions of life, along with a regained pride and a fundamental sense of control over their own destiny. Manthathpe subdivision represents a return to more traditional patterns of residency, where a smaller number of people live on their clan estate, together with relatives of a neighbouring clan. Notably, this re-established pattern reinforced a series of practices made more difficult by residence in the larger community setting. It has complemented efforts to maintain the tripartite exchange and supported other initiatives in ceremony discussed in Chapter Seven below. People today regularly hunt, fish and gather bush foods, on their clan estate. Furthermore, one of the new houses has been designated as single boys' quarter. The Yek Maninah clan has greatly profited from this delocalization. However, the other clans that still reside in Wadeye, including the traditional custodians, Yek Diminin clan, face everyday strained social relations exacerbated by over-crowding and poor housing.

5.3 Transition from mission 'work-for-ration' regime to cash economy and welfare

At the beginning of the 1960s, an increasingly large amount of cash and commodities began to circulate in Wadeye. A number of men who had already been acquainted with a western economy, albeit a peripheral one, by having worked in the cattle station industry in the previous years, brought back their wages from the stations and spent them in the local canteen. Moreover, through travel in and out of Wadeye, people began to have regular access to goods from sources independent of the mission. Availability of cash remained limited, however, until welfare training allowances were instigated at Wadeye.

As Sanders (1985:142) relates, in 1969 these wages replaced the 'cash-and-kind program' that had been operative on missions and other settlements for Aborigines deemed to be working. It was part of a larger policy response to the Wave Hill strike (see Berndt 1971), equal wages, and an increasing number of successful applications among Aborigines across the Territory for unemployment benefits. Many remote Aborigines could not fulfil the eligibility requirements for unemployment benefits that, among other things, demanded availability for work in
circumstances where, often, there was no work available. ‘Training wages’ introduced a ‘cash-only’ training scheme that fell short of the continuity of social service benefits and was considerably less than award wages. At the same time, they ‘raised the pay for adult male workers from $7.60 to between $25 and $30 per week, and for females from $4.60 to between $18 and $27 per week’ (Sanders 1985:142). Through the 1970s the unemployment benefits issue was debated at both the federal and Territory level and ultimately produced plans for work projects\(^5\) that might become a substitute for unemployment benefits. Quite rapidly at Wadeye unemployment benefits and then a CDEP scheme took the place of the previous mission order.

The impact of expanded social security and CDEP was not a matter simply of more cash in the community and more goods circulating. As a mode of social organization that required transient, secular administrators on the spot, it undermined not only the traditional model of subsistence – and the knowledge associated with it – but also disrupted the ration-for-work regime previously maintained by the mission. A few men sensed that the changes were going to impinge heavily on what had become their Aboriginal ‘way’ within the mission’s domestic economy. Some of these comments were recorded by people at Wadeye who had a particular interest in the mission. They therefore de-emphasize the real dilemmas involved in the intersection of a nation state 'rights' agenda with the logic of a local social-cultural order (see also Peterson 1998). Nonetheless, the comments are important for the way in which they underline the early lack of consideration given to the forms of governance and authority structure in remote communities like Wadeye that would follow demise of the mission. Leary (1997:4) describes the reaction of a particular individual:

I remember well our bush carpenter, Harry Luke and his reaction on receiving his first ‘Training Allowance’ package. Harry was very perceptive and a thinker. He called a

\(^5\) These projects would later become the CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects). For discussions of this scheme see Morphy and Sanders (2001).
public meeting. Waving his wage packet he announced in his eloquent Murinbata: "This is a new way to live. It is not my old way. My old way is living in the bush, teaching my children how to live there. That is me. This new way is not me. What if I leave my old way and join their new way? I will end up 'makardu'" - that is literally a non-person, a nobody. (My emphasis.)

Harry Luke voiced his fears: Makardu is a no-one, but more specifically a non-Aboriginal man.\(^6\) Harry Luke clearly felt the advance of the new way as a loss of his Aboriginal social-cultural being, a loss of certain patterns of relatedness that sedentary, cash economy would inevitably cause. The integration of foraging and 'work' for the mission that an isolated mission domestic economy had involved was coming to an end. Harry Luke also sensed the risk of losing the knowledge associated with the management of a hunter and gatherer economy. 'Teaching the children' to live in the bush involves a series of economic activities that are inter-dependent with a ritual knowledge of the territory. Aboriginal maintenance of hunting and gathering includes also the maintenance of totemic Dreaming sites that are the ultimate source of life. The centralized resources made available in the cash economy modified the patterns of travel for many people who decreased their visits to country. This was especially so for those whose countries were at a considerable distance.

The 'training allowance packages' and CDEP followed, but did not necessarily build on, already established social dimensions of the mission order. People of Wadeye had developed an independent and rather functional work ethic based on the system of work for cash and kind. The introduction of a full cash economy, and the depersonalization of the relationships between trainers and trained, providers and receivers of goods and cash, brought a significant change in inter-cultural forms of social relations. Objectification of the self in terms of work, cash and commodities, and the concomitant stress that cash placed on relatedness, certainly brought a

\(^6\) Kardu is the Murrinh-patha noun class for Aboriginal human beings, Mu is a negative prefix. The noun class reserved to non-Aboriginal human beings is Ku.
'new way' (see Austin-Broos 2003; Merlan 1991). The transformations brought by initial whitefella settlement, including the Port Keats mission, were now equalled and even, possibly, exceeded in this new transition.

Interestingly, it was the rate of change that constituted the main concern among people at Wadeye. It seemed that events now occurred at such a pace that it was increasingly difficult to encompass or render them in a specific local form that might connect with the past. Life seemed to 'speed up.' C.N. expressed his concerns to Leary (1997:5)

An eighteen year old lad, C.N., one evening spent long hours telling me his worries about the troubles his people were going through because of so much happening too quickly. "Our word 'thawath,'" he said, "explains how things should be happening." 'Thawath' has a double meaning - slowly, carefully."

The pace of change did not slow down. On the contrary, the impact of equal wages, and advent of social service benefits meant that by the end of the 1970s these factors had affected a range of organized productive activities within Wadeye. 'Virtually overnight,' according to Leary (1997), consolidated activities such as the vegetable garden, the brick factory and the construction industry, and the bakery disappeared.7

In remote Wadeye, where the political and long term dimensions of these changes were less apparent, it appeared that a stable and fairly well integrated regime had been superseded simply by 'sit-down money' or ku mulurn (in Murrinh-patha lit., 'shade money' or 'money to sit in the shade'). The remoteness of Aboriginal communities like Wadeye makes them marginal to the

7 The advent of money, of course, had made a difference. I do believe I have witnessed a life-style perverted almost overnight with the introduction of a cash economy. When you have a supermarket and money to hand there is no need to hunt, no need to teach the children to hunt. The skills that made these people the most independent of peoples are not needed in the new situation. It was a quick passage from independence to dependency' (Leary 1997:4).
forms of market economy and wage expectations that complement the types of political rights that Wave Hill indigenous workers struck for. At the same time, this newly introduced regime made it impossible for the mission to continue as the principal agent of government. Inevitably, in 1975, the mission was pushed aside as Wadeye’s main structure of governance. However, as Leary indicates, even for those who wished to work the major resort became welfare. CDEP provides an alternative to ‘sit down money.’ Yet, wages through this scheme are not much higher than social security payments. The jobs are often ‘no-prospect’ ones (e.g. garbage collection), and this means that, for many, employment is intermittent and desultory.

Wadeye residents who rely on government transfer payments of whatever type have now restructured their life around a timetable of weekly collections from the local Traditional Credit Union branch. Social activities are organized in accord with this timetable and in line with the payments each family receives each week. These allowances have redefined the temporal conception of the weeks. People classify weeks according to the various allowances collected. Mulurn week is the week when the unemployment allowance – sit-down or shade (mulurn in Murrinh-putha) money – is collected. On Children week women receive their parenting allowances. On Pension week, retirees collect their pensions. Workers – mainly CDEP employees – on the other hand, receive their money fortnightly on Fridays. When these weekly payments overlap, a substantial amount of money becomes available. Accordingly, people purchase their supplies and/or engage in gambling sessions in which this income is redistributed among relatives (see Goodale 1987). The line at the local supermarket’s cash registers seems endless on ‘pay days,’ and I soon found out that my requests for work on songs on Wednesday afternoons were unlikely to be successful. Men deeply committed to this translation project were also, in a cashed-up state, deeply absorbed in gambling sessions that, at times, lasted until the early hours of the following morning. These practices recurs ever week with such a regularity that, as G.L. remarked looking at the group of camp dogs waiting for their respective owners outside the store, ‘Even the dogs know when it is Wednesday.’ This adequately captures the power of money and the commodities purchased with it to re-organize
central elements of a delicately poised mission moral economy that had also been the social context for Wadeye's tripartite ceremonial exchange.

These changes required new initiatives in local governance that came under the rubric of 'self-determination.' Along with the other changes, secular and representative governance sounded the death knell of the mission and ushered in a further series of social and cultural innovations at Wadeye.

5.4 Transition from the personal authority of the missionary to the impersonal authority of secular governance: the emergence of 'Whitesella Law'

Remarking on the production of indigenous narratives of colonial encounter based on historical figures such as Captain Cook, Deborah Rose (1984) invoked a difference of values between Europeans and Aboriginal people as part of the reason for the cultural displacement Yarralin people were experiencing in the 1980s. Rose stresses that underlying, different sets of values influenced the relationship between indigenous people and their Euroaustralian counterparts. Myers (1980) has discussed similar issues with regard to the Pintupi of the Western Desert.

Indigenous people experience this divergence as 'two Laws' regulating their lives.\(^4\) Informants stressed many times the struggles they were experiencing in living 'torn' between the two laws, the 'Aboriginal law' and the 'Whitesella law.' The dialogic process that seemed to work so well in incorporating elements of Christianity within the Malkarrin tradition seemed to have become more difficult to sustain. At least, it required different types of innovation when the issues concerned the individual autonomies of a cash economy, indigenous notions of authority, and forms of governance that would work at Wadeye. The traditional patterns that regulated the life of the various clans and the relationships between them, could not be

\[^4\] The ethnographic literature on the 'Two Laws' subject has proliferated in the last decade, among others: Williams (1987), Tonkinson (1988), Austin-Broos (1996) and various essays in the volume edited by Rose and Swain (1988).
translated into a western bureaucratic scheme that required, in order to operate, representatives selected on the basis of their fluency in English, and a viable knowledge of western administrative structures.

In 1975 the mission handed its administrative role to a secular local government. This time, people in Wadeye did not say ‘All right,’ as previously Harry Luke had done in response to Fr. Docherty. The determination of mission and government alike to retain and then ‘hand over’ power meant that Aboriginal people were given little time to address the new order or to formulate their own desires. As a result, the major costs of a formidable transition have been borne by them. Despite their plea to have the changes put in place according to a longer time-frame, they found the tasks involved in administering the town thrust upon them in the form of an elected council. Much has been written of the institutions of self-determination (see Martin 2003; Peterson and Sanders 1998; Tonkinson 1985; Rowse 2000) but its impact at Wadeye is uniquely conveyed below:

In 1975 the government told our people that we had to have a Council. But it was a different way. Our way of making decision was to look back to our Elders because it is they who have the authority. These Elders were never elected onto the Council. They were often considered by the whites to be too old. They had no education and spoke little English. Our young men were smart because they knew some of the new ways. They had mission education and spoke English. They were elected members of the Council. But they had no authority. Only our Elders know the right way to make decisions. (cited in Desmarchelier 2001:23)

Previously the mission regime, which controlled the distribution of most goods, had reached an accommodation with local indigenous structures of power, and the domains of decision making that they had managed to retain. Now, however, the requirements of local, secular governance significantly disrupted this modus operandi notwithstanding the fact that, potentially, it brought
additional goods under Aboriginal control. Unprepared to run a community from a 'rational'
bureaucratic, as well as from an indigenous point of view, Aboriginal people found themselves
unable to order fundamental procedures. In addition, the reorganization of the community
around Euroaustralian structures of governance caused a series of frictions between both
families and clans. The election of individuals, often literate and young, did not in itself give
them authority to speak under traditional law or to make decisions that involved the entire
township. In particular, this form of organization ignored the requirement that decision-making
at Wadeye would inevitably be the province of those with authority in that place. Wadeye had
become the residence of some twenty different clans of which only one clan, the Yek Diminin,
are owners. This head-on clash between different orders of authority soon became evident as
attempts to provide services in Wadeye raised tensions between groups. All this happened as
result of the constitution, in 1978, of Kardu Numida Council.

Literally 'one people,' Kardu Numida had representatives of seven different language-based
clan clusters on its board. It was felt that these clusters would better represent the variety of
people resident in the community. The main task that self-determination posed was to come
together as a community, and to act like one, under a system of western bureaucratic
organization. This proved to be particularly difficult once the supervising authority vanished.
The previous identity and commonality held in place by the missionaries did not reproduce
itself in the new structure of the council. As a consequence, many people still felt poorly
represented and ultimately left the council.

Representation, as Myers has explained (1988), is a different matter in Aboriginal societies (cf.
Rowse 2001). Representatives are not elected on a democratic basis, but on their capacity to
provide resources and services. In addition, since authority is based on locality, the groups that
are not the traditional owners of the land on which the community stands have no rights to
impose their will on communal decision. Authority is in the hands of those who are recognized
as 'bosses,' in this case the Yek Diminin clan. In the previous decades, the mission was
regarded as ‘the boss’ of the people of Wadeye (Fr. Docherty was called Yile Ngala, Big Father) in alliance with the custodians who retained a privileged position. The missionaries, however, distributed economic resources. When self-determination left indigenous people on their own, the traditional land owners of Wadeye were identified as the main source of goods. This was and, in part, still is an enormous burden for Yek Diminin people, who found themselves with no means to respond to an ever increasing and more varied demand for services. Even today, they are often blamed for the lack of resources – even those provided by governments over which they have no control – or for not being able to settle ongoing disputes between groups.

The passage, via the mission order, from inter-clan exchange and inter-regional ritual tradec the market economy, and bureaucratized procedures, had simply been too swift. There had never been one people in Wadeye. As the people of Wadeye did not produce the new Council’s procedures – that is, these procedures overlooked the dynamics of power relations in the community – they were destined to fail, and so they did. The withdrawal of the non-landowning clans from the Council’s committee board, and the financial difficulties of the administration, led to collapse in 1994.

An effort to recreate a more viable Aboriginal domain was made when six outstations were established in the early 1980s. The nationwide homelands movement had provided funding for the construction of outstation houses (see Blanchard in Commonwealth 1987). Notwithstanding the resource limitations that make the outstation movement a precarious affair, the act of taking houses back to country and relying on motorized transport reflects a particular indigenous modernity. Typical of this development, which also involves the identification of clans in terms of their outstation locales, rock bands came to represent clans or at least a cluster of families within a clan. They circulated within the region, and beyond, to various cultural festivals. The

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The ceremonial trade of the Daly River area, known in Murrinh-patha as nanthi kulu, has been investigated by Stanner (1933-4) and Falkenberg (1962). In the following chapter, I will show how this trade is reproduced today in the exchange of pop band songs recorded on audiotapes and CDs.
enthusiasm for these bands among performers, listeners and dancers alike, along with their fairly volatile rise and fall, reflects the ‘fast flow’ of modernity into which people have been drawn notwithstanding the search for ‘quiet’ on outstations. This uneasy accommodation to modernity, however, has also brought further effects concentrated in Wadeye itself. Notwithstanding the construction of a new church, a presbytery and convent, a police station and a courthouse, and permanent housing, job opportunities have diminished further. The right to government support has clashed with a previous social-moral order. Indicative of this dilemma has been the shift from houses built by Aborigines using local bricks of their own making, to houses constructed more rapidly but by external contractors with materials brought from outside the community.

These value conflicts are reflected in and exacerbated by the use of alcohol. The introduction of alcohol in 1974 affected the community greatly and the situation worsened to a point when, in December 1988, a group of non-drinkers destroyed the licensed social club. This event received extensive press coverage well beyond Wadeye. With alcohol no longer available in the community, some outstations became ‘bush pubs’ and others chartered planes from Darwin or Kununurra to fly alcohol into the region. The price of a carton of beer on the ground could be one hundred dollars. These developments evoke the exuberance of modernity at Wadeye, but also its destructiveness. Reports about Port Keats became very disparaging and many indigenous residents were deeply disturbed. Matters became even worse when the Kardu Numida Council suffered administrative and financial collapse.

Wadeye's modernity, its transition from a mission order to a cash economy and bureaucratic governance, has also shaped the individual person, and social categories and groups. The social relations of everyday life have maintained continuity and also been transformed in crucial ways that have influenced the rise of popular music and its performers.
5.5 Changes in indigenous social categories and groups

People in Wadeye are constantly reminded of their clan identity (see below Map 5.4 for clan’s traditional spatial distribution in the area). Indeed the lives of people are punctuated with events and symbolic representations of this affiliation from their childhood years, through their ritual and social life, to their death.

From an early age, youngsters are regularly reminded of their father’s group, especially when their residence generates misunderstandings. At the death of D.N., her Yek Nangu husband, G.K. of Yek Diminin clan relocated to her father’s (L.K.’s) house. Her four-year old son, M.N., lives there and so does her brother, her son’s maternal uncle, a cardinal figure in the child’s life. I drove all the above individuals, plus other relatives, in a survey around the area of a major totemic site associated with Yek Diminin clan. M.N. demonstrated eager enthusiasm at the prospect of seeing his mother’s brother’s, and grandfather’s, country. Once there, he listened attentively to the stories of the wandering of the totemic ancestors that shaped that landscape. Approaching an especially important, and dangerous, site, L.K. called out to its totemic ancestors and guardian spirits. He advised them that the party coming through were rightful owners of the place: ‘Kay! Tek! Kanhi ngurran i kanhi-ka kardu Diminin-wa!’ (Hey! Black Cockatoo! I’m coming, and these are Diminin people!). Enthusiastically, M.N. stressed: ‘Ngay-ka Kardu Diminin-wa!’ (I am a Diminin person!), at which his mother promptly replied ‘Awul Nhinho-ka Kardu Yek Nangu-wa!’ (No! You are a Nangu person!). Immediately, the little boy protested and reaffirmed his affiliation to his uncle’s clan. His mother, however, firmly stressed his patrilineal inheritance again. M.N. lives in a household surrounded by Diminin people, under the authority of his maternal grandfather, and his maternal uncle, interacting extensively with his cousins. Though he identifies himself with these relatives,

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Children are reminded of their filiation even in school, where during the ‘cultural’ activities of Culture Monday – a fortnightly culture awareness program run by indigenous and non-indigenous teachers – pupils are divided in three song-genre based groups and engage in cultural activities with the help of the respective elders. The range of activities goes from spear and didgeridu making, to dance and songs performances.
Diminin is not his clan. As his mother clearly stated, he still retains his primary, patrilineal identity.

This example indicates the complex situation in Wadeye today, the tension between patrilineation and varieties of association. Even within each household, daily interactions can involve a wide range of kin and even different clans and mobs. In the case of M.N., the misunderstanding did not generate further issues – Yek Diminin and Yek Nangu clans are part of the same language group (Murrinh-patha) and song-genre mob (Dhanba). Yet, in other cases the nature of everyday associations and enduring forms of filiation can cause tensions.

Clan affiliation is determined by patrilineation and is seldom modified by residence or affinal relations.¹¹ When female spouses take virilocal residence they engage extensively with their husband’s kin and can become knowledgeable about the geography and cosmology of their partner’s country. They may also perform his song genre. Nonetheless, they still retain their own clan/mob identity. This is particularly evident in mortuary ceremonies. During ceremonies they perform the song genres of their father’s clans. At funerals, relatives cover a person’s coffin with a cloth that bears the totemic designs of their clan while popular songs that describe their country may be sung. Moreover, just as the song genres identify the mobs, stylistic variations in performance can also identify clans. This is particularly evident observing the dance style of women performing Dhanba. Although the movements are the same, subtle differences – shorter steps, or faster arms motion – mark the styles of women of Yek Diminin clan, in contrast to those of Yek Nangu dancers. Performers say they ‘are one [Dhanba] mob,’ but also add that they are ‘a little bit different.’

¹¹ Exceptions take place when paternity is not recognized and consequently the new born acquires the surname and the clan affiliation of the mother. At times, unreliable fathers are deprived of their paternity status. More rarely, the same happens after the ‘divorce’ of the couple.
Map 3.4 Clans' traditional spatial distribution in the Wadeye area
Clans are classified according to language group and they are also associated with two relatively recent and different units of organization. One is the mob, language groups of Wadeye residents and discussed in the previous chapter, and the other is the family. Mobs and families have emerged since settlement and, with clans, constitute a set of identities. For instance, the members of the Parmbuk family, traditionally Marri Ngarr speakers, belong to Rok Kuyuurr clan which is one of the clans of the Lirrga mob. These interrelated identities reflect the dynamic nature of social organization among people who have lived around Wadeye since the 1930s. Stanner and Falkenberg noted this dynamism albeit with regard to the subsection system. Beginning with that system, however, one can trace the development of mobs and, subsequently of families alongside the traditional clans.

Stanner (1936a) and Falkenberg (1962) explain how the subsection system was adopted around the turn of the century from the southern neighbouring Djadmindjang. The frequency of contact between these regional groups had increased due to pressures in the Djadmindjang region created by the development of pastoralism. Stanner (1936a) reports that at the time of his first period of fieldwork in Wadeye (then Port Keats), discussions of this new subsection system occupied people’s nights around campfires. Wadeye people, Stanner reports, ‘[had] been schooled in alien camps until they knew perfectly these verbal accounts of how the subsections work. One described to me how he had sat down for days at a time near the mosquito-ridden Victoria River and had been patiently instructed by his Djadmindjang friends’ (1936a:208). Part of the discussions around campfires involved a structural problem created by the adoption of subsections. Stanner refers to the fact that ‘the patrilineal descent of the moieties [was] coming into serious conflict with the indirect matrilineal descent of the subsections which [were] spreading among them [...]’ (1936a:190, 206).

The new system created a number of ‘irregular marriages’ – a ‘real social problem’ – that was partially resolved by suspending the ‘indirect matrilineal descent of the subsection in anomalous cases’ and arranging ‘marriages which will have the effect of restoring regularity’
The origin of the problem lay in a local desire to retain cross-cousin marriage as a preferred union, despite the encouragement to a new rule, marriage between the children of cousins, or between a man and his mother’s mother’s brother’s daughter’s daughters, that subsections provided (Falkenberg 1962:224). Fifteen years later, in 1950, Johannes Falkenberg observed that ‘indirect patrilineal descent has been accepted,’ and that ‘the subsections have not, therefore, been integrated into the Murin’bata society as a conventional subsection system’ (1962:227). He also reported many irregularities in marriages and concluded that ‘although the system formally operates with eight subsections, it has only four functional groups’ (Ibid.).

The difficulties in articulating a moiety system with the imported subsections might explain why today the subsection system is sidelined. However, the impact of the mission and regional redistribution of language groups should not be underestimated. Stanner opined that ‘the mission disturbed a tribe which was already changing the basis of its social life, thus importing an unpredictable quantity into a situation which was shaping itself on fairly clear lines’ (Stanner 1936a:216). In time, the growth of the mission determined the permanent relocation of other language-groups such as the Marri Ngarr, Marri Amu and Marri Tjevin people within the boundaries of the settlement.

These groups, according to Falkenberg (1962:237), did not really adopt the subsection system, yet they resided in proximity to Murrinh-patha people and would, inevitably, inter-marry. A more effective way was required to order relations. The moiety system, which pre-dated the adoption of the subsections, might have served the purpose (Stanner 1936a:190). The moiety system regulated the relationships between local clans which belonged to one or another of

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12 Like Meggitt (1962:165ff), Stanner describes the passage of women through the subsections generation by generation as ‘matrilineal descent,’ a confusing terminology. The issue is captured better by the fact that the subsection system and and Murrinh-patha descent groups embraced the different marriage rules of Kariern and Aranda.
them, ordered marriages,\textsuperscript{13} promoted alliances among clans of the same moiety and, most importantly, regulated conflicts resulting from irregular marriages (see Falkenberg 1962:202). Moieties were adopted by the Marri Ngarr and other language-groups, however, only as a result of increasing contacts with Murrinh-patha in the 1940s and 1950s. They remained something of an imposition. Moreover, moieties as a classification proved to be too general in the context of settlement. Moiety affiliation crossed language-group boundaries and in time did not reflect the dominant forms of association between people around Port Keats (Falkenberg 1962:199). Instead, the tentative spread of the moieties seemed to suggest that there should be solidarities between people who had been long-standing antagonists (see the history of conflicts, Chapter Two, page 74). Many of these people wished to stress their differences. This, in part, led to the consolidation of the ‘mob.’ Mobs prevailed over moieties as the encompassing units of identity at Port Keats.

Depopulation and the consequent consolidation of estates have brought clans together into regionally-based mobs sometimes dominated by a demographically stronger clan. This process encompassed Murrinh Kura Thipman people, a Murrinh-patha sub-group who spoke a local variety of Murrinh-patha. They were progressively integrated, along with their territory, into the Murrinh-patha mob. On the other hand, Magati Ke, Marri Tjevin, and Marri Amu people maintained their separated identities. Small in number, they still maintain their language although they also speak Murrinh-patha today. Nonetheless they identify and are identified with the Wangga mob.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The rule prescribed that members of one moiety marry individuals of the other, however marriages between individuals of the same moiety were not prohibited if the preferred kin relation between them obtained. Falkenberg reported (1962:201) that the integration of the moiety system with the kinship system functioned in a way that ‘two individuals who marry and who stand in the correct relationship to each other usually also belong to different moieties.’

\textsuperscript{14} Falkenberg (1962) reported how depopulation in the 1930s and 1940s had led to ‘congregations’ of clans through the ‘sharing’ of totemic sites.
As relations between clans and their identities have changed over time through the development of mobs, so forms of identity and relations within clans have also changed. This is reflected in the rise of patrronymic family groups as a form of identity within clans. In small clans, the two identities are sometimes co-extensive. Sutton (1998) describes the modern Aboriginal family in the following way.

A distinctive form of social organization, centred on Aboriginal family identities and combining features of both classical Aboriginal and modern European societies, as well as a number of innovations, [that] has emerged in urban and rural areas of most of Australia and is becoming increasingly manifest in a number of the remoter regions. (Sutton 1998:59)

The families that Sutton describes are markedly cognatic, are a named group, and interpreted by him as a form of organization that has probably replaced the clan. Wadeye presents a less clearcut and also interesting situation where influences, mainly stemming from the mission, have demarcated a particular type of identity within the contemporary clans. Both phenomena reinforce the notion of patrilineal identity although their values and implications are rather different.

One of the first policies of the mission was to eradicate polygyny and promote the Christian model of nuclear family. In order to realize this aim, a number of institutions were established at Port Keats. The institution of the dormitory aimed, among other things, to prevent multiple marriages. Applying the methodology developed by Bishop Gsell on Tiwi Island (see Gsell 1956), Fr. Docherty 'purchased' the marriage rights of young girls from their families, thus preventing their unions with older men. Young girls stayed in the dormitory until they were of a 'suitable' age to marry. The first Christian marriage in Wadeye took place in 1944. The first marriage between two Catholics was in 1949 (Falkenberg 1962:19). Newly married couples moved together into sheds built with local materials. By the end of the 1940s, only a handful of
older men maintained several wives, and some of them even resolved to ‘give away’ the younger ones to Fr. Docherty.

The mission personnel kept an accurate record of these marriages, and of their offspring. The recording of these marriages grouped individuals along lines of patrilineal descent identified by surnames: Old Kulumoort gave birth to eight children, all of them acquired the family name Kulumoort. The same happened with Alliumg, Perdjert, Mullumbuk, Mollinjin, Longmaire, and many others. The practice of baptism also helped in this case. The first baptism took place in Wadeye in 1936 and since then it has been a consolidated practice in the community. Even today, with church attendance considerably decreased, every newborn child is christened. Children received a ‘Christian’ name and were recorded under a ‘family’ surname. This meticulous genealogical systematization of the community rapidly reached every individual, not a surprise, considering the fact that given the particular geographical isolation and the attractive commodities supplied, the mission was in the best position to introduce new practices and institutions.

Imposing a model based on European genealogies, the mission sought to categorize individuals as part of, and exclusively part of, ‘families.’ Under the pressure of these white institutions, inter-mob indigenous institutions (subsections, moieties) progressively weakened. As a consequence, people in Wadeye have come to perceive themselves as clusters of families identified in terms of clans. The demographic explosion of the 1960s consolidated these categories as the number of people with the same surname grew considerably.15 These developments fed into the introduction of new traditional song genres of the 1960s and into the

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15 The six sons of Old Kulumoort gave birth, by the end of the 1960s, to 24 individuals.
popular music movement. Independent site surveys and the emerging outstations also became expressions of clans and families. Bands, outstations, and family names went together.

In the early 1980s, moreover, helped by members of the missionary association Christian Brothers, several clans initiated the Family Book Project, a survey of sites, collection of totemic stories, genealogies, and songs associated with their clans. Many of these booklets are used as teaching materials for the bilingual program at the local school. Around the same time, a group of elders from different clans discussed the establishment of what was going to be the Karamke - Yile Ngala Museum. There, a collection of paintings and artefacts recapitulates the story of the mission and the ‘multicultural’ environment of Wadeye. So does the local Dirru Ngakumarl Art Gallery where people affiliated with different clans have produced a number of paintings illustrating totemic stories associated with their estate. Moreover, this clan identification has also entered the fashion world: B.P. prints annually a number of t-shirts with the name and designs of his clan, and distributes them to his patrilineal relatives.

These transformations and progressive intensification of clan identities helps explain the radical fault-lines of conflict – and violence – that are a constant feature of Wadeye today. The following section provides some examples.

5.6 Social conflict and clan identity at Wadeye

During 2002 several women of the Women’s Centre worked on the preparation of the Breakfast Program, a scheme that was going to target poor attendance among school children. At that time, around half of the school-aged children were not attending the lessons at Our Lady of The Sacred Heart school, and many of those who attended did so on an irregular basis. According to T.N., one of the women in charge of the project, there were several reasons for

Throughout this chapter I maintain that popular music has been fundamental to the extension of bilateral relatedness. However, it also originated from the desire of differentiation of individuals that grew up in the culturally homogenized Dormitory institution.
these poor figures. Dire living conditions were regarded as one of the main factors. Overcrowding of houses prevented a prolonged sleep in many of the houses whose average number of inhabitants was close to twenty individuals. Furthermore, the low income of many families undermined the proper nourishment of youngsters to the point that many children could not eat in the mornings. Tired and hungry, these children were not going to school, but spent most of the day around the community looking for older relatives from whom they received money to buy take-away food.

In order to find a solution to these issues, the Women's Centre proposed to run a Breakfast Program. This would have provided children with a healthy morning meal followed by a 'lift' to school. T.N. spent a great deal of time organising the logistics of this program, including the search for a suitable venue, the personnel and the economic resources to run the scheme.

The program was economically supported by the Women's Centre\textsuperscript{17} in partnership with the school. A small cash contribution was planned from the families of the children. As it happened, the Breakfast Program did not eventuate. T.N. expressed her disappointment at the failure of her efforts, but was not surprised by the outcome. She pointed to differences and tensions between clans and domestic family groups as the main reason for the difficulties. 'They are too different.' T.N. added, 'These kids can't sit together.' At the time, there was considerable tension between children of clans belonging to the Lirrga and Dhanba mob. Similarly, variable levels of authority and responsibility between the women from the same mob also caused a series of 'mini' conflicts.

A second example concerns M.J., a middle-aged man. He lived in an overcrowded and decrepit house. Although the state of the premises would have required constant maintenance, he did not regularly seek help from the housing commissioner. In fact, he was rarely seen around the

\textsuperscript{17} The Women's Centre owns the local Take-away outlet and Bakery.
Council offices where the commissioner was located. When men of his age gathered each morning for breakfast, he was absent. He was clearly uncomfortable in this location, whereas he spent a considerable amount of time sitting outside the local shop, a few hundred meters away from his house, with a number of relatives. The composition of the group of people that gathered at the back of the Council offices provided an explanation for his locational preferences. Most of the men around the council were associated with Murrinh-patha people, a group with which M.J.’s family group, with its Marri Ngarr identity, had ongoing conflicts.

The presence of an antagonist group in the Council offices discouraged M.J. from seeking continual assistance. Even when his situation worsened, he only occasionally sought help. He perceived the Council offices as the domain of an antagonist group. He could have activated a line of relatedness – his half cross-cousin, his father’s second wife’s brother’s son, was one of the most active men in Council – but he preferred to keep his distance.

As landowners, Murrinh-patha people are regarded as providers. Yet, ultimately, they do not control the government transfers of cash and resources, administered by white personnel. They are, however, the custodians of the area around Wadeye. Therefore they face growing frustration because they are asked to deliver services they cannot control. B.P., the recognized leader of the landowning group referred to this situation stressing that it gave him ‘lots of big headaches.’ When M.J. complained that the Council was not looking after his house, he openly questioned the role of the Murrinh-patha ‘bosses.’ Even if questioned, however, their authority could not ultimately be challenged, because it was based on the principle of land ownership. Marginalized from the distribution of resources, and without an effective autonomy, M.J. gave up asking and tensions rose as younger relatives turned to violent acts against property identified with the Murrinh-patha group.

A third example concerns male youth. The local police organized what was supposed to be a peaceful discussion between two opposing gangs, Judas Priest, associated with the Marri Ngarr
mob, and Evil Warriors, the group identified with Murrinh-patha mob. One of these gangs had been driven out of the community to a coastal outstation by repeated attacks on their properties in the township. As they made their way back to the community, tensions heightened. Once in Wadeye, antipathy erupted in skirmishes that involved about fifty individuals around the grounds of the local museum. The police intervened trying to settle things down, and so did a group of elderly women with close relatives in both groups. Unfortunately, the women were not successful and repaired to some nearby shade, under a welter of threats. As I observed the young men shouting and threatening them, the women lay on the ground hugging each other fearfully. The fight was finally resolved when two men confronted each other in a ‘fair-fist fight’ supervised by police.

This was simply one of many confrontations in which residential proximity, in conjunction with attenuated inter-clan relations and marked boundaries between mobs, leave bilateral kin relations as the only entirely indigenous medium for reconciliation. Very often this is not enough, a circumstance that, as I shall discuss in Chapter Seven, has precipitated the search for new, inter-cultural institutions of governance at Wadeye. Notwithstanding, the expansion of ego-centred networks of relatedness has proceeded on a number of fronts and it is these relations that can also mute conflict between clans and language mobs.

5.7 The elaboration of new patterns of relatedness

When the weekly allowance, expended on goods with inflated prices in the local shops, disappears, people ask for help from relatives. Some of these might be close at hand, within a domestic family group. Some will reside in other families and in other camps. This quest is especially noticeable in Wadeye, as people move around the community in circles seeking connectedness, and recognition, from a variety of relatives (see Peterson 1993; Macdonald 2000; Austin-Broos 2003). Especially on Sunday afternoons, when the food purchased the day

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18 Young males cluster in gangs that are named after Heavy and Death Metal Bands (see Ivory 2003).
before has finished (the shop usually closes on Sundays), people move around asking relatives for transportation that will take people out on forays to hunt and gather food.

At times, especially during the dry season, these quests extend to various outstations around Wadeye. Providing transportation for my informants was part of the daily routine, especially during the weekends. Once I drove P.J., her sister and cousin (FZD) to Nadirri outstation, on the other side of the mouth of the Daly River, a four-hour drive from Wadeye. P.J.’s cousin’s late husband was in fact one of the traditional landowners of the estate. Once there, P.J. immediately connected with a number of relatives including her niece (ZD), a relative also connected through marriage with that country. The hosts immediately made a number of demands. Tobacco, a highly prized commodity on outstations isolated from commercial outlets, was in particular demand. P.J. gave away half of her tobacco and in exchange she was granted permission to forage. Being expert mud-crabs hunters, several women came back from the beach with a considerable haul that we partly consumed on the shore. On the way back, we stopped at Yederr outstation where P.J. exchanged some crabs for some flour and tobacco with the family of her former brother-in-law. Back in Wadeye, a number of youngsters who had not been able to fit in the car were waiting for the day’s catch. Employing her ego-centred network, P.J. had returned home with a considerable amount of food, and with a larger quantity of tobacco than she had hours before!

D.L. and M.L. spent most weekends visiting their mother’s country, an estate on the coast north-west of the settlement. This estate could provide a better access to resources – an abundant catch of fish was almost invariably guaranteed – than their father’s estate which was inland, at a considerable distance. The chances of successfully hunting game in that country, moreover, depended upon the availability of transportation and fire arms, items to which G.L., their father, did not have access. On the other hand, their mother’s brother had a car and a number of fishing lines they could borrow. These regular journeys allowed D.L. and M.L. to develop a better knowledge of the Dreaming sites on ‘mother’s side,’ better than their
knowledge of the sites on their patrilial side. They remained, however, fully aware that their principal identity and responsibility were patrilial, with the 'inland mob.' On this point, G.L. noted that although they were 'hanging around their mother side,' they still 'knew where their country [was].' By taking his nephews fishing, S.N. provided a service for his brother-in-law, who, in turn, being a trained mechanic, provided regular assistance with the car's recurrent mechanical problems.

If the elaboration of bilateral connections has been encouraged by the welfare economy, other forms of relatedness have been attenuated by the contraction of ceremonial. However, given the concerns, contexts and mobilities of settlement life, other forms of relatedness have also developed. These are the result of the indigenous re-elaboration of a commonality imposed by mission institutions (also see Sansom 1982). 'Growing up together' generates a strong binding experience in Wadeye. L.M. is closer to his cross-cousins (MBS - pugarli), than to his parallel ones (FBS - ngathan). The reason, he explains, derives from the fact that they 'grew up together, because I was around my uncle from my mother side.' He often takes their children to weekend 'picnics' and regularly hands out to them small sums of money.

Growing up together often meant living together in the dormitory. The relationships developed between individuals that shared a common angst due to this policy of displacement are considered particularly strong. If, on the one hand, this policy precluded the acquisition of an extensive traditional knowledge, on the other it undoubtedly bound together a whole generation of men and women.

Historical circumstances concerning movements and work in the region have also been a source of relatedness. Sansom (1980:17), discussing the category of 'countrymen,' reports that these are 'the persons whom an individual claims to have 'run with' over the years' 'Run with' refers, among other things, to communal working experience, mainly in the regional cattle industry. Many people at Wadeye were employed in the industry in the 1950s and early 1960s.
Individuals belonging to different clans found themselves working in the same cattle station along with other Aboriginal people of different communities. These working experiences constitute a vehicle of relatedness that can be activate in some cases. R.M. once remarked, with a certain satisfaction, that his father's house was spared from the wrecking spree of a particular gang. This, he said, was because his father and the grandfather (now deceased) of the leaders of the opposed gang 'were mates. They worked together in the cattle stations ages ago.' The son of his father's mate 'knew it, and told them [the other gangs' members] not to touch his house.'

Producing and maintaining relatedness is integral to an Aboriginal way at Wadeye today. For this reason, individuals are actively and consistently engaging with each other. As people grow old, their networks become increasingly difficult to maintain (see Austin-Broos 2003). Old people lose the capacity to ask and are not able to activate their relatedness so readily or to walk around asking for resources and connecting with relatives and 'mates.' In Wadeye, these elderly people live at a pensioners' house, an institution run by non-indigenous personnel and removed, both spatially and metaphorically, from networks of relatedness. L.K. poignantly stressed the situation, when she noted that the family of one individual residing in the centre had somehow given up on him: 'He's got whitefella looking after him now.' Severed from his network, this elderly person could only rely on non-indigenous help.

The influence of settlement has transformed categories, groups and social networks in various ways at Wadeye. Families and clans have become bastions of identity. Clans have also become more removed from some of their traditional roles and, within the context of a literate environment, more bounded and individuated groups. The marking of patronymic family identities within clans both fosters and reflects this development. Possibly the differences between language groups in residential proximity have been emphasized even more while networks of bilateral relatedness have been elaborated in ways that partly, but only partly, counter-balance these tendencies. Settlement has also provided other forms of association – dormitories, school, church, cattle work – that become the bases for significant connections.
between mates. People privilege these forms of relatedness according to circumstance but, certainly, their management is both central to indigenous life, and also a continuing, evolving and difficult project for most Wadeye residents.

5.8 Popular music and forms of kin relatedness

Myers (1986:163) notes that ‘creating and maintaining relatedness demands interaction, reciprocity, exchange.’ At times this interaction is ‘hard work’ but, as G.C. notes, it must be sustained:

Going around the community, visiting friends and relatives, That’s how you get respect from people. That’s the way it should go. You can’t look after only your family, I mean, you need to care about your family and the whole community. You can’t stay at home by yourself, if you do so you might go to Melbourne and there is someone from Port Keats there. He says: “Do you know this and that?” “No, I don’t.” you say. “How come you don’t know them if you’re from Port Keats?” See, you’re there by yourself. That’s not blackfella way. 

As I have indicated in my discussions of Malkarrin and Dhanba, strategies to enhance relatedness are intimately involved with performance. In the mid-1980s, another performance genre emerged, this time addressing relatedness and identity among clans and families rather than the mobs. Nonetheless, the popular musical scene of the 1980s and 1990s provided an arena of performance not dissimilar to the one provided by the tripartite ceremonial exchange; one in which identities and reciprocities, sameness and difference, could be reproduced. Bands were based on clan affiliation, and the texts of the songs mainly described the estates or the ‘countries’ of various clans.

19 Alberto Furlan [Fieldnotes, 06.04.2002]

20 At times, however, other relatives played for each other.
While one of the aims of performing at the local club was to strengthen clan cohesion and identity, each band also composed and performed songs for other relatives. These songs praised the beauty of other estates, and thereby enhanced varieties of relatedness between the performers and members of their audience. Songs were requested and exchanged almost as commodities (Sansom 1988; Peterson 1993; Austin-Broos 2003). G.C. explains: ‘People used to come along to my place and say: “Hey, write a song for me!” “I want a song too.” So I said: “All right!” For this one (Da Ninn (Old Man’s dream) [Wakal Bengkunh 06]) the old fellow himself came over and said: “Why don’t you write a song for me?”’ The relatedness confirmed by these performances generated access to other services and goods. This exchange therefore was compared to another traditional ceremonial exchange: nanthi kulu (see Chapter One, page 23).21

Bands performed weekly at the local club, taking turns on the stage. The whole community, informants recollect, was drawn together at these gigs, a development that resembles the tripartite exchange milieu. However, rather than an exchange between mobs, these performances addressed the recipient of the song be it individual or clan.22 These performances were a force for stability in the midst of a social milieu marked by conflict and forces towards the individuation of groups. The movement involved an unusual scale of musical production. In the years between 1992 and 1995, over seventy songs were composed and regularly performed by four active bands. The following chapter considers this genre.

21 Younger generations, as we will see in the next chapter, exchanged music tapes for cash or goods, thus adapting a traditional exchange to their needs in Wadeye’s cash economy.

22 I remind the reader that when a Dhanba group sing for a Wangga individual (for his/her funeral, for instance) the songs performed refer to the country of the performers and not to the one of the dead. With popular songs, instead, it is the opposite: the song Mi Lala, composed and performed by Nangu Red Sunset band [Nangu Red Sunset Band 05] for B.P. of Yek Kubiyirr clan, describes the totemic site of one of the main ancestors of B.P.’s clan, precisely, mi lala, Zamia/Cycad palm.
CHAPTER SIX
ABORIGINAL POPULAR MUSIC

6.1 Introduction

Early in my fieldwork, while I was setting up to record a performance of Nangu Red Sunset Band at Peppimenarti Social Club (see below Picture 6.1), Lawrence Kolumboort, the main singer of Dhanba, suggested that I first point the microphone in his direction:

I go first, and when I finish with that Dhanba, I hold the clapstick up and that’s when the band starts...you know, it’s the same song. It’s my song! (L.K. pers.comm.)

After a nod towards the band stage, Lawrence sang a Dhanba song [Dhanba 23] as an introduction to Kardu Diminin [Nangu Red Sunset Band 13], a recent composition of the band. Lawrence’s remark that the two compositions were ‘the same song’ was a familiar one. It was similar to remarks that I had received since the first days of my research as I noted ideas about the similarities and differences between traditional and popular music. People often talked about a correspondence of intentions, themes and meanings between these two genres through the whole course of this research. Especially when the subject of our discussion focussed on songs ‘coming out from the country,’ it seemed that these two different expressions indeed originated from the same source.
On the other hand, when questioned on the modalities of composition and on the occasions of performance, informants did make a number of distinctions and recognized that, in fact, these two 'songs' were different. These distinctions, as I show below, underline that whereas traditional songs are 'found' in dreams with the help of song-giving agents, popular ones are simply 'made up,' that is, intentionally composed by individuals. Traditional music, furthermore, is performed during ceremonies — even if it can be performed on other more mundane occasions — whereas popular music songs do not have a place in ceremonial — even if they can be performed during the Christian part of a funerary rite. I concluded, supported by the seemingly contradictory answers I received, that indigenous popular music in Wadeye could be described as one of those 'same but different' practices and narratives encountered elsewhere in the indigenous literature (see Keen 1994).

As my fieldwork proceeded, the circumstance that I was addressing with regard to popular music seemed more and more to evoke elements of that process through which Malkarrin songs were forged. True, no popular songs have been 'given' by song-making agents. They are all 'made up.' Nonetheless, it is also clear that popular music developed at Wadeye through a dialogic process whereby songs were encountered by people in their travels beyond Wadeye, and also 'heard' as they travelled from elsewhere into the community. Once again a non-indigenous Australian phenomenon has been engaged, incorporated and rapidly re-contextualized and re-valued (or transformed) within the milieu of Wadeye. Moreover, Lawrence Kolumboort's comment testifies clearly, as do many others, to the homology between Dhanba songs and popular songs. They both address issues of country, evoke similar emotions, and support and encourage active engagement with peoples' clan estates. Finally, this focus on homologies also involves ellipsis, the subordinating of differences. These relate to the fact that where an older generation had extensive engagement with ceremonial life, the generations of the dormitories and their descendants inevitably have had to seek other media for naming, evoking and re-newing their relations with country.
The tripartite ceremonial exchange organized around new traditional genres was a large-scale performance between a number of clans that clustered in mobs and performed one common song. This reinforced regional language-group affiliations in the aftermath of the settlement of a number of antagonist groups within the boundaries of the mission. Similarly, albeit on a smaller scale and generated by the group and personal individuation that cash economy has brought, popular music emerged in response to a desire to reassert clan identity and educate younger generations about their heritage. The outstation movement of the 1980s ran parallel to these developments. Clans began to sing anew about their country as they also planned the relocation of their main residential sites.

When Lawrence said that it was indeed the ‘same song,’ he was noting the homology he saw between traditional and popular song, a homology realized through lyric themes, country and the clans towards which both forms of song are directed. Lawrence recognized both the Dhanba song and the recent band’s composition as his songs, for both were associated with the estate and the patrilineal group to which he belonged (Yek Diminin). This was particularly evident from the presence of the estate’s place names in the texts of both songs.\(^1\) Albeit different in a number of ways – he himself had dreamt that particular Dhanba song a decade before, whereas Kardu Diminin had been composed by one of his classificatory nephews (ZS) only weeks before – they were indeed the same song for him. They were both Yek Diminin songs.

In the following pages I will first provide an account of the origins of the contact indigenous people had in the 1960s with popular music and the dialogic process through which, following initial contact, popular music became popular indigenous music in the mid-1980s. Secondly, I

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\(^{1}\) [Dhanba 13] reads ‘Kunbinhi Kunbinhi! / Ah, my country! Show us Batuk!’ Kunbinhi and Batuk being the names of important dreaming sites. Kardu Diminin [Nangu Red Sunset Band 13] describes other important Dreaming sites, such as Bape, Tharmughen, Kumeway, Mawurt, Memari, and the same Kunbinhi (see Appendix I and II for transcription of both songs)
will discuss the historical circumstances in which bands shifted from ‘mob’ phenomena to units mainly identified with one patrilineal group (clan) or another. This will also involve an account of the emergence of popular music as instrumental in the process of generating separate and delineated identities among groups, and will lead to the analysis of popular songs in terms of their relations to specific clan estates. For this purpose I will describe the composition process and investigate the indigenous concepts of what a song is and how it affects the country and its inhabitants. Songs will also prove to be instrumental to the process of cultural education and to the project of decentralization of clans onto their traditional estates.

Finally, I will demonstrate how songs have been used (and still are) to articulate patterns of extended bilateral relatedness either through the initiatives of individuals or a particular band. If songs are a medium of exchange, in these terms the exchanges have become more individuated and, more often, ego-centred. Nonetheless, they show that popular music is not simply deployed to represent individuated groups, but also to forge ongoing and reciprocal relations between relatives. In this context, songs, and especially tape-recorded songs, have become more like commodities or small change, something that can be passed between various kin to confirm and consolidate relatedness.

6.2 Popular music in Wadeye: a historical overview
In response to the question, ‘Why did Aboriginal people take up modern music?’ it is fair to say that they were surrounded by it. In addition, along with Christianization, came exposure to a wide repertoire of Christian musical expression, some of which was popular. Yet there is more. As Walker (2000) observes, Aboriginal people also realized that they had a lot in common with these new genres and, more importantly, that they could use them to express themselves in ways that were similar to non-indigenous Australians. Walker’s point leads to more specific insights:
Aboriginal people took to country music for quite a number of very good reasons. Firstly, given that most Aborigines still live outside Australia’s major cities, it was about all they ever heard. [...] Secondly, they could relate to it. Not only did Aborigines share a large part of country’s roots (gospel music, minstrelsy, bush bands), they were also attracted to it because country songs are story songs, and in a traditional Aboriginal society, this was all what songs did too – told stories. [...] Country music, moreover, was a music of the land, and so the types of stories it told were stories Aboriginal people could relate to as well. They found familiar the tale of horses and love gone wrong, of dead dogs and drinking. Thirdly, country music is guitar based (thus portable) and easy to play. [...] Finally, there was something more intangible to country’s loping rhythms and mournful tunes – a sadness, a sense of loss – that Aboriginal people identified with absolutely. (Walker 2000:14-15)

These are surely important features of the music, but they take on further resonance still when this genre is juxtaposed with an indigenous traditional one. Some of these features of modern popular music become simply peripheral while others are regarded as central. Talking about stories, popular music is yet another ‘same but different’ tool to describe life, country and landscape and gain access to knowledge in the way that ancestral stories provide access to knowledge. Talking (or singing) about country is just exactly the traditional way to manage and look after land.

Considering indigenous popular music as merely the product of cultural colonization would therefore be a mistake. According to this view, the musical style of the dominating group inevitably influences the production of the popular music of the subordinates. However, such an approach denies the local domains of autonomy and the intentionality of indigenous popular music production. Aboriginal people have appropriated the rock and pop styles not simply in imitation of a dominant culture, but rather in order to initiate a dialogue in which the transformations of this particular genre produce, both in musical form and in content, a music
that is unique to them. Popular music thereby becomes part of a process of reproduction and implementation of old and new identities and patterns of relatedness. Moreover, popular music was also a phenomenon with which, during its peak in the early 1990s, the vast majority of the Wadeye population engaged. It became an arena of performance and representation in some regards as important as the tripartite ceremonial exchange.

Popular music was introduced to Wadeye around the late 1950s. As in many other parts of Australia, the employment of indigenous people in the cattle industry facilitated contact with country and western music. As A.L. (pers.comm) recalls, by the mid 1960s, people in Wadeye had already acquired musical skills: ‘I worked in cattle stations for twenty years, everywhere...I learnt to play guitar there, from ‘half-caste’ blokes... and here in Port Keats the old blokes, now, [they] used to teach us, [a] few chords... they can still play! you go down to their camp and bring your guitar and you hear...they can still play!’

It is easy to imagine how country music infused the community. Indeed, one of the first recorded examples of popular music was made in the mid-1970s. It involved a performer, accompanied by a guitar, singing some of Slim Dusty’s classics. At this stage, though, performances were informal events that sprang up from time to time. They mainly consisted of sing-alongs accompanied by guitar playing.

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2 I am indebted in these formulations to discussions with Diane Austin-Broos and to Bruce Knauf’s interpretation of the relation between Gramsci and Bakhtin. See Knauf (1996:177-218)
3 I am considering here not only the performers but also the individuals in the audience, who participated in public performances by dancing to the rhythm of songs describing their and their relatives’ countries.
4 WASA CD 438 (Reilly Collection CD 6). This recording, which includes Slim Dusty classic Pub With no Beer, was made by Leslie Reilly (then Rourke) in 1976. The performer, Justin Tchinbrurr, was associated with a now lapsed band called The Last Sunset. Country music was highly popular at the time, and live tour concerts to Wadeye by artists such Alex Hood (1973) and Slim Dusty (1974) contributed to the appeal of this kind of music.
Later in the 1970s, AM radio programs from Darwin reached Wadeye, albeit with some technical difficulties. As a result, people were able to hear examples of local and overseas rock 'n' roll. By the late-1970s, the first band of Wadeye, *Yidiy Bush Band*,\(^5\) was performing covers of songs by *The Rolling Stones*, *The Beatles* (UK), *Creedence Clearwater Revival* (USA) and others. They also performed a few country songs, though this repertoire was the primary focus of another band active at that time – the *Last Sunset Band*\(^6\) – whose members had worked in the cattle station industry.

The repertoire of both these early bands also included examples of guitar-accompanied gospel songs. Religious songs, which had been used since the first years of the mission in the process of Christianization\(^7\) were an integral part of the musical repertoire of the Christian community in Wadeye. As new musical technology arrived, people used it for these compositions.

A decisive moment occurred in the 1980s when Chester and Lyn Street, two resident linguists from the Darwin-based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), facilitated the extensive production of gospel songs in Murrinh-patha. Chester Street (pers.comm.) recalls the process:

> We started at the church, Sunday nights, I used to play the keyboard and I had people coming along. Gerald [Longmair], Stan [Ninnal], David [Kundair] and Cornelius [Mollinjin] were there and that used to attract many people. The church was packed. They could see their relatives playing and they loved it. We translated very short songs [inspired by Bible's verses] with good catchy tunes. Then we produced a few tapes of

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\(^5\) Members of this band later joined or formed other bands.

\(^6\) Performances of these bands were recorded by Leslie Reilly in 1975-1976. See WASA CD 441 (Reilly CD 9), WASA CD 442 (Reilly CD 10), WASA CD 446 (Reilly CD 14).

\(^7\) As early as 1954, Stanner recorded a performance of the Port Keats Choir. This cassette, now unfortunately completely decayed, was held in the archives of *Kanamkek - Yile Ngala Museum*, but does not appear in the AIATSIS collection of Stanner's 1954 tapes (see Marett 1999). The Wadeye Choir still performs regularly at Sunday Masses.
gospel songs with their pictures on the cover and that was it! Those tape went immediately. They were very proud of them!

Being recognized as a performer, whether of traditional or popular songs, is highly valued in Wadeye. Moreover, it seems clear that becoming competent in a model of Western expression was a matter of particular pride among people who had been involved in settlement life for some time. As they were trained by Chester and Lyn Street in a workshop at the SIL in Berrimah (Darwin), people became even more ‘professional’ in songwriting. Aboriginal people from all the northern parts of Australia participated in these workshops. For two weeks they were instructed in the processes of composition and lyrics writing\(^8\) and, at the end of their sojourn, they returned to their communities and composed new songs. These were initially gospel songs but, before long, interest shifted toward subjects such as love for one’s own country and the struggle for cultural maintenance. These compositions were immediately understood to be different from gospel songs, not just for the different content of their lyrics, but also because they portrayed a different cultural milieu. These compositions became known as ‘culture’ songs. Popular music had become Aboriginal music.

The first such song was *Nangu* by Stan Ninnal, which, although it first appeared in one of the Gospel compilations, was about country. This song laid the foundation for the production of many such songs that continue to this day.

6.3 Popular Bands’ memberships and composition

In order to understand the evolution of culture songs, it is necessary to investigate how the membership of these popular bands mirrored the social processes of the community at the time.

\(^{8}\) Examples of this production are the recordings: *Sing to the Lord. Gospel songs in English and Aboriginal languages from different communities* (1988, Berrimah: Summer Institute of Linguistics) and *Move around for Jesus* (1988, Berrimah: Summer Institute of Linguistics) [also catalogued as WASA Tape 115 and 166].
As described in the chapter dedicated to traditional music, people in Wadeye clustered in three macro-groups, the Dhanba, Wangga and Lirrga mobs. These groups emerged in the 1960s, in the aftermath of new residency arrangements and initiated a ceremonial system of exchange and reciprocity, that allowed the articulation and representation of differences between the groups.

A similar process occurred with the popular bands which drew their memberships from related individuals. The bands’ foundations in the late 1970s also derived from particular patterns of association albeit among youth. These were the so-called gangs, involving variable numbers of individuals, and usually comprised of young men of a similar age. According to informants, the main purpose of these gangs was to ‘hang around with mates,’ participating in activities such as riding motorcycles – ‘with proper whitefella boots, gloves and scarfs’ – or fishing and hunting trips. Unlike the current circumstance, these gangs were neither aggressive nor violent. Rather, they engaged through sport, at football and basketball competitions.

The gang/band groups included: Devil’s Wheels gang and the related Yidiyi Bush Band, Midnight Ramblers gang and the associated Black Superstars Band, and the Food Land gang and its associated Deep Sea Band. Other bands, not specifically associated with gangs shared the scene: these were Sunrise Band (later known as Hot Wheels Band) and Last Sunset Band. Only one of these bands – Hot Wheels Band – is still active. The others have either lapsed or their members have re-formed in different groups. This evolution has not been random. In fact it has involved a shift towards clan-based groupings. Whereas, in Yidiyi Bush Band – Wadeye’s first band – the musicians belonged to different clans which were also associated with different mobs,9 Hot Wheels Band’s members were drawn exclusively from Rak Kungarbarl clan.

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9 These were: Yek Diminin and Yek Maninh (Dhanba mob), Rak Kubuyirr (Lirrga mob), Yek Yederr (Wangga mob).
What caused this regrouping? An overview of the repertoire of the bands might explain this. As noted above, the performances of the early bands were largely based on covers of rock or country songs, on instrumental pieces, or on gospel songs. As a result, the whole body of lyrics was in English. By contrast, almost the entire corpus of songs collected during my fieldwork was in Murrinh-patha (with a few exceptions in Marri Ngarr and Marri Amu). Moreover, all song lyrics were original and dealt with subjects clearly recognisable as indigenous, and specific to definite countries and clans. Many bands will compose mainly ‘for their country,’ although instances of composers producing songs for other countries are frequent and constitute an important network of exchange, as we will see below.

Two acquired skills allowed this change in the repertoire: an increased competence in songwriting, as a result of thematic workshops led by Chester and Lyn Street, and growing literacy in Murrinh-patha by a generation of composers whose abilities were enhanced by a bilingual program at the local school. The impetus for this production came from the core of indigenous culture: the sentimental link to one’s own estate, the power that comes from nurturing Dreaming sites and totemic ancestors, and the tension between the articulation of differences and the creation of networks of relatedness. These are three of the main driving forces. Different individuals who wanted to express their closeness to a particular estate formed bands and drew their names from those estates. That is why we find that, at this later stage, core members of bands belong to the same – or to very close – clans. The contents of their repertoire will further clarify this process but, as for now, let us consider the names and memberships of these bands.

Table 6.1 below sets out the evolution of the bands in the course of the last three decades. Reading vertically, the table shows the development of the bands from their formation to the present day. The final row describes band composition at the time of my fieldwork. The youth

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10 Variations on this rule may occur. Affiliation to one band may also depend on patterns of local residency within the boundaries of the township, or on friendship between members of different clans.
gang from which each band was generated is shown in square brackets. The name of the mob
to whom the members of the band belong is shown in round brackets, and the name of the clan
associated with each band is shown in italics. The dotted arrows show performers forming
other bands in the 1980s.

In 1997, *Nangu Red Sunset Band*, Wadeye’s most famous band, won the Battle of the Bands at
the Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival, and as a result of this achievement, the band recorded
the album *Nangu* for CAAMA in Alice Springs.¹¹

*Nangu* is a saltwater country some thirty kilometres south-west of Wadeye. The clan owner of
this estate, *Yek Nangu*, is traditionally a Murrinh-patha speaking group. Partly constituted from
previous members of *Yidiyi Bush Band*, *Nangu Red Sunset Band* has been performing together
since the mid-1980s. The band’s members are closely related. If we take Cassimar Nardu
(rhythmic guitar, vocals) as Ego, the other members of band are: Vincent Mollinjin (lead
guitar) and Robert Mollinjin (vocals) – ego’s first cousins – Francisco Bunduck (bass) – ego’s
brothers-in-law – Cyrill Ninal (vocals) and Mark Ninal (drums) – ego’s classificatory
brothers. The band is composed of members of the *Yek Nangu* (Narndu and Ninal) and *Yek
Dininin clans* (Mollinjin and Bunduck), both of which are part of the *Dhanba* mob.

¹¹ *Nangu Red Sunset Band, Red Sunset*, CAAMA, 1998. CAAMA (Central Australian Aboriginal Media
Association) has produced several Aboriginal groups, such as Warumpi Band, Frank Yamma, Letterstick
Band and others.
Table 6.1 Bands' Membership from the 1970s to Day
Emu Sisters is a band originally founded by four sisters belonging to the Rak Kulingmirr clan – Margaret Wundjar, Paula Jongmin, Ellen Tcherna, Judith Jongmin (all vocals) – and Judith Jongmin’s former husband, David Kundair (guitar, keyboards), from Yek Yederr clan and a previous member of Black Superstar. The name of the band refers to the main totem of the Rak Kulingmirr clan. Other members, who played occasionally, were Sebastian Jabinee (bass) – the sisters’ classificatory son – from Yek Ngundaninarn clan and Michael Parmbuck (drums) – no kinship relation here – from Rak Kubiyyirr clan. At the time of this research, Maxi Jongmin, the sisters’ brother and main composer of the band’s repertoire, joined the formation on keyboard.

Wakal Bengkunh Band was founded by members of the Rak Kubiyyirr clan. Wakal Bengkunh is another name for this clan. The band was founded by three brothers: George (vocals), Peter (bass) and Rocky (lead guitar) Cumaiyi – previously with Yidiyi Bush Band – and their classificatory brother Michael Parmbuck (drums). This band has had the most extensive repertoire recorded in Wadeye and has had a few variations in its membership. In fact, only George Cumaiyi, the main composer, was still part of the band when I was in Wadeye. His two daughters, and his wife had replaced the other members.

Hot Wheels Band was founded in the early 1970s by members of the Rak Kungarbarl clan. These were two brothers, Desmond Longmair (vocals, guitar) and Gerald Longmair (lead guitar), and Wilfred Mardigan (vocals), their classificatory brother, and Bonaventure Ngarri (vocals), the brothers’ brother-in-law, from Rak Kinmul clan. Levinus Narburup (drums), from Yek Diminin clan, and Peter Cumaiyi (bass), from Rak Kubiyyirr clan occasionally played with the band. This is the only band whose name does not refer to the clan of the members, but it is a reminder of the old gang/band group in which the members of the band were first involved. Hot Wheels Band has substantially maintained the same formation since its beginning. All the three bands above are part of the ceremonial group related to the Lirrgra song genre.
Yingelmen Band, was founded by two cross-cousins, Don Pultchen and Valerian Nudjulu, respectively from Yol Dumin (Dhanha mob) and Raku Kuy (Wangga mob) respectively. They recorded two songs in Berrimah jail while they were serving time, in 2002. Their repertoire relates to both their countries. This is the only case of a band constituted on the basis of cross-clan and cross-mob affiliation. It is nonetheless based on kinship relationships and born from a particular and rather peculiar residency situation.

Overall, we can see how the original formations of the 1970s, which were based on youth gangs of mixed clan affiliation, were replaced by clan-based bands in the 1980s. The descent identity was thus reinforced. This process was the result of a particular historical moment, the demographic growth of the post-war years, which produced a generation of people who were in their late teens, or early twenties, at the end of the 1960s. This generation was educated under the mission dormitory system, and as a result had a much more limited experience of traditional culture than the preceding generation. With the waning of mission influence in the early 1970s, people's identity — previously defined by the Christian community and by the song genres-based mobs — shifted back towards a more localized character. With the beginning of the outstation movement, attention became re-focussed on clans as the basis of group identity and affiliation. The young generation was eager to give voice to its newly regained independence, and its voice was popular music.

6.4 Clans, country and popular songs: identity re-constituted

The withdrawal of the mission facilitated the re-statement of identity in terms of country. Larger regional models of ceremonial exchange and reciprocity were already in place. However these new 'popular' models were the voice of a different generation. People who did not know 'where [they] really were from' while they were growing up under the culturally homogenising environment of the mission, became the strongest advocates of group differentiation, a process epitomized by the emergence of clan-based popular music bands. As noted in Chapter 5, this process was facilitated by the emergence of clans as clusters of patronymic families. In
significant part, and ironically, this was the product of mission practices including genealogy keeping, baptism and the taken for granted classification of names as personal (Christian) and patronymic. With the waning of the mission, however, the groups these acts helped to define became more highly objectified and central to the explicit process of social life.

The outstation movement, and a newly introduced government discourse of bounded clan estates in the 1980s and 1990s, consolidated this process. People moved to these estates on a semi-permanent basis, during the dry season. The identification of individuals with specific estates became the emblem of the process of differentiation in the post-mission years and, consequently, images of country became pivotal elements in the texts of popular music compositions.

6.4.1 Reaffirmation of clan identity through images of country in popular songs

On a Saturday afternoon, in the first month of my fieldwork, I was driving a number of Aboriginal people on a fishing expedition south-west of Wadeye. As we entered the boundaries of his country, M.N. leaned outside the car window and started calling out to Crow, his totemic Dreaming ancestor. The practice of calling out to ancestors while entering an estate to inform them of their arrival takes place regularly, particularly when strangers are travelling with the owners of that estate. Calling out informs the ancestors – the guardians of that country – that the foreign person is in the company of a legitimate traveller. At times, sweat from these owners is smeared on the strangers to prevent guardian spirits from noticing people who ‘smell different.’ M.N., however, was not worried about Crow recognising us. He confidently asserted: ‘We’ll be all right. They know we’re countrymen, we’re playing their song.’ Kerengbe [Nangu Redsunset Band 07], the Nangu Red Sunset Band’s song about the country we had just entered, was blasting from the car’s speakers at that time.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) Povinelli (1993:153) has stressed the importance of sweat and language in the interacting relationship between indigenous people and the sentient totemic landscape around them. In this case, popular songs
My feeling at that moment is still with me today as I write these pages. It was then that I understood how a popular song can be regarded as a ‘piece of country,’ – how it bears the vitality of country in its lyrics, as tangible as sweat. By boosting the levels of the car stereo, we were ‘calling out’ to their ancestors. By singing the songs loudly – as I was instructed to do – I would easily pass. The Little People would not ‘bog’ my car. The sentient indigenous landscape responded to these songs.

Like the landscape, popular songs hold the power to communicate multiple messages through their multi-layered and multivalent lyrics. They serve as means of constructing people’s identity, rearticulating indigenous values, and creating a performative reciprocity not dissimilar to that of the tripartite ceremonial exchange. In the following analysis, I will focus mainly on song texts, beginning with two songs that embody all the fundamental themes. As I observed above, the first song, Nangu [Nangu Red Sunset Band 01], was the first culture song produced following the song-writing workshops of the late 1980s. Composed by Stan Ninnal, it is also the first track of an album recorded in 1998. The second, Kardu Diminin Country by Yingelmen Band [Yingelmen Band 02], is one of the most recent compositions to have been produced by a local band. At opposed ends of a temporal continuum, these two songs epitomize twenty years of Aboriginal popular music in Wadeye.

_Nangu_

_Ngay-ka thangku-wa-nu nganam karhi-yu?_

_Pule, thurringalingmu da ngarra ngay thatpiru_

_Nangu, da pemanhay ngala_

_Da lelung-ka da matha_

_Ngay-ka bematha wangu nganimu.

*qualify as the ‘appropriate’ language to enter the clan’s estate because the text of the songs speaks about and to the land.*
Nangu, da pemanhay ngala
Da leluh-ka da matha

Why am I still here?
Brother, take me back to the place where I belong
Nangu, the big sand hill
That beautiful place just over there
I will always go there
In that place where there is a lot of food
Nangu, the big sand hill
That beautiful place just over there

Nangu starts with the question: ‘Why am I still here?,’ that is: ‘Why am I still here in Wadcyel?’ This is followed by a plea that the singer be returned to where he really belongs. This kind of plea recurs many times in the repertoire of this and other bands. The significance of these lines can best be understood in the light of the band’s history.

As noted already, the band movement originated in the late 1980s, in the same period when people began a systematic relocation to their homelands – albeit only on a seasonal basis – and constructed several outstations. In many ways, these songs are the voice of the outstation movement, expressing the yearning of people to move back to their homelands. When the singer asks to be taken back to his country, this has a concrete context – the localization of clans on estates. The song then goes on to mention the name of the country – Nangu – and its

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15 It must be pointed out that the theme of going back to one’s country also recurs in traditional songs. Marett (2005 in press, Chapter Six) refers to a Walakandha Wangga song – Walakandha Ngindji – in which one of the ancestral dead expresses delight at the building of the first house at the Nadirri
main landscape feature, a large sand hill. This place is so important to the composer that he states that ‘I will always go there;’ that is, he will always look after his country, and will always go there to take care of the Dreaming sites.\footnote{During hunting trips near the various outstations, people almost invariably take detours to check important Dreaming sites. The very presence of people around these Dreaming sites reinforces them for the sentient landscape recognizes its ‘countrymen’ (kardu darrkardu) and, therefore ‘becomes happy.’ On this point, Povinelli (1993:159) has shown how human labour, along with sweat and speech, make the countryside ‘sweet.’}

The third last line stresses the presence of bush food and its abundance in order to highlight the quality of life in one’s own country, as opposed to that in the township of Wadeye, a locale that is seen as imposed by historical circumstances – and partly as the result of white settlement. Nangu is ‘beautiful’ and ‘just over there,’ that is, within reach of the composer.

\textit{Kardu Dininin Country}

\textit{Da thingarru, palyrr karrim}

\textit{Palyrr Bape, ngarra kura kulurduk yingamngarrwatha-yu da pangu-yu}

\textit{Ngarra kangkari nganki pardida, da pangu-yu da lelunhka}

\textit{Ngarra nhiplin da Kuneaway, da lelunhka da pangu yu}

\textit{Nanthi ngarra ihithangaday yingamngarrwatha-yu, da Memari da lelunhka}

\textit{Nanthi ngarra marrarru yingamngarrwatha-yu, da Mawuri da lelunhka}

\textit{Ngarra Kardu kunugunu pambunkatardumnhinda, da pangu-yu da lelunh-ka}

\textit{Yile, thangarrangkarda-nu ku ngarra ngakamari yingamngarrwatha-yu}

\textit{Yile, da thingarru, Kunbinhi da lelunhka}

\textit{Neki-yu}

Ah, my country! Where the hills are outstation. Certain Dhanba songs [i.e., Dhanba 14 and 16] explicitly voice a desire to move towards the composer’s totemic country.

\footnote{During hunting trips near the various outstations, people almost invariably take detours to check important Dreaming sites. The very presence of people around these Dreaming sites reinforces them for the sentient landscape recognizes its ‘countrymen’ (kardu darrkardu) and, therefore ‘becomes happy.’ On this point, Povinelli (1993:159) has shown how human labour, along with sweat and speech, make the countryside ‘sweet.’}
The hill Bape, Kura Kulurduk over there
Where our paternal grandfathers used to live, a beautiful place
The creek Kumeway, a beautiful place over there
Where the Dreaming site of the eucalyptus flowers is, at Memarri, a beautiful place
Where the Dreaming site of the Milky way is, at Mawurt, a beautiful place
Where the two old ladies drowned, over there, a beautiful place
Father, show me where the Dreamings are
Father, Ah, my country! Kunbinhi, a beautiful place!
Our place.

This song opens with the classic expression of yearning, as the composer voices love for his country, and pain at his absence from it. *Da Thingarru* is an expression that appears almost in every song I have analysed. As such, it triggers sentiments of affection that are the basis of what I will describe below as a 'sentimental education.' The song text presents a list of localities that impart order to important places in the clan estate. The song is like a map. It describes a totemic topography in reference to which the individual can chart his or her individuality, and articulate a personal identification with the song and with the larger clan group. Popular songs also nurture the country, in a way similar to traditional songs. The power that resides in totemic dreaming sites is enhanced by singing them.

By mentioning that his 'paternal grandfathers used to live' around these places, the composer reaffirms his authority, derived through a patrilineal line of descent to that country. The phrase 'Father, show me where the Dreamings are,' is a heartfelt request for knowledge that will allow the composer to understand and consequently nurture and preserve his totemic country. Once

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15 We must not forget, however, that this expression is also present in *Dhanba* songs. See, for instance, *[Dhanba 17, 23, and 37]*.
again, this country is described as 'beautiful.' The song ends with the name of this country - Kumbini - designating it as 'our country.' Here the composer is speaking to his father, and the country that is their clan estate.

The presence of country in popular songs can be found virtually in every item I investigated. This became obvious once I engaged in the process of translating the repertoires of the various bands: the principal subject was, almost invariably, the country of each band. I can confidently say that each and every single song refers to a particular clan estate. The question that needs to be answered is therefore: what is the reason for this recurrent theme? Other related questions also present themselves: what are the processes of identification that occur between the person, his/her country and the song? How do the lyrics articulate the relationship between the song and the estate? What are the cultural values attached to this repertoire?

Let me begin with the first question. I argue that the recurrent presence of country in popular songs derives from the circumstance of these compositions. Popular songs, as we noted above, flourished in the years of the outstation movement. They were produced by a generation of people who had grown up in the dormitory system, and who had been partly removed from traditional values and practices, in a culturally homogenized milieu where the dialogue was between Aboriginal people as an undifferentiated group and the missionaries. For this generation, popular songs were - and still are - a means to express their loss but, more importantly, they are also an instrument for reasserting identity. By singing about its country, each band reaffirms the place of its clan in the cultural landscape of the community. Naming country in songs is also typical of traditional music. A number of authors (Morton 1987; Munn 1970; Tamisari 1998) have stressed how this practice, which is modelled on the totemic

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16 This plea can be also found in Dhanba songs. In the opening line of [Dhanba 17], for instance, the composers asks: 'Father, show us Kumbini!'

17 Neki in an inclusive first person plural pronoun that in Murrinh-patha refers to either males, females or siblings.
ancestor’s naming/creative action, is fundamental in the process of articulation of identities and in the re-vitalization of ancestral life forces in the ritual arena. Popular music also serves this purpose. By performing and naming the country, each band is making the country ‘real’ once again, re-establishing connections between people and their ancestors, re-asserting identities which were homogenized by mission practices and nurturing the interests of younger generations towards their estates.

The second question relates to the process of (re)construction of identity. This process has two moments. One, which strengthens the cohesion between the clan’s members, is inwardly focused, and the other, which develops engagements with the other clans, is directed outwards. The first movement is the more intimate and articulates the individual’s perception of his or her identity with reference to an estate that includes the features of the landscape, flora and fauna, and totemic ancestors that are embodied in, and walking through this landscape. The second movement is articulated through public performance and exchanges of songs, as I will show below.

The creation of images of landscape in the songs initiates this process. Papa Ngala is a good example, and helps us to answer the third question.

*Papa Ngala*

*Kanhi-wa da ngarra wangu da Papa Ngala*

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18 Munn (1970:102) claims that singing ‘one’s way from place to place implied that marks and names are being ‘put’ at each place – that is, that the site is being claimed.’ Tamisari (1998:254) suggests that ‘the shaping of the ground involves the act of naming.’ The connection is here between places and personal or group names which, according to the author, ‘reveal once again the corporeal connection between people, places and ancestors.’
Ngarra kangkurl ngay pardipuptha
Thurnungam ngarra mayern ngala i ngarimawingkale warda
Ngarra kura ngipilinh da Ngurrkaminhinh
Puy wangu thurrulili-ka da kahir
Da ngarra nganki da Bemenhini
Thimarrawith pangu warda wangu ngarra palyirr kurran
Da thingarru da palyirr karrim
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Puy wangu thurrulili-ka da kahir
Da ngarra nganki da Ngerenbe
Ngerenbe thangunu-ka da kahir da ngarra mange
Da Domarday wakal
Domarday wakal thangunu-yu da kahir
Da ngarra nganki Domarday ngala
Puy wangu thurrulili-ka da kahir
Da ngarra nganki da Kerde-yu
Da thingarru da palyirr karrim
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu

I'm going to Papa Ngala
Where my paternal grandfather used to live
Go on the main road and turn off now
At the river, the place called Ngurrkaminhinh
Keep walking, there's another place there
Our place Bemenhini
Going up that way where the hills are
Ah, my country! Where the hills are
Our place Papa Ngala
Keep walking, there’s another place there
Our place Ngerembé
From Ngerembé, another isolated place there
Little Damarday
From Little Damarday
Our place, big Darmarday
Keep walking, there’s another place there
Our place Kerde
Ah, our country! Where the hills are!
Our Country, Papa Ngala

The song was composed by David Kundair in the early 1990s for his nephew who, at the time, was living in Kununurra (Western Australia). David reported that he wanted to give a present to his relative by composing a song for his country. In this case, the song acts as a mnemonic device that is modelled around a typical indigenous epistemology, that of learning about a place by travelling through it. The song presents a series of mnemonic pictures of the country which are recollected through a practice which is deeply rooted in Aboriginal ways of understanding the world.

In another example, George Cumaiyi (pers.comm.) relates how the composition of a song was inspired by the traditional seasonal movements that occurred in a particular area. He lists the localities in a line from south to north because: ‘That’s the way old people would tell us about

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19 This version of *Papa Ngala* [David Kundair 02], was recorded by David Kundair and *Emu Sisters* in October 2002.
20 Travelling totemic song cycles are a key example of this epistemological practice. In this case, traditional songs name places visited by the Dreaming ancestors during creative journey. These cycles are not publicly performed in Wadeye.
these places, when they were travelling around from the dry through the wet season, following the tucker.' This song, known as Nangu Country [Wakal Bengkunh Band 14] was composed by Sebastian Cumaiyi in the early 1990s.

Angenda, Wumarr, Yelum, Ngatat,
Ngalantharr numi warda kanam.
Ngudemun, Nirripi, i da Nanthak, da Nangu,
Ngalantharr numi warda kanam da pangu-yu.
Kunugunu perkenku warda pantangka,
Da pangankape pantangka da pangu-yu

Angenda, Wumar, Yelum, Ngatat
There’s only one old man left.
Ngudemun, Nirripi and Nanthak, Nangu,
There’s only one old man left down there.
Two old ladies sisters are there now,
The two sisters are looking after that place over there.

Personal identification follows from mnemonic recollection and songs are recognized as personal property. Not only the composer, but every member of the clan to whose country the song refers, will declare that ‘This is me, this is my song!’ This declaration is the main theme of Wakal Bengkunh Band’s song Our Country. [Wakal Bengkunh Band 08] In this song, the composer describes his estate and concludes by naming various groups within his clan.

We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe,
And proud for who we are.
Our tribal language Marri Ngarr,
And our country Kubuyiirr
Sleeping under a bark hut house on stormy and rainy night,

Keeping warm in the winter with bushfire all around.

The sound of cicadas from dawn to dusk,
And the Kookaburra laughs in the morning.

We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe
Parmbuk and Madjindi, Thardim,
And Therna, Muriel and Cumaiyi
We are from the Moyle plains so beautiful,

Our tribal language Marri Ngarr,
And our country Kubuyirr.

The sound of cicadas from dawn to dusk,
And the Kookaburra laughs in the morning.

We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe,
Parmbuk and Madjindi, Thardim
And Therna, Muriel and Cumaiyi.  

People immediately recognize songs and relate to them because they depict their country so vividly. They are not, however, merely a collection of images. They are the true vitality of these estates — places in that country manifested as music. Just as traditional songs are considered part of the inalienable knowledge of each clan, like designs or ceremonial paraphernalia, so too popular songs are considered part of the clan’s heritage.

While the process of identity (re)construction pivots also around the totemic cosmology of each clan, the focus is not so much on the characteristics of these Dreaming ancestors or on their activities, but, rather, on the places that result from their actions, and which constitute an enduring feature of the clan territory. While the creative acts of dreaming ancestors are

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21 This song was originally composed in English.
acknowledged – as in the song *Ku nhin* by *Nangu Red Sunset Band* [Nangu Red Sunset Band 06], where the totemic python snake creates the Nangu sandhill by turning himself into it\textsuperscript{22} – the focus of the attention is not the action of the ancestor *per se*, but on the place as imprinted and imbued with these creator’s vitality.

\textbf{6.4.2 Songs and the reconstitution of indigenous values: a sentimental education}

Popular music originated also from the will of the ‘dormitory generation’ to educate their children on matters regarding their heritage. This education is part of the process of reassertion of clan identity, and it is carried on through songs the sentimental impact of which acts to draw the attention of the youngsters to their traditional estate. C.N. (pers.comm) explains: ‘We are talking about our country and our feelings. We sing for our people so our kids can think: “Ah, that’s my country!” and maybe when they are grown up they will go back there.’

Every composer stresses the fact that these songs are ‘good for the kids,’ because they improve their knowledge of their country and, consequently, their personal and group identity. In the following passage, G.C. (pers.comm.) explains what are *country* songs and why he sings them:

What I’m saying in these songs is: this is your country, these are your Dreamings! It’s important for kids to know their country and their Dreamings, where they come from and learn while they are young. When I first saw my country, I cried! I asked the old man to show me the Ngakumarl [Dreaming], I saw the Bebe one [vomit Dreaming] which is close to the airstrip. I only learnt where I came from only in the 70s, and I was already 19 or 20 by then. I understood where I was, where my country was, what sort of language is

\textsuperscript{22} The text states: ‘*Ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra patek nganki-yu*’ which can be translated as ‘the python snake turned into a Dreaming site on our land’ or, more simply, ‘the python snake made our land.’ The word *yinggaangarrawatha*, which recurs several times in the repertoire of every band, refers to this action. Literally translated as *they made a dreaming site,* this term comes from the verb root *-watha*, which, according to Street’s Murrinh-patha dictionary, means ‘to form/fashion a totem site.’ The term also refers to the process of transforming, or ‘turning into’ the land.
my own language. I thought because I was living here in Port Keats all the time, growing up, going to school, I thought Murrinh-patha was my original language, but it wasn't. I learnt that Marri Ngarr was my language when I was 19 or 20 and where my country was, and what sorts of dreaming.  

Nowadays I'm singing. I am sort of addressing young people to make them understand where they are from and what their dreaming is. [Popular songs are] like education stories. That's what it's all about. It would be helpful for young people, nowadays, to tell them where they are coming from, and where their father and grandfather country is – where they belong – and what type of animal is their dreaming and... yo, things like that, yes, education.

Another person proudly remarked that:

If you ask a kid today where he's from he says from Port Keats, they don't know their country. But my kids, they know they are from Kungarbarl. That was from the song! Listen to it over and over. (G.L. pers.comm.)

These two informants grew up in the mission's dormitory, partially excluded from the traditional education their father had enjoyed. Although they acknowledge that there have

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23 By growing up in the Dormitory, G.C.'s generation was actively severed from traditional practices of foraging and travelling through the clan's estate. Since knowledge is fostered through practice and imparted in situ, many people of this generation grew up without knowing their countries and the location of their Dreaming sites. It is therefore not surprising that G.C. thought he belonged to another clan, for he was surrounded by a 'foreign' landscape, and, let us not forget, spoke a foreign language. It was only when he finally left the Dormitory and had access to a means of transportation that he learnt where '[his] country was.'

24 Alberto Furlan, [Fieldnotes, 22.05.2003 – G.C., transcription from a song elicitation session in English]

25 G.L. is referring to the song Thiruliti [Hot Wheels Band 04].
been positive outcomes from this education, for example their English literacy skills, they lament the fact that the separation from their relatives prevented them from understanding their origins. People who started to compose *culture* songs in the mid 1980s regard popular music as fundamental for the education of the younger generations, which, in many cases do not have easy access to their clan estates, and therefore have only limited opportunities to learn about their country. At a time when the influence of ceremonial activity on youngsters has been weakened, popular songs still work, albeit in a different context, to 'keep culture strong.'

What the mission's dormitory had negated, was brought back by a new generation of performers who, certainly were not as knowledgeable as the elders, but managed nonetheless to restructure their world, and their relationship to it, with their new tools (see Sahlins 1985:138). Here, the overarching Aboriginal value of identity drawn from place is re-positioned through the new performance. In addition, these songs have also involved a process of healing and as a result a journey of self re-discovery. Having experienced loss, people have sought to prevent any comparable loss in the new generations. This eagerness to know — *Father, show me the Dreamings!* — resounds in the songs that their children are playing.

Aboriginal people believe that the land is the ultimate source of life but, for the land to maintain this tremor of vitality, it is necessary that people 'look after it.' This is done in several ways: regulating the vegetation by seasonal fires, harvesting the territory, paying regular visits even to the remote places or, in the present case, singing for the land.

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26 The dormitories, for boys and girls, were separated houses located near the old church. Each person was given a number, his or her belongings — for which he or she was held responsible — matched this number. People still remember their numbers today. The dormitory system, initiated in 1942, lasted until 1967.

27 T.N., leader of the women's *Kardu Darrikardu* program for young people and families, often remarked that, after leaving the dormitory, 'it took thirty years to learn about my culture.'

28 The plea asked by the composers to be shown his or her totemic sites, is common in many song of the bands' repertoire. For instance see *Kerdengbe* [Nangu Red Sunset Band 07], *Marri Ngarr People* [Emu Sisters 10], *Kanganthi Thindhi* [Wakal Bengkunh 04].
The ability of songs to nurture the land has been discussed with reference to traditional
genres.29 Similarly, country songs are considered by their composers to be instrumental in the
wellbeing of their estates – ‘We sing for the country, for the dreaming there and for our
ancestors’ (G.C., pers.comm). This practice is also clearly understood by younger generations,
even if they have not yet engaged in the production of songs. C.B., a senior student of Our
Lady of The Sacred Heart School of Wadeye, won the national competition “My Three
Wishes” of Deadly Vibe Magazine, an indigenous publication, in 2002. In her essay, she states
that: ‘My second wish is that my friends and I can be in a band, so we can sing some songs for
our country because our country is getting weaker and we want it to be strong.’

Finally, let me consider the value that people attach to the popular music repertoire. Playing
popular songs through the car’s speakers while travelling toward the country that they are
describing allowed me to understand the deep sentimental relationship that people have with
their country. A sudden feeling of sadness would come upon my fellow travellers when they
heard the country song of a relative who had recently passed away; or, an outburst of joy and
pride might explode at the first notes sounded of the songs belonging to the people in the car.
The expression of love for one’s own country proved to be the most pervasive and most
fundamental quality of popular songs in Wadeye.30 I have always been moved and intrigued by
the manifestations of affection that people express towards places and countries. Seeing adult
men weeping unashamedly at the sight of their totemic estate, made me reflect on the quality
and place of sentiment in the cultural education of Aboriginal people.

29 Classic studies such as Strehlow’s (1971) Songs of Central Australia, point out the importance of songs
in rituals of fertility increase. Other authors, (von Sturmer 1987; Maret 2005 in press) have pointed out
that by singing people establish a contact with the ancestral Dead who are able to ‘manipulate the
environment.’ Singing replenishes the strength of totemic sites, which are the ultimate source of life.
30 This might be said also of traditional music, although this aspect is much more evident in the popular
music production.
Peterson (1972) argues that sentiments attached to places are the foundation of Aboriginal totemism. Myers (1986) discusses emotions as cultural phenomena, articulating the individual dimension of a person within his/her social environment. As such, Myers suggests (1986:107): 'emotions are relational, the relationship they constitute are given meaning and value by social processes in which they are embedded.' From this perspective, through practive – and in this case, particularly, music performance – sentiments become educational tools for the process of identity construction.

Children grow up in an environment where sentiments of affection towards country are constantly expressed. Children are taught the virtues and values of their estate, and the beauty of its landscape feature is constantly stressed. They are taught to feel for their country.\(^3\) Ideally this process takes place during frequent trips to these estates, where people engage in hunting and foraging activities. One's own country is always considered benign. As such, it is surrounded by a positive aura that pervades people walking through it. In sum, people feel happy while they reside on their estate. This is because of their closeness to the ultimate source of life, the springs of Dreaming sites where the life trail left by totemic ancestors eternally produces human beings, flora and fauna. This positive feeling holds an educational value. It establishes a fundamental connection between the idyllic nature of the country and the feeling of belonging to that particular estate. 'I am feeling well because this is my country,' implies 'This is my country, therefore I am feeling well here.' Conversely – and this is important for popular songs – being removed from one's country is a source of deep sadness and discontent. Songs articulate this paradigm in order to provoke sentiments whose aim is to connect people with their estate.

\(^3\) Even when children do not have access to their estate due to a lack of transportation, adults constantly tell stories about their country, describing all the positive features, instilling in the youngsters a desire to visit it.
Feld (1990:131) describes a similar technique, with regards to the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, arguing that 'When Kaluli compose and perform songs, they assume that their audiences will be prepared to listen to them in a reflective and nostalgic way. They consciously utilize this assumption to construct texts that will make their audiences attend to and think about imagery in an amplified manner.' What is evident through the analysis of popular songs at Wadeye, is that sentiments are used by indigenous people to construct identity through declaring affection towards particular places. Sentiments are devices, constituting an educational narrative that highlights affiliation with an estate and a network of kinship relationships.

It is sentiments that ultimately link a person with his country and his ancestors, and provide a powerful means for recognition of the self in a specific place in the world and within a specific network of relationships between individuals, clans and their estates. Previously we have encountered one of the primary elements of this process, a specific expression that appears virtually in every popular music composition, and in several traditional songs: *da thingarru*. This expression immediately attracted my interest, not only for its ubiquity, but also for the depth of meaning that it implies. *Da*, the Murrinh-patha noun class term for time and place, can be translated as *country*. *Thingarru*, on the other hand, has no literal translation. People often translate it as *being sorry for*. This feeling does not appear to be completely negative, but rather is a *double entendre*. One informant said that it is 'like a person when he is feeling sorry for his country, he can feel sorry both ways: happy, or sad. It's just a feeling that the person expresses for his country.' (C.N. pers.comm). Seeing my bafflement at his explanation, he added: 'It's like for you: how do you feel about your country [Italy] now that you are here?' I realized that I could relate to that mixed feeling of affection and loss that is typical of people who are living far from what they consider their 'home.'

*Da thingarru* stands as declaration of love for one's own homeland. The constant desire to move towards it, the sad feeling of living somewhere else, and the hope that one day the person will go back, to stay, where he or she 'really belongs.' *Da thingarru* is an expression of
yearning, and is the sentimental force that drives the composition of songs. This force derives from the constant tension between dislocated residence in the township and the country of spiritual residence of the clan’s members. The translation of *da thingarru* must maintain that yearning spirit that includes so many meanings. It is therefore glossed in this text as ‘Ah, my country!’ Desire, love, sadness are all included in it. When the composer utters this expression, he or she teaches the people of the audience to feel and love their country, and therefore to identify with it (see also Myers 1986:105-109). It is a ‘feedback’ process in which music produces sentiments that in return elaborate the significance of music.

6.5 Popular music and the maintenance of relatedness: songs as commodities, performative reciprocity

Popular music emerged in a context of renewed salience for specificities of relatedness. Communal identity and relationships based on Christian worship (‘We are all equal in front of one God’) began to fade with the withdrawal of mission authority. On the other hand, clan identities re-asserted themselves partly to the detriment of the regional affiliations that have sustained traditional ceremonial performances. Finally, in the context of settlement life, the impact of commodities and cash encouraged the articulation of denser bilateral networks of kin that also could be re-affirmed through performance and the exchange of songs between individual relatives, and between different bands.

In the course of this thesis, I have underlined the fundamental role of musical performances in the constitution of relatedness. Discussion has focussed on indigenous intention and agency that in *Dhanba* songs were epitomized by the performances of the Little People that provided a dreamer with a song. As I have noted above (see above, page 164), in these dreams spirit beings associated with different estates perform and visit each other, thus providing human beings with the model for ritual dances and the rules of this engagement. With their performances, the Little People produce relatedness, and so did human beings when they ‘find’ and use the songs and dances seen in dreams.
In popular music, human beings have appropriated this agency of spirit beings (see Myers 1986:44-53). The process has also been more explicit as songs were intentionally composed ‘to be given away,’ to embellish a connection with an individual or group related to a member or members of a band. Composers, whether they were asked or not (see above, page 210), wrote songs for other people describing the country of the recipients, and then gave these songs away. That is, they did not play them anymore.\footnote{B.N. and G.L. are clear on this point: ‘[the person that asks for the song] He owns that place, so the writer of that song, he can’t sing it now, he just forgets it. Forget everything. He gives it to the one who owns the land.’ It is interesting to note that, in other contexts, traditional songs also are ‘given away’, or transmitted. Redmond (2001:348) notes that, in the Kimberley region, ‘Mejerrin songs were passed or ‘sold’ on to exchange partners living on a remote cattle station near Gibb River after the death of the original composer in the 1970s.’} This act confirmed a connection between the composer and the recipient, the former now having the right to ask for something in return.\footnote{R.M. told me several times that he could have easily ‘got tobacco’ by ‘making up’ a song for his brother-in-law.} Popular music proved to be effective for this purpose, with people composing songs especially for close kin, but also for other relatives.

George Cumaiyi of \textit{Wakal Bengkunh Band}, composed various songs for a number of different countries. Besides those about his own estate, he composed songs for his mother’s country (\textit{Mun Mum} [Wakal Bengkunh Band 21]), for his father’s mother’s country (\textit{Werntek Ngyanayi} [Wakal Bengkunh Band 07]), for his wife’s country (\textit{Kanganthi Thindi} [Wakal Bengkunh 15]), for his brother’s wife’s country (\textit{Kanganthi Kulthill} – Wakal Bengkunh Band 11), and for members of other families of his clan (\textit{Tharwargar} [Wakal Bengkunh Band 05]). The connections established with these ‘gifts’ also confirmed his access to a number of different countries where he often spent his weekends taking his family on fishing or hunting trips.\footnote{The series of connections that people establish with different kin partners are reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) model of the ‘rhizome’ (on this subject, see Ramsey 2001), where relatedness develop from one point towards multiple directions.}
With the consolidation of cash economy and the implementation of portable recording technology, the exchange of songs became less kin-based and more commoditized. In this case people traded songs — song items recorded on tapes and/or CDs — for material goods or services. People called this transaction nanthi kulu, thus comparing it with the traditional ceremonial exchange of goods. Younger generations today see this exchange of songs as an instrument to strengthen relatedness in the same way as traditional nanthi kulu is still perceived. R.M. (pers.comm.), stresses the importance of this trade and compares the traditional ceremonial exchange and the production of new songs:

If you stop that kulu, we’re enemy, we fight each other. Kulu is still going on, generation to generation to come, still going. All songs are kulu. Dhanba, Wangga, Lirrga, These [are] things that old people give to the new generation, and we tell him: “Ah, your grandfather was singing this song, you got to help him [passing on the tradition]!” The old people telling him. “Why me?” “It’s your grandfather’s song and your father’s song!” [...] And these new songs are the same, it’s all the same. Like Dhanba and Lirrga and Wangga, the same. For this one is going back also to white people so they got to understand. [...] My father didn’t make this one, him only clapstick, but today new generations have this one, but they are the same, all the same, it doesn’t matter that bloke sings traditional songs, we sing traditional song too!

This statement is particularly striking as it describes the character of popular music in Wadeye. R.M. proudly affirms that his band is singing traditional songs. He is not concerned with stylistic structures — bands songs do not encompass musical patterns of traditional songs. Instead, he has in mind the motivations and the procedures with which popular music mirrors

\[\text{35} \text{ Traditional nanthi kulu still take place during men’s initiation ceremonies. Tapes exchanged in the modern nanthi kulu can travel a long distance, even beyond the usual boundaries of local clans exchange. In one case, a CD made its way to Borroloola, more than a thousand kilometres from Wadeye, in the space of a week.}\]
traditional expressions. For R.M. popular songs are instrumental for the process of re-voicing indigenous values. They are based on the same continuity of clan groups (‘It’s your grandfather and your father’s song’). They are instrumental in the preservation of indigenous culture and non-indigenous Australians can also understand them. In sum, they are the contemporary counterpart of Dhanba and other traditional songs.

There is a difference, however, that must be appreciated. Whereas elders refer to nanthi kulu as a ‘gift’ between parties, younger people who exchange songs stress the value of the transaction, whether a song is exchanged for tobacco, meat, or transportation or for a cash amount. Still, there is no simple assimilation to market exchange values. A tape’s value in exchange depends on the importance that the buyer attributes to the song and this is always contextual. A song that refers to the country of a recently deceased relative, for instance, usually has great value because people can use it to remember him or her, instead of openly uttering a name.

At a time when other expressions of relatedness have become less effective or infrequent – as is the case for ceremonial life in the past ten years – popular music also provides an arena for performative reciprocity. Community concerts started in the late 1980s in Wadeye, when the local sport and recreation hall was transformed into a stage for the so-called Battle of the Bands. G.C. recalls those days:

We had battle of the bands, where the basketball court is, and the old people used to judge, sitting in the front. And $200 dollars for the best and $100 for the second and nothing for the third. And we got the $200...

Later, the construction of the Community Club, which included an external band stage, provided a better venue and the musical scene blossomed. D.K. confirms that “During the Club time, everybody had a set of instruments in their camps and at the club, everybody was mad
about writing their own songs.' Weekend performances saw the bands take turns on the stage and people sang and danced to their songs.

We had several bands every night. There was Nangu Band, and when people heard their songs they stood up and danced. Kids in front, then men and women at the back. Then came, Wakal Bengkunh Band and their mob standing and dancing now, then Emu Sisters and so on...we had a great time! [G.C., pers.comm.]

Indeed, it must have been a 'great time' considering that the larger part of the popular song repertoire was written in the years when the Club was reopened for the second time (1992-1995). G.C. stresses this fundamental point: the performances of each band attracted people whose country was the subject of the song that was played at that moment. There was an immediate recognition of identity between the song, the land, and the group of people that was engaging in the performance.

This practice echoes traditional music performance where people manifest their affiliation to country by performing for their song-genre-based group in a ritualized ceremonial exchange with others. The difference here is that whereas not everyone is a performer in a traditional context, anyone can stand up and dance for his country during a popular concert. The fact that the event might include specialist figures as designated dancers does not diminish the value of the extemporaneous individual performance. This is important at two levels. On the one hand, it provides a vehicle for personal identification with a particular estate, namely the one sung of in the piece. On the other, the collective performance of different bands allows each person to have a broader vision of the world, as songs evoke a number of estates. A person's identity is therefore actively constituted through a bivalent process: he or she is part of a group – self
(clan) identity — and also part of a larger network of groups where identity is constituted by juxtaposition with others. A process of reciprocal recognition takes place.36

Public performance also demonstrates an active level of engagement between clans when one group plays a song that does not refer to its estate but is composed to sing another group’s land.37 D.K. (pers.comm.) explains the reasons behind this practice: ‘Each band sings different homelands, it’s like giving them a present. Singing from the stage, to make them proud of their country, to give them a good feeling.’ ‘Give them a good feeling’ or ‘make them happy’ are typical expressions that occur every time a musical performance is carried out, especially when it is orientated towards the gratification of another group. This is interpreted not only as an act of kindness, but also as ritual behaviour marked by reciprocity: by making people happy, performers return ‘good feelings’ as ‘countervalue’ for established relations.38

Popular music performers do not belong to the generation of performers of traditional music. There is no overlap between them.39 Moreover, forms of reciprocity have changed.

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36 Today, Wadeye’s bands are not playing publicly any more, as there are no available venues in the township, but people have found another way to ‘get the message out.’ Disco nights are run on the weekends at the local recreation hall. At these venues people bring their favourite music to be played through a p.a. equipment, and often people bring their country songs and dance. Disco nights also provide an excellent field of research into youngsters’ clustering habits. Teenaged girls and boys are divided into gangs which are named after their favourite musical groups. During the night, they request their song to be played: that is, for example, Kylie Girls would dance a song by Australian pop-artist Kylie Minogue. It is therefore possible to understand immediately which group is on the dance floor by knowing the name of the artist whose songs is playing at the moment, and vice versa.

37 Performing for someone else is also a typical characteristic of traditional music ceremonies, where a group leads a ceremony for another group (see Chapter Four).

38 In one particular case the prolonged, extemporaneous, performance that occurred after a ceremony in Timber Creek, was a demonstration of gratitude for hospitality and food.

39 Gerald Longmair, a didgeridu player for Lirrga, and occasionally Wangga, is also a member of Hot Wheels Band. Although he performs in both genres, his role as musician in traditional performance is only marginal, that is, he is not in charge of the outcome of the ceremonies. To use an indigenous expression, he is not a ‘boss’ for the ‘business.’
considerably. Nonetheless, they can still be of considerable strategic social importance. The case of Emu Sisters band is an appropriate example. The female members of this band are related to M.J. (whom we encountered in the previous chapter), whose group has little access to community resources. During the period of tension between M.J. and the powerful Council group, the band was highly productive, recording many songs for a number of different domestic families some of whom involved members of the Council group.\footnote{They recorded the song *Memari* [Emu Sisters 05] for their classificatory nephew [DS], S.B., of Murrinh-patha origin. Other songs were exchanged with relatives from their mother side, and others with their classificatory husband's relatives.} While M.J. did not utilize his own relations with the group, the band members confirmed their relatedness and made various demands for goods and service in exchange for their songs.

In this chapter I have shown how popular music originated in a particular historical context at Wadeye. Popular music has been instrumental in giving expression to forms of clan-based identity subdued by the mission and re-invigorated in the post-mission era. It has also acted to mute and deflect some of the forces for individuation and fragmentation brought by secular governance and a cash economy. Therefore it is inaccurate to suggest that popular music simply stemmed from cultural contact with, or the increasing dominance of, a non-indigenous genre. This process of interpretation and transformation of popular song has also involved marked Aboriginal agency in which particular intentionality in the local milieu has left its mark on the numerous songs produced. As a consequence, popular songs at Wadeye have a number of distinctive dimensions: they are symbols of identity for a variety of groups and especially clans linked with estates. They are also an educational device and, in everyday life, media of relatedness. In a way similar (but different) to traditional music, popular songs have allowed people to sustain an experience of continuity within a context of historical change. In the following chapter, I will focus on yet other ways in which people at Wadeye have sought to negotiate a cultural balance that ultimately might encompass change.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ‘NEW’ THAMARRURR REGIONAL COUNCIL AND THE ‘OLD’ CIRCUMCISION CEREMONIES

7.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have discussed the ways in which different performance genres have responded to and interpreted a process of change. *Malkarrin* registered an early sense of ‘something different’ that ultimately became Christianity in the region. As I have suggested, it seems likely that the origin of the *Malkarrin* songs was in events that preceded even the arrival of Fr. Docherty at Wadeye. *Dhanba* and its linked forms, *Lirrga* and *Wangga* reconfigured and also reclaimed a fundamental mode of indigenous social relations: the affirmation of different identities through ceremonial exchange. In this case, three language group-based mobs, the Marrinh-patha, the Marri Ngarr, and the Marri Amu/Marri Tjevin/Magati Ke gave expression to their relations around Port Keats in the 1960s through the medium of an open ceremonial exchange. This complex still continues today, albeit sporadically. Finally, popular music of the 1980s and 1990s was played by and identified in terms of individuated clan groups and associated with estates reinterpreted through the outstation movement. Popular music has been

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1 Performances associated with the tripartite exchange occur today mainly in the context of circumcisions, funerals, signings and ragburnings.
a medium for clan identity and for both group and individual exchanges that reference past practices but also, in some degree, current commodity exchange.

One of the characteristics that the three genres share is their role in interpreting change and maintaining a sense of cultural continuity among the people who congregated around Port Keats, and now reside at Wadeye. Moreover, it is fair to say that this has been an implicit, as much as an explicit, role. Among the genres, the popular music movement has been most explicit in its role as an educator. Popular culture songs were intended to and did re-connect young people with country.

These genres contrast with Harry Luke Kolumboort’s account of the founding of Port Keats. In his narrative, Harry Luke explicitly positions his clan’s permission for the mission as a generic event of inter-cultural relations. In terms defined by Terence Turner, this generic permission described by Harry Luke gives his narrative a truly mythic dimension (see Turner 1988b:252). In an explicit and purposive way, Harry Luke’s narrative proposes both cultural continuity and autonomy for indigenous people by virtue of the dialogue established between Yek Diminin and the missionaries.

This chapter will address two further, related instances of the way in which Aboriginal people in and around Wadeye have engaged with institutions of the nation state and sustained a sense of their own specificity and cultural continuity. In each case, like Harry Luke, people have maintained an explicit and public discourse of indigeneity in the face of a non-indigenous order. At the same time, these two developments also differ from Harry Luke’s narrative. Where he identified continuity in terms of a dialogue with the mission, the forms of discourse identified here rest on asserting specificity in terms of a link between the present and the pre-mission past. The import of these discursive forms is that if the mission can be culturally encompassed in the way that Harry Luke suggested, it can also be transcended through contemporary forms of governance and rite that retrieve a cultural past.
The two developments that I propose to discuss, with their concomitant but different types of performance, are (i) the emergence of a new indigenized form of community governance, Thamarrurr; and (ii) a recent circumcision ceremony in which the principal organizer underlined the da murtak or ‘old days’ character of the procedures. I will also indicate the way in which the realization of Thamarrurr influenced the organization of the circumcision ceremony and some of its innovative features. The general point I wish to make is that the talk and practice around these events has been part of a developing public and assertive discourse of indigeneity at Wadeye. Yet, this discourse has only really enjoyed a space of effective disclosure since the demise of the mission. Although indigenous residents at Wadeye were not inclined to repudiate the mission, neither were they free to the degree that they are now to explore their sense of indigenous tradition.

This project has become a pressing one as the impact of the cash economy and secular governance — with the ‘rational’ authority of its bureaucratic order — bears down on Wadeye. In this process, none of the performance genres alone, or together, is equal to containing the conflict and distress that is common at Wadeye today. It is for this reason among others that people have turned to issues of governance again, and to the rites involved in making and disciplining men. Therefore this account of Thamarrurr and a circumcision ceremony shows how the negotiations of value over time that were an implicit part of the song genres have become increasingly explicit in the post-mission era. As life circumstances have become more difficult, Aboriginal people at Wadeye have become determined to assert their identity and act to maintain a cultural specificity. In Marshall Sahlins’ terms, they have begun to ‘own’ or take responsibility for their own history (see Sahlins 2000:488-495).

7.2 From Kardu Numbila to a ‘new’ form of government

As the authority of the mission progressively faltered, and with it the organization of everyday practices, indigenous people were drawn into a dialogue with federal and Territorian
interlocutors. Although the era of ‘self-determination’ came with a certain recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty over land, the same did not apply to indigenous models of social organization. From an administrative point of view, the dialogue between the various clans that lived in Wadeye was re-molded according to imposed ideas of political representation.

The ethnographic literature regarding the relations between indigenous people and the modern nation state during the early period of self-determination has stressed the fact that effort was spent in ‘production of communities.’ Among others, Cowlislaw (1999:16) notes that, according to these policies, ‘members of Aboriginal groups had to come to think of themselves as belonging, not to moieties, clans and skin groupings but to a community, with a concern for its development and its future.’ To an extent this was also true of Wadeye. If the mission created the condition for the constitution of the ‘mob’ identity and the tripartite ceremonial exchange, the Kardu Numida Council involved western ideas of representation albeit with reference to the Wadeye language groups. The Council had a board of 14 councillors elected by seven group clusters defined in terms of spatial and linguistic units. This clustering of representation transgressed the autonomy of individual clans that numbered 20 in the Wadeye area. Decisions were made with reference to common interests, but were also ratified by the traditional owners of the land on which Wadeye stood. Moreover, administrative power was given to young people who could manage ‘whitefella business’ and their authority, in turn, tended to conflict with the traditional authority of elders. In sum, community representation was referred to the landowners but also administered by ‘young fellas’ with an ambiguous status. This struggle between intents and powers led to tensions that resulted in the withdrawal of many clans’ councillors from the Council. For several elections in the early 1990s, the

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2 This inevitable procedure -- residents on somebody else’s land need to abide by the rules of the rightful estate holders -- had a twofold effect. Non-owning residents felt put aside in the decision-making process as the dialogue between indigenous people and the nation-state representatives often became a matter between government representatives and traditional landowners. At the same time, Yek Diminin people became subject to increasing pressures to provide services and resources over which they did not have any power.
landowning clan on whose land Wadeye stands, the *Yek Diminin* people, had been left virtually alone in the decision-making process. This too inevitably caused tensions, and distress for *Yek Diminin*.

During this period there was a growing number of social issues in Wadeye, especially concerning substance abuse and related violence. Cash economy in conjunction with unemployment and poor literacy skills disoriented people's everyday practice and their ideas about appropriate expectations. People felt an increasing sense of displacement now that their world was changing once again. After a series of riots in and about Wadeye, beginning in 1988, media reports exacerbated the situation, *The Northern Territory News* describing the community as a 'hell hole' several times.³

It was in this context that local initiatives, and developments within the Northern Territory and federal governments, coalesced to generate a new mode of governance for Wadeye that was more responsive to indigenous practice and expectations. The result of the ensuing dialogue materialized in March 2003 with the official constitution of the *Thamarrur Regional Council*.

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³ Examples of these reports can be found in the *Northern Territory News*, 08.03.87, 06.04.90, 13.03.95, 31.12.95. These reports are part of the (post)colonial imagery developed around Aboriginal communities which echoes the colonial imagery of the 'savage and treacherous blacks.' Although the image has changed – no more 'savages' are to be found anywhere – and been replaced by the idea of 'disadvantaged indigenous people' (to be helped in the best case) or 'hopeless subsistence-exploiting mob' (in the worse), the intent of these reports is very similar to Fabian's *denial of coevalness* (Fabian 1983:31): the reiterated attempt to deny to the cultural other the same space in time as the investigating subjects. In the case of the media reports, moral values have taken the place of Time, but the aim is the same: to separate indigenous Australians from the everyday life of the nation/state.
7.3 *Thamarrurr*, an indigenous initiative in governance

In June 2004, *Thamarrurr* Region Councillors made the following statement:

*Thamarrurr* is the cornerstone of our society. It is our way of working together, cooperating with each other, and it is also the basis of our governance system.

In the early days we looked after our families, our clans and our people through *Thamarrurr*. We arranged ceremonies, marriages, sorted out tribal disputes and many other things. We were people living as a nation. People living our own life.

Suddenly, in the 1930s, white people, traders, prospectors and others came on to people’s country. We started to fight back because they were coming on to our land. The government said that we needed help and asked the Church to come in. They brought Western law and a modern way of living.

*Thamarrurr* then went underground. After that the system never really worked for our people. All our previous systems of law and governance were replaced. At the same time the old people thought it was a good thing. But many were also confused. It was a quiet time, a time when we depended on the missionaries. For many years we were directionless. We were told to follow rules and that’s it.

But the spirit of the people was still there. Some of our people began to get restless and gradually we starting (sic) moving, with the help of many people, to get our governance back. We became more positive and we began to see that this is what we are. Control was reclaimed.

We saw that *Thamarrurr* gave back people the right to speak for themselves and talk about themselves. We realized that all is equal between people. Even the smallest clans now have a say. We now can stand up and say “I've got the right to have a say.”

A really big change is happening. We are moving forward. And it will continue. In many areas, such as the school and other places, we are taking leading roles [...].
At the end of the day we just want to be treated like ordinary Australians. We want our people to have the same living conditions and opportunities as normal Australians. We want our kids to have a chance. (cited in Taylor 2004:v)

_Thamarrurr_ translates from the Murrinh-patha as ‘coming together for ceremonies.’ It is also glossed as ‘coming together to work.’ The site of this co-operative work was and still is conceived to be a ceremonial site and the paradigms of this ‘co-operation’ are the ritual services that one group or groups offer to another in the course of funerals, the opening of houses, ragburnings, circumcision ceremonies and the like. Services ‘free up’ the group that is most concerned with a particular event and that group, in turn, will offer a payment in like kind for the ‘job’ that has been done for it. As Taylor (2004:9) notes, however, in pre-settlement days it was at ceremonial gatherings that other matters were also addressed: ‘the different clan groups in the Daly River/Port Keats region would meet periodically to preside over issues of ceremony, [but also] use of natural resources, economic transactions and minor law and justice matters.’

_Thamarrurr_ is, today, a regional council that oversees an area of 5,000 square kilometres (see below Map 7.1). Two councillors each are elected from the 20 clans that populate Wadeye. The Council is one of seven pilot projects around Australia sponsored by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) with the participation of the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) as the leading agency in the project.⁴ Accordingly, three areas of major interest have been recognized: housing, women and family, and youth. These pilot projects – part of the COAG program of Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots (ICCP) – are based on the principle that responsibilities within these agreements, between local government, the Northern

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⁴ Since Wadeye is the largest Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, it was an obvious choice for the trial. The other pilot projects are: Cape York in Queensland; in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands in South Australia; the Kimberley Region in Western Australia, Shepparton in Victoria, Murdi Paaki in New South Wales and Tasmania.
Territory and Commonwealth Governments, are equally shared. These pilots are intended to provide flexible programs and services based on priorities within a community. At the same time, each aims to develop a ‘negotiated regional development plan’ that is subject to ‘a regular process of evaluation and monitoring against measurable outcomes’ (Taylor 2004:2).

During the months I spent in Wadeye, I witnessed a number of meetings between local representatives and the various agencies. People visited Wadeye on a daily basis introducing new policy projects, checking the indigenous feedback on their propositions, and working together with local people for a better development of the community. In October 2002 a commitment of intent was signed by the various agencies participating in the project and the representatives of various clans. In a ceremony which, significantly, was held on a site overlooking the area, leading indigenous men and women spoke – in their own languages – noting the importance of an agreement that involved both various levels of government and all, even the smallest, clans. The new agreement, rather than relying on just one landowner would charge each clan with the responsibility for decisions regarding their own estate. The township would still be the site for distribution of resources, but a progressive outstation delocalization is the project’s ultimate aim.

In the months that followed this initial meeting, indigenous people of Wadeye assiduously investigated the organizations of their administrative partners. Refusing to enter the agreement in a disadvantaged position, they sought to understand the structures and procedures of their government interlocutors. In a series of workshops run by the local town clerk, a number of men directly involved in the development of the Thamarrurr agreement analysed national and state forms of governance and representation. Groups analysed the Australian Constitution, the composition of the Federal and State parliaments, the Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, and other relevant institutions and laws.
Map 7.1  Area of jurisdiction of Thamarrurr Regional Council
As Taylor (2004:9) aptly comments,

The purpose of these workshops was to explore and give form to a governance structure that could provide both a legal representation of government functions as required by the contemporary world while reasserting and enabling customary residential rights, albeit in a contemporary form.

After months of preparation, the Thamarrurr Constitution was officially gazetted in mid-March 2003 and the tripartite agreement was signed on March 21st, 2003 by Northern Territory Chief Minister, Hon. Clare Martin, and Federal Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Amanda Vanstone.

L. M. put his own cast on the indigenous inspiration for this new form of governance:

The elders got together and thought. They were thinking about the time when people came together to help each other, like when people were invited to feed in one country: “Hey we have too much of this – it could have been barramundi - can you come and help us to clear up this?” So that’s the time when Thamarrurr started to reemerge. (L M. pers. comm.)

Moreover, a number of features of Thamarrurr underline its indigenous origins. As noted, its organization confers a significant autonomy on each of the 20 clans. This autonomy is reinforced by acknowledging that Thamarrurr traditionally was episodic. That is, people would come together for an event and then return to their estates. Similarly, initiation ceremonies in the past (see Stanner 1989:109) were gatherings that involved a small group of initiates and a group of performers usually from a neighbouring area.
Thamarrurr re-emerged, as an adaptation of a traditiona structure, with the intent to re-gain control over the decision-making process, to re-structure the Western-like administration around an indigenous framework by focusing attention on the administration ‘event.’ In short, rather than elaborating a fixed agenda out of context, it was proposed that issues be managed as they emerged, and with reference to the clan or clans directly involved. It would not be the case that groups were involved in other groups’ business. Recalling Aboriginal social dynamics of aggregation and dispersal across space and time became a way for Wadeye residents to modify the structures of governance (see Myers 1986:71-73).

In addition, Wadeye men underlined to me that the framework of relations is based on the concept of exchange, or nanthi kulu. This term, which is also invoked in discussions of popular music, refers to a ceremonial exchange of goods which takes place along a line of trade that originates in Belyuen (an Aboriginal community situated on the Cox Peninsula west of Darwin), passes through Wadeye and continues through Timber Creek, on the western border of the Northern Territory. From here the route divides either to Kununurra and further east to Broome in Western Australia, or southward to Yarralin and further down to Yuendumu, in the Western Desert. Bamboo shafts come down from Belyuen. Boomerangs and pearl shells come in exchange from the desert and the west coast of Western Australia.\(^5\) Although not with the regularity of the past, this ceremonial exchange still takes place on the occasion of sacred men’s ceremonies. Nanthi kulu has come to mean many things in Wadeye. It stands as a paradigm of traditional interaction between clans. It also stands for any exchange between individuals whether of a ritual or more mundane nature including, as we have seen, the production and distribution of audiotapes.

Nanthi kulu is also the term with which people of Wadeye describe the new Thamarrurr agreement, an exchange between local and other levels of government on the basis of equality.

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\(^5\) Other authors have investigated these exchanges in these regions (see Akerman 1980; Akerman and Stanton 1993; Redmond 2001; see also Stanner 1933-34)
Naulhi kulu is, too, the principle on which the discussion of issues among the board members is carried on: the identity and independence of each clan allows discussions between smaller groups of clans to take place independently. Therefore people say that when they discuss matters of interest with other groups, they are 'having a kulu,' both when this relates to common, community issues discussed with representatives of federal or Territory institutions, and when discussions pertain to strictly local concerns.

There was also an interesting departure in Thamarrurr. The new structure and procedures needed councillors who could productively, and rapidly, understand and interact with a western bureaucracy. In a decision that had no precedent, the group of elders delegated the power to the middle-aged group, or kardu keke, to 'take care of' what once was classified as 'whitefella business' but had now become a 'blackfella' matter as well. This decision is quite revolutionary if seen from a strictly indigenous perspective: full responsibility in corporate matters usually comes at an older age and the middle-aged are, in many cases, still apprentices. On the other hand, the privileging of kardu keke is consistent with indigenous forms of respect for knowledge. Ritual pre-eminence has never been based on age per se but, rather, on outstanding knowledge of ceremonial matters and procedures (see also Dussart 2000:104-105). In matters of public administration, the middle-aged group showed a more extensive knowledge, and an ability to interact confidently with their non-indigenous counterparts. Moreover, the authority of these kardu keke remains confined to council rather than ritual matters and will need to be responsive to the people who are most influential in clans.

The knowledge of these kardu keke has also been the product of years of commitment. L.M. (pers.comm.) explains in a fashion that implicitly references the acquisition of ritual knowledge:

We gained respect by working for the community in this [council] office. And this was not easy, you need to go through a series of hurdles, stages during which the old men
learnt to trust the middle-aged [men]. This is what we know, working in this office is our job and they are looking at us now. We are ready to take over!

*Kardu keke* are part of the generation of children raised under the dormitory system. They were the first generation to have access to secondary education in Darwin, men and women who were born and raised in a ‘two-law’ community (see Austin-Broos 1996). *Thamarrurr* claims that the pace of the changes and developments in the community needs to be controlled by the people of Wadeye. They are conscious of the radical changes ahead of them and are aware also that improvements can only come from a good understanding of the territory and national institutions. For this reason, people like L.M. have been involved in workshops on various subjects that aimed to broaden their knowledge of the Australian system of governance. With their knowledge of ‘whitefella business,’ their experience in dealing with council issues, and their knowledge of indigenous values, this middle-aged management is the best ‘performer’ in this context.

I now turn to some aspects of meetings in the days that directly preceded the final *Thamarrurr* agreement that involved not only chief ministers, but also a party of 50 or more notaries and some more familiar modes of indigenous performance.

7.4 *Thamarrurr* workshops and the ceremony of agreement

For a part of the male population, the day in Wadeye begins at the back of the *Kardu Numida* Council office. Men gather, cups of tea in hand, waiting for the daily agenda to emerge. On a daily basis, the *kardu keke* of *Thamarrurr* attended meetings with various government representatives, sitting in workshops on various subjects prepared for the meetings in Darwin, and scheduled locally by the town clerk. Cowlishaw (1999:16) has pointed out that in the era of self-determination meetings ‘became the most common practice through which communities were produced’ and Myers (1986:275) has observed that, regardless of their effectiveness, meetings have sustained a ‘sense of shared identity among people who are coresiding.’ The
Thamarrurr meetings were also concerned with the production of a community but in quite a different way. Rather than trying to craft a community, these meetings acknowledged and highlighted differences. Within Thamarrurr, each clan would participate in the management with the same decision-making power both for matters of regional development and with regard to their own, specific affairs.

The kardu keke that participated in these meetings belonged to a number of different clans and were mindful of the responsibility that autonomy also brought. It is a ‘hard job,’ I was told. ‘Sometimes my head is spinning at the end of the day, but we must be here, it’s for our future.’

L.M. is one of the most committed people, a man of the middle-aged generation who enjoys the trust of the elders in his work for the development of the community. L.M. underlined the historical importance of these organizational developments and warned other people regarding the responsibilities they had now assumed: ‘We are here now, and it’s not mission-time anymore. There is no superintendent now to tell us what to do. It’s up to us now! And we must take our responsibilities. We’re on the driver’s seat now and we must be careful.’

It is important to note that, like others of the dormitory generation, L.M. had a sense of the mission as a total social system. Therefore he had a sense of the real possibilities in Thamarrurr – for greater local independence and self-determination. For this reason, L.M. and others like him were committed to a process in which almost every day a meeting occurred and weekends came as a relief for both indigenous and non-indigenous staff.

The meetings which preceded the signing of the Thamarrurr agreement in March 2003 provide a good example of interactions and representations that shaped these occasions. To allow a more comfortable participation for the female kardu keke, the meetings were held in the common room of the Women’s Association Centre. Several clan representatives, although not

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1 These meetings were held on the 18th, 19th and 20th of March 2003.
all of them, were present along with a Territory government project officer, part of the non-indigenous staff of Kardu Numida Council, the store-keepers, and a few indigenous and non-indigenous representatives from Our Lady of The Sacred Heart School. The signing day was seen as the culminating moment of months of work, a turning point and a new start in the lives of people at Wadeye. The clan representatives were also aware of the press coverage that Wadeye would have around the Northern Territory and even nation-wide.

Sheets of butchers’ paper – an indispensable item in any project planning – were distributed and, as the meeting began, people wrote down the twenty clan names, and the families included in each of them, and hung the sheets on the walls. I.M. pointed out, once again, how responsibility should be taken by every single clan through their representatives, and stressed the fact that the new council had been constituted by the independent will of the indigenous people of Wadeye. The responsibility for the development of their community is ‘back in the hands of Aboriginal people,’ and therefore, M.N. remarked, people should be aware that their ‘commitment is necessary.’ T.N., one of the leading women on the board, stressed the fact that the day marked a special occasion and, indeed, was the foundation of a new life for the community that should actively engage the new organization. To emphasize that the following day’s events would be a foundation for the future, and especially for young people’s lives, T.N. proposed that three people from each clan, representing elders, the middle-aged and youth should sign the agreement. Logistics did not allow this, but the importance of the future role of the young was stressed by delegating two youngsters to present the community statement to the press.

The agreement was described as namhi kulu, and it was emphasized that in order to participate in this exchange, the government needed to understand properly ‘where people from here come from.’ Interestingly, this affirmation did not refer only to the knowledge that white people should have about indigenous culture, but also to the history of the township of Wadeye itself—to the changes, struggles, and achievements people had experienced in the past seventy years.
This history was taken as a testimony to Wadeye peoples' pathway through the Australian nation state. It was also decided that a ceremonial dance should accompany the process of signing the agreement. It seemed natural to choose Dhanba, since this song-genre belonged to the group on whose land the signing was taking place.

The second day of these preparatory meetings was dedicated to the minute-by-minute arrangements for the ceremony. It was decided that the Thamarrurr Land Rangers should meet the party of government representatives at the airport. Thence they would be escorted to the Council offices for refreshments. The school staff and pupils would then go to the ceremonial ground in the middle of town, in front of the Dirrnu Ngukumarl Art Gallery. Every effort was made to plan the day comprehensively so that things would 'run smoothly' as M.N. remarked.

On the third day of the meetings, the elders joined the middle-aged management to give their approval for the program. They stressed the need to acknowledge the authority of the landowners of Wadeye. This concern was met by the decision to read a statement on this matter at the beginning of the ceremony. It was also suggested that a few people drive around the community with the government project officer to 'let people know' about the events of the following day.

There are a number of interesting points that emerged in these meetings. The acknowledgement of difference and independence of the single estates has been the sine qua non for the establishment of Thamarrurr Regional Council. The whole concept of Thamarrurr involves a clan-based differentiation and interaction. By writing down the clans and family names on butchers' paper on the walls, people were writing down the basic units of the new system which are also the 'building blocks' of Wadeye society. The continuity between Thamarrurr now and pre-mission practice was stressed by giving the new agreement the status of nanthi kulu, meaning that the exchanges between local and federal and Territory governments would be equal.
This was seen to repair a situation in which indigenous skills have often been neglected by administrative bodies that, at best, have acknowledged the structural organization of indigenous society. They have not, however, valued techniques of relatedness that have been a central and perennial part of Aboriginal sociality. \(^7\) *Thamarrurr* stands as the recognition that these skills exist and that they can be applied today. The characterization of *Thamarrurr* as *nathi kulu* also bears on the *Dhanba* songs performed at the signing ceremony. The positive attitude that people of Wadeye have towards this agreement derives in part from this exchange. Local people and the federal and Territory bureaucracies actively exchanged forms of representation. As main interlocutors in this dialogic process, the middle-aged management led the meetings, taking organizational decisions. Behind them, the elders were there to approve their decisions. The butchers’ paper on the walls stood as an acknowledgment of the multi-clan character of social life.

A party of over fifty people, government representatives, Territory and national media crews, project officers and the two ministers arrived the following day in Wadeye. As programmed, a representative of the *Thamarrurr* Land Rangers escorted them to the ground of the ceremony. The school pupils and the indigenous and non-indigenous staff arrived soon after. Three pupils of different ages stood up while one of them read the following statement by T.N. of the Women’s Centre:

\[^7\] Tonkinson (2004:195) stresses this point: ‘When the new self-management policies were implemented in the early 1970s, these [organizational] skills were not recognized or acknowledged by government agents, nor were the necessary new skills imparted that would have allowed them to run their community corporations effectively. Left largely to find their own way, and inadequately prepared to assume self-management responsibilities, the Murdu were set on a path to inevitable failure and disappointment. This undermined their confidence, hence perpetuating the feeling that ‘Whitefella business’ was an esoteric domain still beyond grasp.'
This is just a beginning for Wadeye Community and the people who live in the surrounding outstations.

Today we are very proud that we were able to raise *Thamarrurr* high as a strong culture form of Governance for our people.

We went through the hardship of our struggle and we have been long suffering, but the people have kept their strength and the culture strong.

We have our ways to find solutions for our own people that are strong in our culture foundation.

Now we are a very proud people – *Thamarrurr* Governance will be now sharing the responsibilities and with equal voice for all the clans represented in Wadeye and the outside landowning groups, along with the Commonwealth Government and Northern Territory Government.

This day we are signing the shared responsibility agreement, this day our young people will start to grow strong.

Minister Vanstone and Minister Martin spoke, stressing the importance and uniqueness of the agreement and then people started to form a queue to sign the papers. It was decided that the *Thamarrurr* representatives would put their names first. The line grew very long as a good number of people wanted to record their presence at this momentous event. They felt the importance of ‘putting down the name on the paper.’ More than sixty people waited their turn.

In the meantime, the *Dhanba* singers and dancers performed for the ministers and the public. A final statement was given by the elders of the community to the national ABC press, stressing the importance of the day and the improvement that the agreement will bring to the life of the people of Wadeye.*

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*Many positive things have already happened as an outcome of the agreement and from the related strength and positive attitude it brought in the lives of people in Wadeye: the new *Kardu Darrikkardu* Family Program, entirely run by the members of the Women’s Centre was launched in early August, the indigenous Leadership Team of the school has taken the role of deputy principal and is working on the*
7.5 *Thanamurr* and the dialogic process of governance

As a final comment on *Thanamurr*, it is interesting to compare and contrast two discussions – 20 years apart – of the cultural dimensions of Aboriginal governance. Myers, in his article on the Pintupi’s ‘broken code,’ largely reproduced in his monograph, focuses on the cultural conflicts and incommensurabilities involved in indigenous Australians coming to grips – albeit locally – with the nation state (see Myers 1980, 1986). Myers describes how inter-personal authority in Pintupi society was masked by the idiom of ‘looking after’ and the transcendental reference point provided by the Dreaming (see Myers 1986:254-255). The evident transience of Euroaustralian local government and its systems of representation both transgressed values that are central to Pintupi sociality. These new organizations also provided many occasions for the unequal distribution of goods. When principles of kin-relatedness met representational governance, the outcome could be the deployment of resources to particular, well-positioned groups and to the disadvantage of others in a settlement.\(^9\) Myers was therefore pessimistic regarding the outcomes of the Pintupi’s contact with institutions of governance within the nation state. Notwithstanding their return from Papunya to their traditional countries, Myers’ implication seemed to be that the Pintupi faced radical cultural disruption.

Martin (2004), on the other hand, writes more generally and also of a range of indigenous communities most of which have had a much longer history of engagement than the Pintupi with western governance. Martin repudiates the notion of exclusive Aboriginal domains within Australia and, like Merlan (1998), underlines the ‘intercultural’ nature of most indigenous projects which seeks to ‘give every kid a chance,’ a group of women of a near outstation has started an arts and crafts business, a project to give ‘local jobs to local people’ is now running in the community.

\(^9\) Myers (1986 Chapter 9) gives several examples where the authority attributed to village councillors by virtue of their administrative position, conflicted with kinship relatedness. Because of these pressures, resources are often distributed in unequal proportion among the population, with individuals who hold some power favoring relatives over the rest of the community. This, in turn, creates tensions that cannot be eased by moving away, a traditional strategy that can no longer be applied today by people living permanently in settled communities. In Wadeye, an example of these contrasts has been provided in Chapter Five when discussing M.J.’s house renovations problems.
experience today. Indeed, he suggests that negotiations over local government are an important site at which the intercultural emerges. This is reflected in the statement by councillors that I cited as I began to discuss *Thamarrurr*. That statement underlines the disruptions caused by colonialism but also the ‘underground’ continuities in culture. Like T.N., they testify with regard to *Thamarrurr*, that ‘We have our ways to find solutions for our own people that are strong in our culture.’ At the same time, councillors observed that ‘We want our people to have the same living conditions and opportunities as normal Australians. We want our kids to have a chance.’ Moreover, it is clear that the *Thamarrurr* of today and yesterday involve a certain homology but also differences. The continuities are asserted forcefully by employing ellipsis (see Povinelli 1993:126-127).

This suggests that it is important to hold onto the insights of both Myers and Martin. The struggles that T.N., M.N. and other councillors describe would not have occurred if there was an easy compatibility between the cultures of the Wadeye area and the types of local governmental structures required by Territory and federal governments. At the same time, *Thamarrurr* shows the capacity of leaders of various generations to engage in dialogue with non-indigenous Australians and negotiate viable institutional forms that retain the specificity of Aboriginal culture. In short, the intercultural is made not given and is constituted slowly, over time.

The confidence gained by the re-emergence of *Thamarrurr*, and the culturally appropriate structures that it provides, has inspired people at Wadeye to reflect on issues of policy in autonomous ways. Moreover, the re-emergence of *Thamarrurr* has also had other ramifications. It has created a sense of ‘a really big change’ in the way people regard their culture and its practice generally. It thus bears similarities to the impact of the song genres, especially each one at its height. All of these have been cultural events, and *Thamarrurr* no less so, that have built the abilities of people to negotiate their own indigenous culture within the nation state. A further outcome and also a factor in this process has been the influence of these
developments on the organization and performance of circumcision ceremonies in a ‘more traditional’ way.\textsuperscript{10} It is to this subject that I now turn.

\textbf{7.6 Thomarrur as background to a circumcision ceremony}

Around the first week of May 2003, word spread that circumcision ceremonies would be held in the following weeks. Around the same time, women elders were holding female initiations for two adolescent girls. Cultural reasons prevented me from witnessing these ceremonies, and I did not enquire about them. Like the rest of the male population I was informed of events day by day. At times, some roads in the community were closed, and everybody was well aware not to go anywhere near the ceremonial ground. However, during the final, public part of the ritual, when the women rejoined the community accompanied by the newly initiated girls, I was able to determine the frequency of these events. Women’s ceremonies were largely discontinued during the mission years being disparaged by the missionaries. They were re-established in the mid-1980s, and have been performed almost every year since. The regularity of ‘women’s business,’ however, is not matched by their male counterparts. A previous ‘men’s business’ had occurred in 2000,\textsuperscript{11} and circumcisions in 1997.

A decrease in male initiation ceremonies is common in many parts of Australia (see Peterson 2000). In Wadeye, the reasons are both cultural and economic. Where women’s rituals are often modest in scale, men’s business has come to involve a large number of young men - a good part of the generation of boys of an appropriate age – and many other senior male participants.\textsuperscript{12} In Wadeye today, the large scale of these events tends to place the onus of organization on a small number of elders. At the same time, many youngsters are not willing to submit themselves spontaneously to the elders’ authority. Moreover, the open nature of

\textsuperscript{10} The circumcisions performed in June 2003, bore a closer similarity to those described by Stanner (1989), than to those performed in the 1980s and 1990s described by Marett (2005 in press).

\textsuperscript{11} Men’s secret ceremonies followed the 2003 circumcisions, in August.

\textsuperscript{12} This was indeed the case of the 2003 circumcisions when it was arranged for a groups of Wangga performers from Belyuen to participate in the first week of the ceremonies.
circumcision requires the performance of the groups involved in the tripartite ceremonial exchange, and the organization of these performances often requires a long process of negotiation. Accordingly, where the smaller scale of women's ceremonies allows a certain degree of adaptation to delays caused by unforeseen events, the larger scale of male ceremony makes it more vulnerable to adverse developments.

The social situation in Wadeye in the months preceding the circumcisions was unusual. In March, the Thamarrurr Regional Council was established with the signing of the tripartite agreement between the twenty local clans and the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments. People finally saw the completion of a major project, and they had the structure of their local government acknowledged by their nation state counterparts. People felt they were engaging with the structures of western governance and economy in quite new ways, investigating the procedures and how they worked. In doing so, they were able to understand better the resources and cooperation that governments had to offer. The application of this new knowledge proved effective when the women's Family Program was funded for a five year Youth and Family Project beginning in 2003.

At the same time, the Thamarrurr agreement had complex implications for the Yek Diminin clan. Key leaders in their mob would also be prominent in Thamarrurr. On the other hand, implications of the agreement down played the significance of the Yek Diminin group in administrative procedure and resource distribution. They were just a clan like others resident in Wadeye. Their circumstance as landowners was given a lesser significance in the context of local government and community.\textsuperscript{13} Notwithstanding the care that was taken to acknowledge Wadeye's landowners in the course of the formal procedures that launched Thamarrurr, its instigation diminishes the status that this group had built up through the mission years. It seems, therefore that their organization of a new round of circumcisions soon after Thamarrurr

\textsuperscript{13} These are the types of issue that were canvassed in Reeves Report (1998) and were discussed and rebutted in Altman, Morphy and Rowse (1999).
became a site for asserting ceremonial status, and fidelity to a pre-mission tradition. Now that the mission had been superseded by secular governance, *Yek Diminin* needed to identify themselves in a new way. How did these factors influence the nature of the ceremonies? And what elements were decisive in this process?

**17. When does a ceremony start? Discussion and preparation of the performance**

Around the first days of May, as the women’s ceremonies came to an end, male elders of the community were discussing the arrangement of the pending circumcisions. The process was quite long and required several consultations among the different groups of ceremonial leaders of the three song-related genres. As it happened, the actual performance started a good three weeks later. The amount of time between the first discussion and the start of the ceremonies made me reflect on these negotiations. It became apparent that this period of discussion was not simply a prologue to the ceremonies. While I was making notes about ‘preliminaries,’ I realized that the ritual process had actually begun. The discussion was part of it. Overall, the 2003 circumcisions lasted from the beginning of May until well into the second half of June. This does not mean that during these weeks people were constantly involved in ceremonial activities – indeed, the rest of the town activities proceeded as usual – however, everybody was well aware that ‘business was on.’ The community was in a ‘ceremonial mode.’

Discussions and variable forms of realization were an integral part of this ritual process. In fact, the difference between what I was told would happen, and what did effectively occur was, at times, so stark that I contemplated writing two accounts of the ceremonies. Yet, on further discussion I found that these differences did not constitute an issue for the *Yek Diminin* who were ‘running the business.’ Even when confronted with two contrasting versions, they dismissed my problems of ‘inconsistency’ as, rather, the course that events actually took in accommodating all those involved over time. The outcome was acceptable. This orientation has been discussed by several authors (see Keen 1994; Dussart 2000; Poirer 2001; Wild 1987) who explain the nature of indigenous performances, and the stages of preparation around them, as
necessarily open-ended and shaped by the introduction of new elements or participating individuals. Innovations have always taken place in ceremony and this was certainly so at Wadeye in 2003.\footnote{Here I refer to the final act of the ceremonies when the washing of the initiates was carried on under the supervision of their classificatory brothers-in-law. Some informants remarked that in the ‘old days’ this was done by the initiates’ classificatory wives (see Stanner 1989)} Far from cultural anarchy though, Wadeye procedures were tied to the rights and responsibilities of country in numerous and interesting ways. It was therefore the elders of the Yek Diminin people that decided the order of activities. It was in particular, B.P., the recognized leader of the landowning group for Wadeye, who expressed his views and set the guidelines. He stated that it was ‘going to be like it used to be.’

7.7.1 Looking back, looking forward: a pre-mission ceremony in a post-mission Wadeye

B.P.’s statement signalled an intention to perform the ritual in a certain way, a more traditional way, though this did not imply that previous ceremonies were not properly performed or had departed from traditional ways. Rather, B.P.’s intention was to organize the circumcision ceremonies in a way that was distinctively different from those staged in the last decade. But what period was B.P. referring to when he was thinking about these ceremonies? It became evident that he was referring to the time in Wadeye before the mission: it was about the ‘old days.’

The ‘old days,’ or da marntak in Murrinh-patha, refer to the period before the establishment of the settlement. It goes back in time to days when people sustained themselves with a hunting and foraging economy and consistently engaged in ceremonial exchanges with neighbouring ‘tribes.’ The temporal boundaries of this time do not blur into the da marra-re, or Dreaming creation time, but they are defined by the memories of the very old. In Wadeye, a number of elders in their late seventies and early eighties were born before the arrival of the missionaries in 1935. Albeit youngsters at the time, they remember their life before the mission and they are
a constant source of stories. The generation of elders now in charge of ritual activities comprises men and women in their late sixties. They are the younger brothers and sisters of those who were born before the mission was established. As such, they underwent initiation rituals which had not yet been influenced by the missionaries' presence. B.P. is one of this group. He clearly remembers the ceremony of the 'old days,' and it was this that he sought to retrieve.

In Chapter Five, I described some changes in ceremonial activity post-settlement. Albeit under remarkable pressures, people had sought actively to maintain the circumcision ritual through the first decades of the century, only to desist, according to Stanner (1989:109), under the rule of the missionaries. The missionaries began to circumsce young boys in the mid-1940s as a way of undermining what they regarded as barbarous procedures on the part of Aborigines. Around the time that the tripartite ceremonial exchange began in the 1960s, circumcisions organized by elders also re-commenced although these were ceremonies now involved the whole settlement community.

Circumcision in the Wadeye area is based on reciprocity. Each one of the three mobs requires the engagement of one of the other two mobs to perform the song and dances that will lead the initiates through the ritual. Reciprocity in rituals is typical of the whole region and was a common feature in the area before the establishment of the mission, or the tripartite exchange. However, pre-mission ceremonies, as Stanner (1989) noted, involved considerable travel in the area. Groups from the southern Fitzmaurice region and from further east were asked to perform

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15 I am not referring here to myths and stories of the Dreaming corpus. These narratives have an intrinsically unknown origin and they refer to a time that goes beyond human first-hand recollection. Rather, these elders' narratives refer to daily life in the bush in the days before the arrival of the white settlers. Only a few Aboriginal communities around Australia still have members of a generation that can recollect these stories. At Wadeye, this is so because the foundation of the community happened in the relatively recent past. People in Wadeye have always been inclined to preserve this heritage, as the several hundred hours of recordings of oral history held in the WASA archive show.
for Murrinh-patha people. At the base of this reciprocity lay a desire to replenish contacts and links with neighbouring language groups with which people from the Wadeye area also maintained a trade exchange. Young initiates, in a way, were part of this exchange – elders would say that they were ‘going to give [the initiates] away.’ Traditionally, the youngsters were taken to the country of the group that was going to perform for them, and kept there for several weeks. During this time, Stanner (1989:113) remarks: ‘[the initiate] had to learn and remember a host of new places and names, and many identities of kin and kith. He also saw new dances, heard new songs, and was told new tales and myths.’ A substantial part of the circumcision ceremonies, therefore, involved an educational training on the cultural specificities of the host country. This country would become part of the new identity of the initiated male, who would be known, and addressed, by the name of the song-genre performed for him.16 This strengthened the relationship of the family of the boys with the people of the host country.

Stanner described circumcisions in Wadeye in his monograph *On Aboriginal Religion*, (1989:110-125). Here it is useful to list the main events of the ritual in order to compare them with the circumcision I witnessed:

- the father of the initiate appointed a *malakumbara* – the person, usually the future brother-in-law of the boy, who had the duty to ‘make him a man.’
- after a ritual ceremony in which the *malakumbara* ‘captured’ the boy, the initiate was taken to the country of his ritual guide for a few weeks in order to be taught ‘all the things a man should know.’
- at the return of the initiate, spectacular songs and dances were performed for him and the other boys.

16 This applied, Stanner (1989: 110) noted, also when particular circumstances arose: ‘There were several called Kadu Kungini (“people of the evening”) because circumstances had required the rite to be held after working hours. Another was called Wuma, a contraction of *wungumanji*, to signify that he had been without a part of escorts on his return from isolation before circumcision.’ The same applies today when boys circumcised in Darwin Public Hospital are, on their return, called *doctor.*
• after a pause of several hours, the boy was painted with his clan's design and taken to the ritual grounds. Here, while a number of performers danced, he was circumcised.

• the boy did not return immediately to his camp, but resided in a secluded place while his wound healed. During this period, food was brought to him and his training continued.

• when the final ceremony of ritual washing 'made him clear,' he returned to his camp with a new status.

There are a few differences between these circumcisions and those performed in the 1980s and 1990s. Although I did not witness them, I understand from the recollections of my informants — and from video footage held in the Kanamkek - Yile Ngala Museum — that they were on a much larger scale (see also Marett 2005 in press). The whole community participated and virtually every family had a relative involved in the ceremonies. The song groups performed for each other on the same day. Thus the ritual lasted until the early hours of the morning. This simultaneity of performances implied that each group both performed and received a performance; that is, each group at the same time both 'gave boys away' as the relatives of the initiates, and 'turned boys into men' as the group performing for them. In the last stage of the ritual, a large tent was erected and all the boys slept under it, after the circumcision. The surgery was done in partnership with the local clinic. An indigenous and a white surgeon shared the duties.

The practice of 'sending' the youngsters away for a period before the actual circumcision withered with the introduction of the tripartite exchange. The new reciprocal system entrenched the community as the major reference point for the ritual, and both travel beyond Wadeye and the participation of other regional groups became less common. This community base for ceremonial procedure had also encouraged larger and larger circumcision ceremonies at Wadeye since the 1960s. By contrast, pre-settlement ceremonies involved a much smaller

17 Occasional participation of groups from Barunga and Elcho Island have occurred in the last twenty years.
number of boys. Like women’s ceremonies today, they were performed on a demand basis, and arranged between the family of the initiate and the leaders of the group that would be asked to perform. The tripartite exchange favoured a large ceremony held every few years.

In many respects, the 2003 ceremonies were inspired by B.P.’s pre-mission model. The overall intent was not to reproduce identical procedures from the distant past, for the three song-genre groups and their exchanges had struck a desirable balance in Wadeye. For this reason, the ceremonial groups were asked to perform along with a related Belyuen Wangga group. Similarly, the scale of the ceremony was more like the previous two decades – a large number of youngsters would participate due to the fact that a circumcision had not been held for six years. However, it was decided that the performances of the various groups would not be on just one day, as had occurred in 1997 and 1996. Rather, each group would have a separate performance day and these days would be scheduled in three different weeks. Moreover, the ceremonies would begin with a ‘ceremonial run’ and the ‘giving away’ of two initiates to the external group, the Ngindi Ngindi Wangga performers from Belyuen. These two acts made the planned ritual process more akin to that described by Stanner. It also allowed the Yek Diminin group to innovate on immediate past procedure without dislocating it and, at the same time, to maintain that they were returning to the ‘old days.’

The re-emergence of Thamarrurr provided an inspiration and a precedent for this retrieval of pre-mission practice. Even though there had not been a circumcision ceremony since 1997, and even considering that inevitably new generations of youngsters bring ceremonies, the coincidence of events was not accidental. The establishment of the new Thamarrurr Regional Council had been saluted by elders and middle-aged managers alike as a ‘new beginning’ in local administration. Moreover, people felt that with Thamarrurr the nation state had acknowledged the existence and validity of indigenous autonomy, values and forms of relatedness. This acknowledgement seemed to build confidence and encourage other initiatives that also underlined indigenous identity referenced to the pre-mission period. For Yek Diminin
people in particular this was significant. They wished to retain a ritual pre-eminence and to transcend the mission days. The dynamics surrounding Thamarrurr were therefore an impetus to ceremonial innovation in 2003.

7.7.2 The herald, the run and the runner: Wadeye – Darwin – Bolyuen – Wadeye. The ceremony begins

During my fieldwork in Wadeye, my car and driving skills were deployed in several ceremonial journeys (see Peterson 2000). I covered nearly 5,000 kilometres in the period of most intense activity at the end of dry season 2002, and at the beginning of the following dry season. As a colleague once said to me 'In the field, I am my car!'

The car I was providing became the main means of transport for the Yek Diminin clan members who were organising the circumcisions. For these ceremonies I was recruited as the runner. The runner, according to L.K., is the one who ‘makes sure everything is there for the ceremony. No-one is left behind. Things are picked up, and so on.’ Although he does not take independent decisions, and his position is subordinated to one of the elders who are the ‘real bosses for the ceremony,’ his logistical role is important. He must be ready and available at any time, coordinate the movements of the ceremonial party and combine the requests of the elders with the logistics of the travel. The runner is kardu kumparra, the man in the front. In short, I was working for K.L. as his runner, and learning about ceremony as a result.

As he was about to leave the community for the first phase of its initiation journey, S.L. was saluted by his female cousin with this expression: ‘Puya, nhinho thunungamthathbath, kumparra!’ which translates from Murrinh-patha as ‘Keep going, you are heralding, go

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18 Due to my close relationship with my main informant L.K., the main songman for Dhanba and one of the elders of Yek Diminin clan, I was integrated into the kinship network of his family. My 1985 Toyota Landcruiser, consequently, was named Pangkima, one of the Murrinh-patha terms for native bee, the main totem of the clan.
forward! The herald is the first of many other initiates that will be exchanged between groups, he is ‘the starter. It’s like the build up [the pre-monsoonal season] when the clouds bring all the rain and it grows bigger and bigger.’ (L.M. pers.comm.). Albeit in his early teens, as his cousin greeted him with his given name for the last time, S.L. was conscious of his role. The herald is not simply a messenger. He is one of the participants in the ceremony, someone who brings himself as a ‘message.’ As one of the initiates, he brings himself to the group that will perform for his circumcision, he ‘gives himself away.’ The herald is also called mulurnuk, which translates as ‘the promise.’ The young boy constitutes a promise of intent, the means by which groups establish a relationship with each other.

Following the early negotiations, we thus embarked on the ‘ceremonial run.’ A party of three men and two initiates, left with me in my vehicle headed for Darwin. The two herald-boys belonged to the Dhanba and Lirrga mob and the group towards which they were going, the Belyuen Wangga mob, was one part of the third component of the reciprocal ceremonial exchange. Part of the economic onus was born by the families of the initiates. However, as the ceremonies were a community event, money was also provided by the local shop, an Aboriginal owned business that redistributes part of its profits for community projects. Funds also came from the Northern Land Council, through a scheme that provides for indigenous ceremonies across the Northern Territory. These funds would be used to cover the costs of transportation and other needs of the visiting group (see also Peterson 2000 and Merlan 1998).

The three men accompanying the herald-boys were all associated with the Dhanba mob, organizers of the ceremony. Interestingly, only one of these men was a ceremonial leader. The other two were a man in his late thirties, a dancer with no particular ceremonial authority, and a

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19 First cousins of opposite sex, according to avoidance taboo, cannot directly address each other by name after the male undergoes the circumcision initiations. As stated above, they are called, and always indirectly, with the name of the song genre of the group that performs from them.

20 Walakandha Wangga mob joined the performance in Wadeye, see below.
middle-aged man who was not involved in the performance but had been a leader in forging the
Thamarrurr agreement. His pride in the agreement guaranteed his commitment to this cultural
project and when he was chosen, not without a hint of surprise on his part, he readily agreed to
be active in the run. L.M.’s knowledge of ‘business’ was limited and precluded him from the
elders’ status. Yet it seems that his proficiency in one domain came to influence, to a certain
extent, his position in another. This may well be due to the fact that managing the community
in partnership with government is now being recognized as ‘blackfella business.’ This is not to
say that Council representatives are considered as ceremonial leaders. However, just as it has
been usual practice in many communities to invite ‘whitefella’ managers of significant
government resources to major ceremonial occasions, so it seems that B.P. and other organizers
judged it entirely appropriate that L.M. should be involved in a suitable role.

We left Wadeye in the mid-afternoon heading towards Darwin with a number of ceremonial
paraphernalia including loin-clothes, a didjeridu and clapsticks. Between Daly River and
Adelaide River, clay – later to be used for body paint – was dug from a yellow ochre deposit on
the side of a small hill. We had a considerable sum of money to arrange for the return travel of
the performing group. It was envisaged that one and possibly two minibus taxis – each with
eleven seats – would be required for the purpose.21 The first thing to do, however, was to find
the performers and let them know that they should be ‘ready for the business.’ Before leaving
Wadeye, I was advised that the run might take us ‘a bit around,’ and that my role as ‘runner’
could involve navigation. As it happened, my fellow travellers knew how to ‘get around’
Darwin much better than I did and we looked for the relevant people at various ‘blackfella
spots’ (also see Sansom 1980). Driving ‘a bit around’ turned out to be a 1300 kilometres

21 During the dry season, when the high level of the water caused by the monsoonal rains recedes and the
Daly River road reopens, hiring a minibus is the most economic way to travel. As people are more mobile
during this season, these taxis travel weekly back and forth between Wadeye and Darwin. The hiring fee
for a one-way journey is around $800. Divided by eleven, it is much less than the price for a one-way
flight with Murin, the local airline company.
journey over a period of three days. We travelled between Wadeye, Darwin and Belyuen. (see below Map 7.2)

In Darwin, my companions noted that Nightcliff beach was the place where North-east Arnhem Landers camp, whereas ‘that desert mob stops at K-Mart’ – that is, around the Casuarina Shopping Mall. In larger communities, such as Bagot and Minmaram, various peoples live together. Yet, as in Wadeye, their various identities are clearly defined and spatially located. It was in Bagot, Darwin’s largest Aboriginal community, that we found C.W., a well known Wangga singer. Not far from Bagot, in Minmaram – a smaller Aboriginal community – a number of Wangga dancers and B.S., the ceremonial leader to whom the initiates were going to be given away, were waiting for our arrival.

As people gathered around C.W.’s camp in Bagot, informal singing began. The songs performed were those that would be sung during the ceremonies. The two initiates were listening attentively while B.S. explained to them the meaning of the lyrics, describing the country to which the song texts referred. This learning process was similar to the one described by Stanner (1989) even though in this case there was no marked segregation of the initiates. Nonetheless, B.S. moved increasingly close as he instructed them and, in turn, the boys’ relatives stood aside. When B.S. finally said ‘These boys are mine!’, it was clear that the handing over of the initiates had taken place.
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Initiation Run Itinerary

1. Wadeye – Darwin
2. Darwin – Belyuen
3. Belyuen – Darwin
4. Darwin – Wadeye

Map 7.2 2003 Circumcisions Journey
There were a number of matters still to be organized, and L.M. was in charge of the travel for the performing group to Wadeye. Most of the dancers and other singers in fact were not in Bagot but at Belyuen, about 120 kilometres from Darwin. L.M. therefore organized a minibus to pick them up the following day. In order to be sure that everyone was prepared for the bus, we drove to Belyuen late in the afternoon. Once there, L.M. connected with a number of relatives who had arrived the day before and advised a few dancers to be ready. L.M. sensed that a further minibus would be needed but funds were now running low and it was too late in any case to arrange further transportation. The following morning a number of performers, L.M., his relatives, and the two boys made their way back to Wadeye, while I drove back to Bagot with L.K. to pick up C.W. and his family. Although the initiates were ‘handed over,’ they did not remain at Bagot but instead returned to Wadeye on the minibus.

7.8 The ceremonies in Wadeye

Once back in Wadeye, L.K. organized for a Wangga performance the same night at the house of one of the initiates. Notably, this ‘celebration’ of the boys’ return also appears in Stanner’s account of circumcisions although it had not be a component of recent Wadeye circumcisions (Stanner 1989 and Marett 2005 in press). This was another reference back to pre-mission procedures.22

During the following week, L.M. spent most of his time on the telephone speaking with the rest of the performers in Belyuen, organising a further minibus, and persuading relatives to travel to Bagot to pick up other people. Another minibus and three cars arrived later in the week. The first day of the proper circumcisions was planned for the following Monday.

The day the circumcisions started, the whole community came together to watch the performance that re-enacted the boys’ seclusion. The Wangga performing groups were playing by the house of one of the two boys who had participated in the run. At the same time, a

22 On the subject of the ‘return of the boys’ see also Elkin 1958.
number of ceremonial leaders from the same group gathered around a row of initiates sitting on the ground. These were mainly Dhanba initiates and some from Lirrga mob. Clustering in a compact, semicircular group, and emitting the roar of the sacred ancestor,²¹ each one of the malakumbara picked up his initiate, while all around Wangga songs mixed with the wailing of the initiates' female relatives. Malakumbara, as Stanner explains (1989:111), are usually men who will provide an initiate with a wife and themselves assume the status of brother-in-law. These men are mainly classificatory relatives today. Malakumbara are key figures during the circumcisions: they assist the boys during the more delicate part of the ceremonies and spend the following few nights at their side. They are also present for the washing ritual.

Once each one of the boys was picked up, they all headed towards the ceremonial grounds at the community Club where they camped in seclusion overnight. This seclusion was not repeated for the other two groups. As a re-enactment of the segregation, it was considered exemplary for the others as well. This part of the ritual process closely resembled the seclusion as Stanner described it.

In these procedures, locality was especially significant, albeit in a symbolic way. On the previous day, the initiates had come from one of the houses in the Yelmugam camp, which is associated with the Dhanba landowning group (see Chapter Five, Map 5.1). As such, they were symbolically moving from Wadeye and they were going away with their malakumbara. They spent the night at the community club that represented the 'foreign' country to which they had travelled. On the following day, in order to be decorated with the design of their circumcision group, they were taken to another part of the township, in proximity to the Museum grounds, in the area of the Kempinjingkal camp, the part of town associated with Wangga people. Moving back towards the ceremonial grounds, the community club ceased to be a 'foreign' place and became the centre of the town again as they returned to Dhanba country. In short, the patterns

²¹ The roar is associated with the Great Mother, the ancestor protagonist of all male initiations. Stanner (1989) and Hiatt (1971, 1975) offer different interpretations of this ritual process known as Punk.
of movement repeated, in local terms, the appropriate patterns of regional travel (see below Picture 7.1).

Picture 7.1 *Wangga* performers and initiates arrive at the ceremonial ground from *Kempinhingkal* camp.

Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003).
Back at the ceremonial grounds, malakumbara gave back the initiates to their relatives, who sat behind them. Ritual wailing resounded through the air while the songs started. Ngindi Ngindi Wangga from Belyuen was joined by the local Walakandha Wangga. The performances alternated while a number of men and women engaged in dances that were directed towards the initiates.\(^{24}\) One by one, the boys were taken inside the community club by their brothers-in-law, where a kardu ngima – a circumcision doctor – ‘turned them into young men.’

The boys spent the following three days inside the club, waiting for their wounds to heal. During this time, their nangkun assisted them and their relatives brought them food. An Aboriginal health worker periodically checked the progress of their recovery. Once back at home, they settled in their own room, separate from their female relatives. A few individuals living at Manththape, the new subdivision, relocated in the single men’s quarters.

The following Monday, it was the turn of Lirrga group to perform for Dhanba and Wangga boys. After the initiates were gathered, they were taken to the outskirts of the school, within the boundaries of Nillit camp, the area associated with Lirrga mob that lies to the eastern part of the community. There, they were decorated with Lirrga designs, and conducted back to the ceremonial ground, replicating the pattern of movement of the previous ceremony (see below Picture 7.2). A very large group of people performed for the initiates including also members of the audience affiliated with the performing group, but not specifically painted for the occasion.

\(^{24}\) The father of the initiate decides under which song his son will be circumcised. This choice depends on the desire to reinforce the relationships with a specific group. In this case, for instance, L.M. chose Ngindi Ngindi Wangga for his son because that was the group of his brother-in-law. On the other hand, G.L. choose Walakandha Wangga because he preferred to strengthen the relationship with a local group, and complete the ‘missing piece’ of local groups relations, being himself associated with Lirrga and his wife with Dhanba.
Picture 7.2 *Lurrga* performers and initiates move towards the ceremonial ground from *Nillit* camp.

Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003).
Before the last group performed the following week, the first group of initiates was taken for the ritual washing at Nimbi, a beach to south of Wadeye. Wangga performers, three singers and a didgeridu player, sang a few songs after which the ritual bathing took place. This ritual aims to make the boys ‘clear’ (tarangka). Bathing while listening to the songs also impresses on the boys that their identity has now a new component: they belong, to a certain extent, to the mob that sang and danced for them. Being circumcised under the saltwater Wangga people, these initiates washed themselves with saltwater.25

The Dhanba mob was the last group to perform (see below Pictures 7.3 and 7.4). In a fashion similar to the two previous performances, boys were gathered and decorated by the house of one of the performers, at Wadeye camp. Initiates therefore walked to the ceremonial ground from the south-west part of the community, from Dhanba country. The circumcisions took place between the Saturday and the following Monday, as the clinic had run out of anaesthetic. The ceremonies came to an end.

The ultimate effect of these ceremonies was to reproduce the unity of a community. Wadeye’s commitment to indigenous culture was squarely re-confirmed. At the same time, the 2003 circumcisions involved an interesting ritual counterpoint. B.P. distinguished his procedures by (re-)introducing the ceremonial run, a journey designed to reach out to a larger regional domain and also to (re-)enact the hand over of initiates. These acts implied acquisitions of knowledge and alliances beyond the community at the same time that they also involved smaller groups in the relevant transactions. In addition, B.P. organized that the circumcisions relevant to each mob’s performance would occur on a separate day, making each group of circumcisions more manageable, but also perhaps, de-emphasising ‘community.’

25 I have not witnessed the washing rituals of the other two groups, but I was told that, since Lirrga and Dhanba are associated with fresh water, the bathing would have taken place in two freshwater creeks in the outskirts of the settlement.
Picture 7.3 *Dhanba* performers and initiates in the proximity of the ceremonial ground.

Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003).
Picture 7.4 Dhanba performers at the ceremonial ground. Photograph by Alberto Furlan (2003)
For the Yek Diminin leaders, matters worked out, but only partly (see also Dussart 2000:91-94). The hand over of the boys in Darwin was a little perfunctory. They returned prematurely to Wadeye and with some of their own close relatives. Moreover, the large-scale community performances ultimately overshadowed the newly introduced ceremonial run. However, B.P.’s attempt to go beyond the community was possibly prompted by Thamarrurr’s (community-based) egalitarian turn. He sought to elevate his status with a new ritual initiative. At the same time, this very initiative may have been encouraged by Thamarrurr’s regional nature, and the recognition that post-mission transport and resources opens new vistas for indigenous performance and rite (see Peterson 2000; cf. Dussart 2004). Though different from his initial plans, as B.P. observed, the outcome was ‘all right.’
In this conclusion, I propose to offer an overview of the three song genres and their social-historical context. I will be emphasizing some of the differences between genres as well as their similarities. The chapters of this thesis describe some strategies implemented by people of Wadeye in order to reproduce indigenous values in the course of the twentieth century. These strategies used dreams and songs, narratives and performances, to register, interpret and encompass change thereby rendering it as forms of continuity as well.

In Chapter One, I defined the lines of this investigation, proposing that through the analysis of open-ceremonial song production it is possible to understand wider indigenous socio-cultural change. Songs, in this regard, are not simply the result of historical circumstances but also play a pivotal role in the very constitution of the experience of change. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the history of the area using a number of narratives. From the first explorers' logs and the settlers interpretation of the 'unknown,' to the indigenous re-interpretation of frontier mythology and the story of an encounter with the missionaries, narrators have described Wadeye as a site where key events have led to change. In the Aboriginal narratives, non-indigenous elements are intertwined with indigenous ones, creating a space of discovery in
which the ‘new’ is understood as also familiar. This is especially so in the case of Mollinjin’s vision where new elements are traced to the periphery of a (nonetheless) autochthonous system.

Musical production presents a paradigm of the way in which change is incorporated into the indigenous order. The new song genres that emerged as a result of this process of incorporation became instrumental in a number of key processes: they helped people of Wadeye to encompass the presence of white settlers within their ‘traditional’ space, they favoured a re-definition of group identities as the circumstances brought by the mission modified the spatial distribution of a number of different language groups, and they facilitated the institution of a ceremonial reciprocal exchange between these macro-groups. Popular music became a vehicle of identity for clan and family groups individuated through mission influence and also a vehicle for individual exchanges within personal networks.

In Chapters Three and Four I investigated the emergence of two traditional genres. I noted also that as historical circumstances changed, the preeminence and/or the role of these genres has diminished, even though they remain a key component of people’s identities. Malkarrin was the expression of a commonality of experiences that referenced the relationships between indigenous people and the mission regime. It was concerned with the negotiation of values in the time of change from a hunter-gatherer to mission domestic economy, and from a taken for granted cosmology to a circumstance in which indigenous cosmology was objectified as one of ‘two laws.’ Yet, once the mission interlocutor lost its primary place in the power/authority structure of Port Keats – replaced by the welfare nation state – Malkarrin became a form of historical genre. Today it is rarely performed and it is talked about mainly with reference to the ‘old days of the mission.’ However, it has not lost its importance in the culture-scape of indigenous self-representation: what was once instrumental for the construction of an indigenous identity during the times of change, is today still important as evidence of the fact that indigenous values encompassed and reconciled ‘Christian’ values, a circumstance that is often compared by indigenous leaders with a lack of morality at Wadeye today. Malkarrin
stands now as the foundation of indigenous Christianity in Wadeye, rather than as a performative device encompassing change.

*Dhanba* and the tripartite ceremonial system, on the other hand, are still the principal expressions of ceremonial activity in Wadeye. Yet, the incidence of performances has decreased, especially in the past two decades. Today such performances are mainly associated with mortuary rites. The tripartite system also has undergone significant modifications in these years, if not specifically as a form of ceremonial, certainly in its applications to the administration of the community. After they became the expression of cultural differences in the ceremonial context, the mobs also became the main aggregate agents in the context of Wadeye social life. *Wangga, Lirrga* and *Dhanba* became economic groups separately administering three bank accounts into which welfare payments were made and then distributed to individuals. For a period of time, people thought they could use this model of ceremonial process for administrative purposes as well. However, this arrangement lasted only temporarily due to the demographic explosion of the late 1970s and 1980s, and a series of impacts brought about by more testing forms of modernity. The tripartite ceremonial system is based on a principle of reciprocity and relations in which the cosmology and peculiarities of one clan can stand for other clans in a mob. The progressive fragmentation of the community as a whole, after the withdrawal of the mission, and the increasing differences even within the same mob, made explicit by the outstation movement, impaired the representational properties of the mobs as macro-language groups. The tripartite system is still in place as a mode of ceremony. However, as a model of relatedness and agent of ritual it has been joined by other forms of aggregation that have emerged in subsequent years.

Faltering modernity and ‘self-determination’ have individuated and objectified the patrilineal clan as a prime social agent and aggregative unit. In addition, other influences related to mission practice (baptism and the promotion of nuclear families) have favoured the emergence of a particular type of identity based on patronymic family groups. In addition, welfare and cash
economy favour the expansion of extended bilateral kin relations. All these forces have undermined tripartite exchange between mobs as the model of social organisation at Wadeye today. In short, continuing changes, of different types, through time have brought different forms of social response, and different media for representation in the form of dreams and song.

Social and economic changes in the last three decades have acted to encourage large networks of relatedness. They have also heightened conflicts. In the 1980s and 1990s, popular music provided people with a form of reciprocity through which tensions could be diluted and managed. This process involved an exchange of performances and songs, a process that restated the principle of reciprocity in the tripartite exchange in yet a further modern and more fragmented way. Epitomised by popular bands, clans, instead of mobs, became the prime 'ritual' agents. Moreover, reciprocity covered a wider range of relatedness, as each one of these bands performed and composed songs for relatives other than patrilineal ones. The articulation of these extended reciprocities performed by a clan-based 'institution' – the band – created a space in which various forms of relatedness were acknowledged and reconciled.

Turner argues that ritual plays a decisive role in the process of redressing social tensions. He states (1996:291) that 'by establishing ties of co-participation in cults which operate independently of kinship and local linkages, the ritual system compensates to some extent for the limited range of effective political control and for the instability of kinship and affinal ties to which political value is attached.' I believe performances produced by the people of Wadeye – notwithstanding their patrilineal identities – also embody this type of dynamic. Popular music is one of these performances. Like Malkarrin – with which people incorporated Christianity into their indigenous cosmology – and Dhanba and the tripartite ceremonial exchange – with which tensions generated by new residence patterns were resolved – popular music allowed people to establish networks of kin through the individual exchange of songs and performances. In this, popular music resembled the tripartite ceremonial exchange, but also involved different forms and incidences of exchange.
A first, important distinction is that through Dhanba people produced relatedness for social and ritual purposes whereas popular music often produces relatedness for social and economic gain. Moreover, the scale and timing of the performances is different. If traditional music involves a considerable number of performers that come together for a special occasion, popular music can be played by a small number of individuals at any time, even if large concerts of popular song sometimes assume a ritual character.

Regarding popular music as a lesser version of traditional music would be a mistake, though. This is because the songs were fashioned to respond to changed patterns of relatedness that took place in different decades. Indigenous popular music is not the inevitable result of cultural borrowings of white pop-rock music. It has a specific rationale, Aboriginal musicians have a strong consciousness about the processes of composition and performance of their songs, and this awareness is independent both from the musical modes they use and from the traditional modalities and rationale of performances. It must be noted, as well, that the composers of popular music belong to a different generation from those involved with traditional genres. In fact there are only isolated cases of performers engaging in both genres. Popular music provided the generation raised in the dormitory, and their children, with a voice regarding their dispossession and loss of traditional culture. It allowed them to express a yearning to return to their traditional landed estates, sentiments that also found their expression in the Australia-wide campaign for outstations. Through popular music, this generation wanted to defeat the cultural homogenisation imposed by mission policies. Popular songs, with their constant reference to clan estates, became an educational device for the younger generations. It was a very contemporary vehicle for generating sentiment.

In the mid-1990s, after the closure of the local pub and the declaration of Wadeye as a ‘dry’ community, public performances stopped. As a consequence, the composition of popular songs diminished appreciably. The pressures created by the welfare economy have impinged on the
forms of exchange that popular music was able to realise. The situation progressively worsened under the pressures generated by dire living conditions, by recriminations concerning the distribution of resources, and by the marginalization of disadvantaged groups. All these factors led to open conflicts. In recent years, episodes of violence between juvenile gangs associated with antagonist families have become more common. The decrease of ritual activity and the economic individuation buttressed by welfare allowances has threatened the authority of the elders who are confronted by a generation of people – numerically the vast majority of the population of Wadeye – that challenges their power. People have grown apart, which does not mean that bilateral kin networks have diminished in importance. Rather, circumstances now experienced as ‘poverty’ place greater pressure on all forms of relatedness.¹

A complex juxtaposing of relatedness and exclusion, of commonality and autonomy, is articulated daily in Wadeye. When connections are acknowledged – through material exchanges, performances or other strategies – tension can be resolved. When other circumstances disrupt these connections, people inevitably collide in antagonistic acts of differentiation and tensions that, at times, erupt in violence. In Wadeye, tension cannot be eased by moving away. Not many people can leave the main settlement and remain in the area, for only two outstations actually allow a year-round residency. Those who decide to leave, usually going to Darwin or Kununurra, do so with the prospect of disrupting regular associations with the majority of their relatives.

¹ Myers (1986:179) has noted that ‘violence offers a way of sustaining and producing an image of the self.’ The ‘self’ in Wadeye expands to include family groups, and clan at times, in violent episodes of which youth gangs are protagonists. Ivory (pers.comm.) reported that gang leaders argue that their actions are driven by the necessity of ‘protecting their family’ (see also Ivory 2002). Such acts of self-affirmation/protection are the result of extreme differentiation, a tendency that is exacerbated by historical circumstance and dire social situations. By activating extended kin relatedness, people have the tools to overcome these tensions. Often, though, this is a difficult task, as the example of conflicts recorded in Charter Five confirm.
It is these types of issue that people in Wadeye are trying to ameliorate now with a new form of
governance. The new Thamarrurr Regional Council has been constituted as an institutional
mode in which differentiation and relatedness can be administered. Thamarrurr, which in
Murrinh-patha means ‘coming together for ceremonies,’ proposes to revitalise traditional
patterns of interaction and transpose them into a modern governmental form. By including
Territorian and Federal government in this interaction, this project also proposes to merge
different strategies into a viable solution for the community. By giving the same weight to each
one of the twenty clans on the administration board, Thamarrurr has set the basis of new forms of
multicultural identity at Wadeye.

The re-emergence of this traditional model of governance has also influenced, perhaps, the way
in which ritual forms, and notably circumcision, will be represented in the future. The
confidence gained as a result of a felt recognition of indigenous practice from agents of the
nation state has led people towards a performance of circumcision ceremonies that is understood
as faithful to a pre-mission form of procedure. These ‘old style’ ways have allowed the people
of Wadeye to reaffirm their own indigenous culture within the nation state, and also allowed
Yek Diminin clan – the landowning clan and organiser of the ceremonies – to restate their
primacy within the new ‘democratic’ Thamarrurr arrangement.

In this thesis I have proposed that the analysis of song genres can offer an effective tool for
investigation of the process of socio-cultural change experienced by indigenous people at
Wadeye. This approach suggests that people encompassed change in ways that allowed the
reproduction of indigenous culture, not through the simple reproduction of traditional
ceremonies, but rather, through the creation of new performances that also became new vehicles
for specifically indigenous values. This account has emphasized the strategies that people adopt
in order to produce the experience of continuity in the course of change. It is not so much that
this continuity is a ‘constructed’ Aboriginality but, rather, that all tradition is a form of dialogue
and one in which continuity and change are constant poetic partners. For this reason, the
challenges that Wadeye residents currently face will not disperse their identity as indigenous Australians. Moreover, it is safe to say that in the future these and other challenges will elicit further forms of narrative and poiesis.

No doubt, people of Wadeye will continue to tell their stories, and Lawrence Kolumboort will recognise his song whatever form it takes.
APPENDIX I
TRADITIONAL SONGS TRANSCRIPTIONS

MALKARRIN SONGS
[28 Items]

All songs are composed by Mollinjin (Wunamparrkit). Performers names are in brackets. These song texts refer to items, located by the researcher in WASA (Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive) archive in Wadeye (see Appendix III). The texts of the songs were elicited with the help of Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, George Cumaiyi, and Lucy Tcherna. The first line of the text is a transcription from Murrinh-patha, the second line gives a literal translation of each term (where possible), and the third line is the final gloss of the song text.

[Malkarrin 00]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin)

Mulurn kanarra prath parra-wa wantinh-ya
Leaves made of bushes that's it
Bush shed made of branches... that's it

[Malkarrin 01]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Kumbangulum pana wurrinja ngulu
the wind that fright (when somebody wakes you up)
That wind, the fright of being suddenly woken up

[Malkarrin 02]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin)
City here it is going up going up
Going up! Here is the city

[Malkarrin 03]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Yinimala kukpi pana yinimala kayer kayer
attacking snake (black-headed python) that attacking tongue tongue
The snake is attacking, the tongue is coming out

[Malkarrin 04]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Siti mana mawurkunha kulantharra mawurkunha
City here it is going up going in going up
Here is the city, going up and entering

[Malkarrin 05]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Thilarrpak kulaninhbila panga -rala kadakadak panga
Squirting different layers of colors of rainbow there -redupl rainbow serpent there
The rainbow serpent in squirting the rainbow there

[Malkarrin 06]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Mary Naja)

Pungkarpuilkara karayel tharayel mani
Morning star rising it is moving is coming continuative
The morning star is rising, it is moving, it is coming
[Malkarrin 07]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaity, Polly Bunduk)

Kanamala  witpi  pana thawurrnalara
Fin  dolphin  there  going in and out of the water
The fin of the dolphin is going in and out of the water

[Malkarrin 08]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin)

Kunbingi  thiwaranh pardi  warrangan  pana
Kunbingi  yam  all  gone,  they  took  them  nothing  now  there  [at Kunbingi]
At Kunbingi they took all the yams away, there is nothing left there

[Malkarrin 09]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jinjair)

Yilintiriki  tirrki  kadhawula  kadhavula
The sound of rubbing branches of trees  conical paperbark hat (and ceremony related) (x2)
[Making] the rubbing branches noise [while dancing the] paperbark hat ceremony

[Malkarrin 10]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jinjair)

Ka  linhi-  linhi-  linhitha  linhi-  pambara -mbara
At redupl-  redupl- wind whirl redupl- twisting  -redupl
A wind whirl twisting

[Malkarrin 11]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jinjair)
(the first translation was given in the elicitation process, the second was retrieved in the Museum’s archives)

*binkbing*  *malara lawarra*  *kanhi*
noise of frog  frog  [unknown animal species]  here

Noise of frog, the frog, [unknown animal species] here

*Pinipinh, malara, yalarrarnganhi*
Bat, frog, lorrakeet

[Malkarrin 12]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin)

*Purrugupurrugu Purrugupurrugu kithparam–para*
King Tide  King Tide  coming  redupl

The king tide is coming in

[Malkarrin 13]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jjinjair)

*Kulugulu kulugulu*  *wabim pana wabim pana*
Place between Bradshaw and Timber Creek (x2) weaving  there

[s woman] weaving [a dilly bag] there, at Kulugulu

[Malkarrin 14]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jjinjair)

*Wunamparrkit parrkit pana kararga rarga rarga*
Old Mullinjin  -redupl there  tied up  -redupl  -redupl

Wunamparrkit is tied up there

[Malkarrin 15]
(Mary Naya Mollinjin, Gypsy Jjinjair)
pilil pilil pilil pili yelampurra yelampurra
The rattling noise of eggs crocodile [in Murrinh Nyuwan]
Don't rattle the eggs, there's a crocodile!

[Malkarrin 16]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Thinimin thila warrarralpanga karranturturp karranturturp
Small bat (unknown Murrinh Nyuwan word) going in going in and out
The small bat is going in and out of (the cave)

[Malkarrin 17]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Yingila pala pala kalawurruka
You can not go jumping around they cannot go anywhere
[the fishes] are jumping around, they cannot go anywhere

[Malkarrin 18]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Thilthi kunakaknga warrinhi warrinhi (x5)
Clouds separating telling to move

lrriwirlthi mala pandana panda (x5)
The start spear stomping -redupl

He's telling them to move, the clouds are separating. At the beginning of the ceremony [the old man] has a spear and stomps his feet

[Malkarrin 19]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
Kunamala witpi pana thawurralara
Noise of frog is making that frog [in Murrinh Nyuwan]
That frog is making its noise

[Malkarrin 20]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Thampilipili yemarranhkarri
Thampilipili they are welcoming me
They [the Little people – Kardu Yawa] are welcoming me at Thampilipili

[Malkarrin 21]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Irene Nardpuk, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Pimbimngu rari thawurral panga
Pimbimngu here young leaves [in Murrinh Nyuwan] hole
At Pimbingu, new leaves are coming out from the hole

[Malkarrin 22]
(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck)

ripala -la pimalara
jumping -redupl big green frog
The big green frog is jumping

[Malkarrin 23]
(Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Irriwirrithimala pandana panda
Irriwirrithimala that's it that
This is Irriwirrithimala
[Malkarrin 24]
(Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Kawakawam pani yirriyirrin thela
Barramundi [in Murrinh Nyuwan] there [bubbles] coming top
A barramundi there, the bubbles are coming up

[Malkarrin 25]
(Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

langadhe langarra
[unknown literal translation]
Ah, my mother’s country!

[Malkarrin 26]
(Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

Kamul kamul lena
kamul kamul lena
Camel Camel [no meaning]

yirrinyirrin thila
yirrinyirrin thila
coming top

People coming on top of camels’ back

[Malkarrin 27]
(no recording)

Wuurpleura ngapurl kungtara
Long necked turtle [Murrinh Nyuwan] swimming let’s go
Let’s go swimming for long necked turtle
DANBA SONGS
[63 Items]

The names of the performers of each song are recorded in round brackets, and those of the composers in square brackets.

These song texts refer to items, either recorded or located by the researcher in WASA (Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive) archive in Wadeye (see Appendix III). The songs were elicited with the help of Lawrence Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Leo Melpi, and Lucy Tcherna.

The first line of the text is a transcription from Murrinh-patha, the second line gives a literal translation of each term (where possible), and the third line is the final gloss of the song text.

[Dhanba 00]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Robert Kolumboort]

Yiliyi        nganala    ngunbaram    baram
Yiliyi       I climbed up forward -redupl
I climbed the hill Yilidi

[Dhanba 01]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Robert Kolumboort]

Batuk kathu batuk kathu pambawaya pambawaya
Batuk from Batuk from honey bees honey bees
The honey bee are coming from Batuk
(or: the honey bees brought this song [from Batuk])

[Dhanba 02]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Robert Kolumboort]
Ngalarkin  pana  ngarim  pana  kulurgulur  mani
Wax  that/there  sugarbags  that/there  Little people  modal
Bees there, the Little people are [watching]
(or the wax is keeping the sugarbag together)

[Dhanba 03]
(Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Lawrence Kolumboort, Kevin Bunduck)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Ngurumilen  kalaith  mulumulu  thakunh  thakunh  dembinhimnu  kathu  wurrak
Ngurumilen  brother  son  left handed  acting  went down  from  continually
Ngurumilen, the little brother of the left handed (Mayamungum) was dancing. He went down
to the ground and came up (he was dancing)

[Dhanba 04]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Thakunh  kaku  banhiwait  kurun  nanhebet  nanhebet  kalaith  neki
Left handed  down  went  (continuative)  grab him  grab him  brother  our
Mayamungum went down while dancing. Grab our brother!

[Dhanba 05]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Robert Kolumboort]

Nganani  Dindin  Malarmmarari
E.C.'s father's mother
E.C. father's mother (classificatory)
E.C.'s father
[Dhanba 06]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

[Robert Kolumboort]

Matinki Kolumboort Parth Kynthia

M.P.'s father
L.K.'s father
Mollinjin
D.K.'s father

[Dhanba 07]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)

[Joe Birari]

Dirrunu mempatha watha dim dhanba Kunbini
Design making -redupl cont dhanba Kunbini
I am painting [myself with] the Kunbini design

[Dhanba 08]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi
[unknown]

Puluthi dhanba pirrimma mardanarda pelpith-nu Kunbini kathu-ya
Puluthi dhanba standing waiting top Kunbini from

Domkarda pirrim ngarra ku ngugumigi tek
I see standing at noun class (animal) dreaming site black cockatoo

At Pulutki Dhanba [Mayamungum], who came from Kunbini, was standing, waiting on the top [of the hill].
Standing here I see the Black Cockatoo Dreaming site
Dhanba 09
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Gypsy Jinjair, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[unknown]

Dhanba Kunbinhi  pangarruthu  wurran  kardu  warnangat
Dhanba Kunbinhi  like  continually  everybody
Kunbinhi [Gregory Mollinjin] was dancing dhanba, everybody likes [him]

Dhanba 10
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Robert Kolumboort]

La-ngadhe  ngadhe  la-ngarra  ngarra
[Unknown literal translation]  to  to
He won’t stand up, he’s gone

or: He won’t stand up, he’s gone. (we must say goodbye to him)
or: He’s gone now, he’s dead. We cannot see him anymore.

Dhanba 11
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Ngarim  thakuni  (ngarim ngakumari)
honeybees  lefthanded  (honeybee totem)
marramarda  nhini da  karrindurday
son  that place  turn around

The bees – Mayamungum’s (the lefthanded one) son and daughters - are here, turning arund.

Dhanba 12
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Charlie Kuruwurl]
**Dhanba**

(Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)  

(Dhanba 13)

I am coming, I am standing here, I am Mayamungum.  
You’ve got to know me, I am the Dhanba man.  
From Batuk, I am going [to Wadeye]  

(Dhanba 14)

(Father  look at me wax playing (cont.) bees hand my  
move back Kunbinhi wangu)

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**Dharawal**

kardu dhanba dhanba nemerru ngurdanituk  
Man dhanba dhanba one send

ngakumarl manthigat yingamyerryal dim Wadeye warda  
totem redcollared lorikeet make a circle looking cont. Wadeye creek now

Dhanba sent the lorikeet to look for water at the Wadeye creek

[Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna]  

(Dharawal 13)  

Dhanba kuku wangu Mayamungum ngarrim ngay  
Dhanba I am coming Mayamungum standing I

Dhanba wuru ngay the ngangibatmu kuku wangu ngurran  
Dhanba I am me understand I am (continually) going

Batuk da ngunu kathu-ya  
Batuk (a.c.) place I am going from
ngarra ku ngunkumingi warda melethetungirra -ya

to Dreaming site now put them back in place

Father, look at me, I am playing with wax in my hand
I must to go back to Kunbinhi
Take them back to their Dreaming site now

[Dhanba 15]

(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Thangida kurlunturtuk
Thangida peaceful dove
Thangida [was watching] the peaceful dove

[Dhanba 16]

(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kalaith, dimninthayepup kathu -la -eh
Brother, listen from (this way) -la -ch

Dhanba rarirari Kunbinhi wangu mam dim-ya
Dhanba go back Kunbinhi way I am going

Brother, listen to me
Dhanba! I am going back to Kunbinhi

[Dhanba 17]

(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)

[Lawrence Kolumboort]
Yile -le Kunbinhi mani nangarrangkarda
Father -dupl Kunbinhi (modal trying aspect) show us

a mulunulu Kunbinhi thingarru kurdamardurdudimnuye
son Kunbinhi Ah, my country! Turn around

cadhawula kadhawula ye milindirri dirri dirri
dupl. paperbark hat dupl. paperbark hat dupl. paperbark hat redupl. redupl.

Father, show us Kunbinhi
I am a son of Kunbinhi. Ah, my country! They disguised it
Paperbark hat, paperbark hat

[Dhana 18]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)

[Dhana 19]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
Dhanba pirrim Ngiparl ngakumarl kulurrnturtuk mantharti wurran

Dhanba standing sugarbag Dreaming ancestor peaceful dove imitate the action continually

Kulurrnturtuk kulurrnturtuk kulurrnturtuk
peaceful dove peaceful dove peaceful dove

Dhanba sugarbag (Little people) are standing [here], they are imitating the action of the
Dreaming ancestor peaceful dove.
Peaceful dove, peaceful dove, peaceful dove

[Dhanba 20]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Lawrence Kolumboort]

Kale - le yekpa pannumurmuldim kura mimbi mimbi -ya
Mother redupl Freshwater crocodile coming out water grass grass

My mother [comes from the place where] the freshwater crocodile comes out of the water and
[stands on the] grass

[Dhanba 21]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Matthew Pultchen, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Mary Bunduck,
Lucy Tcherna)
[Barty Perdjert]

Kalaih, Batuk wangu ngunu nungu-yu
Brother, Batuk way we going

Thangku-nu warda nhini-yu?
What-for now that (previously referred to)

Kalaih Ku ngugumingki warda ngubamngkardu ngunu-nu ya
Brother Dreaming site now look I am going -ya
Brother, we are going to Batuk
What for?
Brother, I am going to look at the Dreaming site

[Dhanba 22]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Matthew Pultchen, Steven Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi,
Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Rosie Kolumboort]

Pigunu thakunh makardu kanhi ngarra Warda kama kanhi -yu
Those lefthanded nobody here where are they? here

Those lefthanded [Little people] are not here, where are they?

[Dhanba 23]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Matthew Pultchen, Steven Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi,
Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna)
[Lawrence Kolumboort]

Kunbinhi Kunbinhi thingarru -ye
Kunbinhi Kunbinhi ah, my country

Batuk mani nangarrangkardanungime
Batuk mod. (trying aspect) show us all

Kunbinhi, Kunbinhi. Ah, my country!
Show us Batuk!

[Dhanba 24]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Dolores Narburup)
[Robert Kolumboort]

Dhanba lina dhanba (l)ina kuma kuma(i) (l)ina kuma
Dhanba we are getting it Dhanba you are digging it
You are digging and getting the Dhanba paint (yellow ochre)

[Dhanba 25]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Dolores Narburup)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Dhanba kuku wangu ngaram nangkuwegait namme nhim-ka
Dhanba I am coming surrounding gather around

Ngakumarl nhini da ngamruyinhime Bathuk ngunu kathu-yu
Dreaming ancestor that place visiting Bathuk I am coming from

Dhanba are coming, they are gathering around, they are surrounding us
Dreaming ancestor, I am visiting you from Bathuk!

[Dhanba 26]
(Lawrence Kolumboort, Leo Melpi, Dolores Narburup)
[Theodore Palada Bunduck]

Kurintip wakal kahni wangu purulili
Kurintip child that way was walking

[My] child Kuritip was walking that way

[Dhanba 27]
(Joe Birari, Harry Luke Kolumboort, Polly Bunduck)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kardu dhanba dangukardu kurlumurtuk nungamna dim Kunbinhi-nu warda wangu-yu
Little people looking at peaceful dove they are going Kunbinhi-to now way

The Little People are looking at the peaceful dove, they are going back to Kunbinhi now
**[Dhanba 28]**

(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Narjic his wife)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

*Lurrinhin pinthinherren da ngarra muku nyamwatha watha da Dini-yu*

Cicada sings place his made in the dreaming Dini

*Dhanba berdui dim da ngarra yingamwatha watha da Dini-yu*

Little people around place made in the dreaming Dini

Cicada was singing at his Dreaming site, Dini

There were little people around that Dreaming place, Dini

**[Dhanba 29]**

(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Narjic his wife)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

*Ku-ka lurrinhin-ka minthirre-wa pindanheu-yu*

Cicada when sing

*Ku-ka lurrinhin diwepup thurr pangu kathu kanthimmherren-yu*

Cicada listen come that way he started to sing

When will the cicada start to sing?

Listen, come, over there the cicada started to sing!

**[Dhanba 30]**

(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck, Mary Naya Mollinjin)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

*Ngakumarl tek yingamyerrarr dim Batuk Kunbinhi wangu-yu*

Dreaming black cockatoo is flying around Batuk Kunbinhi way

The black cockatoo is flying around the Dreaming place at Batuk, towards Kunbinhi
[Dhanba 31]
(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck, Mary Naya Mollinjin)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kardu numireibaitiname-yu x2
Man one holding each other

Kardu thinmel thingarru ngundin bangkardi kanam kalpa Darranthi wangu
Seagull Ah, my country! storm look being rock Darranthi way

Let’s hold each other.
The people from Yederr [Kardu Thinmel] say: “Ah, our country!” We look at the the storm near the rock at Darranthi

[Dhanba 32]
(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Ninnal, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Johnny Ninnal]

Tidha Tidha-ya da ngarra mayern nigunu pirrimantharthart pirrin x2
Tidha place track her standing waiting standing

Kalaiith binhepup pirrim ngakumarl neki malangan dannimarda wiye wiye pirrin
Brother listen standing Dreaming our stingray make me sad bad bad standing

MunMun is waiting on her track.
Brother listen! Our Dreaming, the stingray, is making me sad.

[Dhanba 33]
(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Ninnal, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kuriumurturk ngakumarl tek yingamyerrarr dim Kulurdruk wangu-ya
Peaceful dove Dreaming black cockatoo flying around Kulurdruk way
Kurlunturturk binthinherren damnimarda    wiye wiye pirrim
Peaceful dove making noise making me sad bad bad standing

The peaceful dove is flying around the black cockatoo Dreaming site, at Kulurduk
The peaceful dove is making its noise, it is making me sad

[Dhanba 34]
(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Ninnal)
[Johnny Ninnal]

Tidha Tidha memethap dim
Tidha Tidha fold your arm

Nanhti lallingkin kardu mira    i    ninu ninu    yiranganka dim
Saltwater (Sea) man mermaid and mermaids watching

Tidha is folding his arms,
He is watching the man mermaid and the mermaids in the sea

[Dhanba 35]
(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Dhanba kadhawula milindirri    dirri
dhanba conical hat conical hat redup!
Dhanba people [have a] conical hat on

[Dhanba 36]
(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

La-ngadhe la-ngarra
[glossed: I am here]
Ngurumihien kalaith mutumulu thakunh nanhebet
Ngurumihien brother my son left handed (Mayamungum) pick him up

I am here
My son, brother Mayamungum, go and pick Ngurumihien up

[Dhanba 37]
(Johnny Ninnal, Anna Maria Ninnal, Gypsy Jinjiar)
(Harry Luke Kolumboort)

Pigunu ngunbanhimangkardu palyrr kura kulurduk wangu-yu
Them come and see hill kura kulurduk way

Palyrr kura kulurduk yingawatha watha da Wurrini-yu
Hill Kura Kulurduk made his site redupl Wurrini

The Little people are coming from the hill to see Kulurduk
The hill where Kura Kulurduk made his Dreaming site, Wurrini

[Dhanba 38]
(Felix Bunduck, Lawrence Kolumboort, Mary Bunduck, Gypsy Jinjiar)
[unknown]

Kardu dhanba bamperar wurran pelpith-nu Kunbinhi kathu
Little people going up and down (dancing) head-for (top) Kunbinhi

Ngarrim thakunh nhinida kunbara warra wurran-yu
Standing Left handed you’re leading now continuative

The Little people are going up and down (dancing) on top of Kunbinhi
The lefthand (Mayamungum): you’re leading now!
[Dhanba 39]

(Joe Birari, Harry Luke Kolumboort, Dave Kuruwurl, Patrick Kurungaiyi)

[Koe Birari]

Kardu dhanba nunidaru bematha pirrimthip pelpith-nu ngarra Kala x2
A Little Person one only one standing top at coolibah tree

Nanthi ngarra pulurt ngakumari dirranganpe pirrim
at honeybee wax dreaming looking after standing

Tek kurlunturturt pirrinhidamarda marda
Black cockatoo peaceful dove up waiting for (him) redupl

Only one Little Person is standing on top [of the hill], next to the coolibah tree
Looking after the wax Dreaming [site]
The black cockatoo and the peaceful dove are waiting for him.

[Dhanba 40]

(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Joe Birari)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Thakunh kanamaridi ngarra kalakalak mangelkamu warra kathu pirrim-ya
Lefthanded (Mayamungum) going into in cloud standing now from standing
Mayamungum was going in the clouds, he is standing there now

[Dhanba 41]

(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Joe Birari)

[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kalaith numebilmaninira Kunbinhi wangu da ngarra hathangaday kurdanwirl nguran wangu
Brother look back Kunbinhi way at the eucalyptus flowers are all ripe way
Kardu dhanba nhini-da da ngarra nanthi dhanba yingampatha Kunbinhi da kurran teret

Little people here they are at the place (native bees) made their site Kunbinhi a lot of

Brother look back at Kunbinhi, the eucalyptus flowers are ripe now
Here they are: the Little people! At the place where many native bees made their Dreaming site, at Kunbinhi.

[Dhanba 42]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Joe Birari)

Kunguuynguyu perchanku pudamgkarntu tara
Porcupine (echidna) two went down together

Minele wangu i pudangkawurl tara Kunbinhi warda wangu
Minele way and went back Kunbinhi now way

Two porcupines (echidnas) went together down to Minele and they went back to Kunbinhi

[Dhanba 43]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Joe Birari)
[unknown]

Palyrr ngubangkardu pangu kunungamtumpe kem da ngarra kardu walakandha pigunu punada neme
Hill look over there is misty the place walakandha them going to

Tek perchekumumee punadangume Pirrini
Little persons three coming back Pirrini

Pudarnkawurineme tara tek perchekumumee kardu dhanba percheku kibim-ka mamay mamay
They're coming back back cockatoo three little people two little people
**pelpith-nu ngarra kala**
on top by coolibah tree

Look that hill in the mist, the place of Walakandha people, those three (tek: black cockatoos) they are coming back. Coming back from Purrini.
They are coming back, those three Little People and two other Little People were waiting for them on top, beside the coolibah tree.

[Dhanba 44]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Joe Birari)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

*Kunbinhi* and *Ngapapa* (H.L.K.’s wife) watching

*ngarra ladingkin* danthawy baway darra-yu
at saltwater (sea) white foam (rough sea)

*Thinnmel manthayway wurrarn Yederr-nu warda wangu-yu*
Seagull dives continually Yederr-to now way

Kunbinhi and Ngapapa were watching
[the Little People] by the rough sea,
The seagull dives in and goes back to Yederr.

[Dhanba 45]
(Joe Birari)
[Joe Birari]

*Mayamungum Batuk Kunbinhi thangunu ngunu kathu*
Mayamungum Batuk Kunbinhi from going from

*Nhinida kathu pimingkayelyerrpumbangka-ya*
That place from peering
Nanthi ngarra dhanba nukunu pubankalarrkipubangka-ya.
Noun class (thing) on dhanba he dancing in circling

Mayamungum and Batuk are coming from Kunbinhi
At that place they are peering
He is the one, dancing Dhanba circling around.

[Dhanba 46]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumayi, Polly Bunduck)

Kalakalak kule kale dhanba marnamanda wurran
Cloud mothers Little people facing toward (watching)
The mothers, the Little People, are watching the clouds

[Dhanba 47]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Polly Bunduck, Mary Naya Mollinjin, Irene Kolumboort)

Darrnathi wangu pangkarpu ru wurrn da thingarru ngarru
Darrnathi way morning time going place ah, my country! -redup!

Darrnathi wangu punbarkarrhum wurrn Tidha
Darrnathi way raising dust going Tidha

Kubamkarrhum pangu da thingarru ngarru
raising dust there Ah, my country! -redup!

I am going to Darrnathi in the morning. Ah, my country!
At Darrnathi, Tidha (Little People from Yek Nangu country) are raising dust
They are raising dust. Ah, my country!
Nanthi ngarra dhanba nukunu pubankalarrkipubangka-ya
Noun class (thing) on dhanba he dancing in circling

Mayamungum and Batuk are coming from Kunbinhi
At that place they are peering
He is the one, dancing Dhanba circling around.

[Dhanba 46]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kalakalak kale kale dhanba mammamarda wurran
Cloud mothers Little people facing toward (watching)
The mothers, the Little People, are watching the clouds

[Dhanba 47]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Polly Bunduck, Mary Naya Mollinjin, Irene Kolumboort)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Darrnantihi wangu pangkarpurl wurran da thingarru ngarru
Darrnantihi way morning time going place ah, my country! -redup!

Darrnantihi wangu pumbankarrthum wurran Tidha
Darrnantihi way raising dust going Tidha

Kubamkarrthum pangu da thingarru ngarru
raising dust there Ah, my country! -redup!

I am going to Darrnantihi in the morning. Ah, my country!
At Darrnantihi, Tidha (Little People from Yek Nangu country) are raising dust
They are raising dust. Ah, my country!
[Dhanba 48]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

[Dhanba]
Little people Wadeye brought
The Little people brought [the Dhanba song to] Wadeye

[Dhanba 49]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

Lurrinhin pinthinmherren ngarra da lurrinhin yingawatha waiha da Dini
Cicada making the noise at place cicada made his dreaming site Dini

Dhanba berdui dim da ngarra lurrinhin yingawatha waiha da Dini
Little people round and round [were dancing] at place cicada made his dreaming site Dini

Cicada was making his noise at his Dreaming site, Dini.
The Little People were dancing at the Cicada Dreaming site, Dini.

[Dhanba 50]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

Kardu wurnagat mange pana kanam kurran-yu
Everybody all together standing continuative

Wunamparkit nhinhi thamanu-yu yukoy ngay warda nguparhu-yu
Wunamparkit you do it Right! I now call

1 The text of this songs is identical to the one of [Dhanba 28].
[Dhanba 48]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

[Dhanba Kolomboort]

Dhanba Wadeye banpark dim
Little people Wadeye brought
The Little people brought [the Dhanba song to] Wadeye

[Dhanba 49]¹
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

[Dhanba Kolomboort]

Lurrinhin pintinmherren ngarra da lurrinhin yingawatha watha da Dini
Cicada making the noise at place cicada made his dreaming site Dini

Dhanba berdai dim da ngarra lurrinhin yingawatha watha da Dini
Little people round and round [were dancing] at place cicada made his dreaming site Dini

Cicada was making his noise at his Dreaming site, Dini.
The Little People were dancing at the Cicada Dreaming site, Dini.

[Dhanba 50]
(Harry Luke Kolumboort, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)

[Dhanba Kolomboort]

Kardu wurnagat mange pana kanam kurran-yu
Everybody all together standing continuative

Wunamparkit rhinhi thamanu-yu yukoy ngay warda nguparinu-yu
Wunamparkit you do it Right! I now call

¹ The text of this songs is identical to the one of [Dhanba 28].
Ngakumari ngay kururturturk mangartari wurran dhanba bamperar wurran
Dreaming mine peaceful dove I will imitate the little people moving up and down

Everybody was dancing (dancing with the same style),
Wunamparkit, you do it now! Right, I call my Dreaming name, the peaceful dove,
I will imitate the movement of the Little People going up and down

[Dhanba 51]
(Joe Birari)

[Kardu Kunbinhi perrenku nhini da kathu kunungamninda kem Kunbinhi thangunu kathu]
Little people two here to are coming Kunbinhi coming from

Thamul ngakumari wungku memnhinda wiye wiye tara
Iron wood spear Dreaming dancing the action

Two little people are coming here from Kunbinhi
They are carrying the ironwood spear, their Dreaming, they are walking and dancing the action

[Dhanba 52]
(Joe Birari)

[Robert Kolumboort]

Dhanba (lina) kadhawula Wurlgurru gurrru
Old Pultchen (repetition) conical hat Wurlgurru redupl
Wurlgurrukurru said to Old Pultchen: ‘Go back to your kadhawula (country)’

[Dhanba 53]
(Kevin Bunduk, Elizabeth Cumaliyi, Polly Bunduck)

[Tumulu bamam]
Clay white
White clay

[Dhanba 54]
(Kevin Bunduk, Lawrence Kolumboort, Polly Bunduck)
[Lawrence Kolumboort]

Kalaih da thingarru Dithi ngarmimarda kathu
Brother Ah, our country! Dithi otherside from

Kalaih damnhimangkardu ku ngakumarr tek yingamyerrarr dim Dithi ngarmimarda kathu
Brother look Dreaming black cockatoo are flying around Dithi otherside from

Brother! Ah, our country! Dithi, the other side
Brother, look. Our Dreamings, the black cockatoos, are flying around Dithi, on the other side

[Dhanba 55]
(Felix Bunduk, Kevin Bunduk, Lawrence Kolumboort, Polly Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Mulindiri dirri Batuk wangu wurdamardudui dim-ya
Wax -redup! Batuk way turning around (disguise)
Wax, Batuk was turning around (disguising) [Kunbinhi]

[Dhanba 56]
(Kevin Bunduck, Polly Bunduck, Mary Naya Mollinjin)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Ngarrim Kunbinhi tanirila rila x4
I'm standing (I am) Kunbinhi you climb up

Ngarrim Kunbinhi Malarma mambarrwirlrwl
I'm standing (I am) Kunbinhi Malarma chase him!
I am Kunbinhi, you climb up [the tree]
I am Kunbinhi, Mallarma (Little Person from from Yek Nangu country) chase him!

[Dhanba 57]
(Johnny Ninnal, Kevin Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Polly Bunduck)
[Joe Birari]

Dhanba dhanba dirmu thithay ngakumarl pubanhillith pibim-ya (x3)
Little people design native bee Dreaming straightening it up (clearing)

Dhanba kunbinhi pandarluth wurrann pirrim-ya
Little people whole lot (all the group) coming

The Little people are clearing the design of the native bee dreaming site
The whole group is coming [to help]

[Dhanba 58]
(Gypsy Jinjar, Mary Bunduck)
[Anna Maria Ninnal]

Tidha perkenku-ya pubimkaya yeller pibimka-ya x2
Tidha two peering

Ngapapa-wa ida nangku kalaith thingurru-ya diwangu kunungamka karrim-ka
Sugar glider there husband Ah, my brother! they’re gone those two standing

Two Tidha (E.C. and M.B.) were peering,
They saw the sugar glider (F.C.) husband. Ah, my brother! They’re gone now!

[Dhanba 59]
(Gypsy Jinjar, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Anna Maria Ninnal]
Tidha thangkarda-wa da pangu kathu-yu
Tidha what's over that to

Da-ka Ninpingi-ka pangu da-yu ngarra kakalak kanampekem-ya
Ninpingi over there at cloud stand on top

Tidha, what is that place over there?
Ninpingin is over there, where the clouds stand on top [of the land].

[Dhanba 60]
(Johnny Ninnal, Harry Luke Kolumboort, Irene Kolumboort, Mary Naya Mollinjin, Anna
Maria Ninnal, Polly Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kunbinhi Thida yingumwatha watha da wurrini damngangkarda pirrim ngarra
Kunbinhi Thida dreaming site (turn in) place was going showing standing at

Damngangkarda menhinthabirl pirrim
Looking looking back standing

The Kunbinhi Little People were showing the dreaming site [where the Native bee ancestor]
was going
[They] were looking back at that place.

[Dhanba 61]
(Johnny Ninnal, Joe Birari, Anna Maria Ninnal)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Dhanba Kunbinhi pangarurtur wurrin kardu wurnagat aaaaaa
Dhanba Kunbinhi acting cont everybody [calling Cicada noise]
Everybody is watching Dhanba Kunbinhi (G.M.) acting (dancing)
Tidha thangkarda-wa da pangu kathu-yu.
Tidha what's over that to

Da-ka Ninpingi-ka pangu da-yu ngarra kalakalak kanampekem-ya
Ninpingi over there at cloud stand on top

Tidha, what is that place over there?
Ninpingin is over there, where the clouds stand on top [of the land].

[Dhanba 60]
(Johnny Ninnal, Harry Luke Kolumboort, Irene Kolumboort, Mary Naya Mollinjin, Anna Maria Ninnal, Polly Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Kunbinhi Thida yingamwatha watha da wurrini damningkarda pirrim ngarra
Kunbinhi Thida dreaming site (turn in) place was going showing standing at

Darningkarda membinthabiri pirrim
Looking looking back standing

The Kunbinhi Little People were showing the dreaming site [where the Native bee ancestor] was going
[They] were looking back at that place.

[Dhanba 61]
(Johnny Ninnal, Joe Birari, Anna Maria Ninnal)
[Harry Luke Kolumboort]

Dhanba Kunbinhi pangarurturt wurran kardu wurnagat aaaaaa
Dhanba Kunbinhi acting cont everybody [calling Cicada noise]
Everybody is watching Dhanba Kunbinhi (G.M.) acting (dancing)
Dhanba 62
(No recording)
[unknown]

kadjawula  bamihormal  pirrim,
paperbark hat  wobbling  standing

pilinh ngala  dimbarbarl  warda
star  big  glittering  now

The paperbark hat is wobbling,
The morning star is glittering now
APPENDIX II
POPULAR SONGS TRANSCRIPTIONS

These song texts refer to items gathered by the researcher. These items are all deposited at the WASA (Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive) in Wadeye. The text is given first in Murrinh-patha, and a gloss translation by the researcher follows. The composers names are recorded in square brackets, and the approximate date of the composition follows.

The text have been elicited with the help of Cassimar Narndu, Robert Mollinjin, Cyril Ninnal (for Nangu Red Sunset Band); George Cumayi (for Wakal Bengkunk Band); Paula Jongmin, Margaret Wundjar, David Kundair, (for Emu Sisters); Gerald Longmair, Desmond Longmair, Bonaventure Ngarri (for Hot Wheels Band); Don Pulchen, Patrick Nudjulu (for Yinglemen Band); Robert Mollinjin, Mark Pupuli, Prudence Bunduck, David Kundair, and Cyrill Ninnal (for their songs).

NANGU RED SUNSET BAND

[18 Items]


Nangu Red Sunset Band 01 – Nangu [Nangu]
[Stan Ninnal – 1982 circa]

Ngay-ka thangku-wa-nu nganam kanhi-yu
Pule, thurrihingalnu da ngarra ngay thathpiru
Nangu, da pemanhay ngala
Da lelunh-ka da matha
Ngay-ka bematha wangu nganimu
I da-ka ngarra ku terert thaypirr-yu
Nangu, da pemanhay ngala
Da lelunh-ka da matha
Nangu, da pemanhay ngala
Da lelunh-ka da matha

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Why am I [still] here? [in Wadeye]
Brother, take me back to the place where I really belong
Nangu, the big sand hill
That beautiful place just over there
I will always go there
In that place where there is a lot of food
Nangu, the big sand hill
That beautiful place just over there
Nangu, the big sand hill
That beautiful place just over there

Nangu Red Sunset Band 02 – Saltwater People
[Cassimare Narndu and Cyrill Ninnal – 1990-1995 circa]

I came from the Saltwater People
The place called Point Pearce
Well, my country it’s a beautiful country
And we are living up on a big sandhill
Before old people they used to stay [sic],
Well, my country it’s a beautiful country
Well, my country it’s a beautiful country
Well, my country it’s a beautiful country

Ngay-ka kardu wakai lalingkin
Da ngay thaipirr-ka Nangu
Da ngarra Nangu, da murrumu-ka
Nganki-ka nganapup ngarra pemanhay ngala
Kardu ngalantharr murruk warra pardipuupta da pangu-yu
Da ngarra Nangu, da murrumu-ka
Nanthi Tina kanam wurran ngarra lalingkin
I nganki-ka nginipunh le patha warda nganam da pangu-yu
Da ngarra Nangu, da murrumu-ka
Da ngarra Nangu, da murrumu-ka
Da ngarra Nangu, da murrumu-ka

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[translation]
I came from the Saltwater People
My country is Nangu
Nangu, it is a beautiful country
We are living on a big sand hill
Where the old men used to live in the old days
The sun set down to the sea,
And with our relatives I am happy in that place
Nangu, a beautiful country
Nangu, a beautiful country
Nangu, a beautiful country

Nangu Red Sunset Band 03 – Kudantiga [Kudantiga]
[Cassimac Namdu and Gregory Namdu – 1990-1995 circa]

Kanhi-ka da ngarra ngay wangu da Kudantiga
Ngarra thamunh ngay Wunamparrkit bangkanirn-yu
I da-ka leunh-ka-wa da pangu-yu
Darrimurn nganki pangu-yu
Ngarra Kale Neki pirrim-yu
Ngarra thamunh ngay bangkanirn-yu
I bangkarnurt da patha da pangu-yu
I nganki warda nganawath da pangu-yu
Nhirepenu ngani da pangu-yu
Kangkurl nganki panamnagarapart da pangu-yu
Da thingarru da nganki da Kudantiga
Ngarra Kale Neki pirrim-yu
Ngarra thamunh ngay bangkanirn-yu
I bangkarnurt da patha da pangu-yu

I am going to Kudantiga
Where my grandfather Wunamparkit had the dream
That beautiful place over there
Where our sand is
Where the Virgin Mary is standing
Where my grandfather had the dream
Over there where he found that good place
And we are going over there
I will always looking after that place
Our grandfather left that place over there for us
Ah, my country! Kudantiga
Where the Virgin Mary is standing
Where my grandfather had the dream
Over there where he found that good place

**Nangu Red Sunset Band 04 – Yek Nangu Tribe**

[Cassimarr Narndu – 1990-1995 circa – song originally composed in English]

There’s the people living in Wadeye
People living – people living
There’s the people living in Wadeye
People living – people living
There’s the people of my tribe
Oh oh – Yek Nangu tribe
Oh oh – Yek Nangu
I am going back to my homeland
To sweet Nangu – to sweet Nangu
I am going back to my homeland
To sweet Nangu – to sweet Nangu
I am going back to my tribe
Oh oh Yek Nangu tribe
Oh oh Yek Nangu
There was a long, long time ago
My people used to be – my people used to be
They used to hunt and fight
For the land – for the land
Oh my people – my people
Oh my people – my people
Oh my people – Yek Nangu
There’s the people living in Wadeye
People living – people living
There’s the people living in Wadeye
People living – people living
There’s the people of my tribe
Oh oh – Yek Nangu tribe
Oh oh – Yek Nangu
Yek Nangu tribe – Yek Nangu
Yek Nangu tribe – Yek Nangu
Yek Nangu tribe – Yek Nangu
Yek Nangu tribe – Yek Nangu
Yek Nangu

Nangu Red Sunset Band – Mi lala [Zamia/Cycad palm fruit]
[Cassimar Narndu and Cyrill Nimnal – 1990-1995 circa]

Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha
Pule, thurdingharlmu da ngarra ngay thaypirr-yu, da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr
Pule, thurdingharlmu da ngarra ngay thaypirr-yu, da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr
Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha
Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha
Pule, thurdingharlmu da ngarra ngay thaipirr-yu da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr
Pule, thurdingharlmu da ngarra ngay thaipirr-yu da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr
Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha
Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha
Mi lala-yu, mi lala-yu, mi lala nhingangarrawatha

Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site
Brother, take me back to the place where I really belong, my place Kubuyirr
Brother, take me back to the place where I really belong, my place Kubuyirr
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Brother, take me back to the place where I really belong, my place Kubuyirr
Brother, take me back to the place where I really belong, my place Kubuyirr
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Zamia palm fruit, zamia palm fruit, the zamia palm fruit Dreaming site.
Nangu Red Sunset Band 06 – Ku Nhîn  [Carpet snake]
[Cassimarr Narndu and Gregory Narndu – 1990-1995 circa]

Kardu Yek Nangu ngurdamwurl da ngarra putek nganki wangu-yu
Da-ka Nangu-wa ngarra ku nhin nhingangarrawatha
Ku nhîn ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Ku nhin ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Kardu-ka Yek Nangu-wa panapup da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Nanhi-ka Wurlthirri-wa ngarra Kangkuri nganki panamngarrapart-yu
Nganki-ka nganawath-wa ngarra nanthi ngunga pirrim pangu wangu-yu
Da-ka Nirrpi-wa ngarra kura lallingkin pirrim papa wangu-yu
I da-ka tilmah-ka-va ngarra nanthi ngunga kanam-nu wuran
Ku nhin ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Ku nhin ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Ku nhin ku nhin nhingangarrawatha da ngarra pemanhay Nangu

We, the Nangu tribe, are going back to our land
Nangu, at the carpet snake dreaming site (lit: where the python snake made its site)
The carpet snake made our land
The carpet snake made our land
Our ancestors used to live on our land
Where our grandfathers left the song Wurlthirri for us  [Father’s Father]
We are going where the sun Dreaming is
At Nirrpi where the saltwater is screaming
I will always go to that beautiful place where the sun goes down
The carpet snake made our land
The carpet snake made our land
The carpet snake made the sandhill Nangu

Nangu Red Sunset Band 07 – Kerdengbe  [Kerdengbe]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1990-1995]

Yile, thurdunthingkar-yu da ngarra nganki you
Da Kerdengbe Kerdengbe nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Yile thangangkardamu ku ngarra ngakumari nganki-yu nganki-yu nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu
Da-ka nganapup da Irmininhinu wangu da-yu da-yu nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Da ngarra thamul ngumi nhingangarrawatha wangu
Da Kerengbe wangu da Kerengbe wangu-mu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu

Father, take me back to our land
To Kerengbe, that's us Kardu Yek Nangu
Father, show me the dreaming places of our clan Kardu Yek Nangu
I will always live at Irmininhinu
At the place where the mangrove spear Dreaming site is
At Kerengbe
That is us, Kardu Yek Nangu
That is us, Kardu Yek Nangu
That is us, Kardu Yek Nangu

Nangu Red Sunset Band 08 – Thamunh ngay [My grandfather (Mother's Father)]
[Robert Mollinjin – 1997 circa]

Thamunh ngay-ka makardu warda
Wurdawurl da ngarra nukunu da Mardanungume
Nukunu-ka Kardu Wakal Malgin
Da nukunu-ka palyirr pangu kurran
Wurdawurl da ngarra nukunu da Mardanungume
Ngunhpalin thu marlantath nhingangarrawatha
Da Wayeri ngarra da darrinpirr
Wurdawurl da ngarra nukunu da Mardanungume
Nukunu-ka kanapup pangu da ngarra nukunu da-yu
Wurdawurl da ngarra nukunu da Mardanungume
Da Mardanungume
Da Mardanungume
Da nukunu-yu

My grandfather is not here anymore [Mother's Father]
He returned to his place, Mordanungume
His clan is Kardu Wakal Malgin
His place is where the hills stand
Where the whip snake and the thunder and lighting Dreaming sites are
At Wuyeri where the flood plains are
He will always live there, at his place
Mordanungume
Mordanungume
His place

Nangu Red Sunset Band 09 – Nanthi Tina  [The sun]
[Cassimar Narndu – 1990-1995 circa]

Nanthi tina damlarran pirrim ngarra da ngarra ngay wangu
Ingay-ka the mamaith ngem nanthi pangu wathu-yu
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda
Ingay-ka the mamaith ngem nanthi pangu wathu-yu
Ngarra nanthi damlarran kathu pirrim-yu
Da ngarra ngay Nirrpi
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda
Kardu nanthithip kathu wurrar
Ngarra da darrimarn kathu
Ingay-ka the mamaith ngem da ngarra perremkanhipingkar!
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda
Ingay-ka demnhimardathin warda

The sun is shining at my place
And I understand that sign from a distance
And I’m feeling sad now
And I’m feeling sad now
And I understand that sign from a distance
It is shining now,
At my place Nirrpi
And I’m feeling sad now
The Little people are coming
Here, from the beach
And I know the place where those two are kneeling [a Dreaming site]
And I’m feeling sad now
And I’m feeling sad now
And I’m feeling sad now

**Nangu Red Sunset Band 10 – Da Wadeye**  [Wadeye]
[Stan Ninnal – 1989 circa]

*Da thingarru putek karrim da Wadeye*
*I da thingarru palyrr karrim palyrr Thuykem*
*I da thingarru palyrr Deida palyrr Bape*
*Ngarra kura kulurduk yingampatha*
*Ngarra kardu ngalantal muurtak warra pardipupta-yu*
*Da pangu-yu da kanhi-yu*
*Da thingarru, da thingarru*
*Da thingarru, da thingarru*
*Da thingarru, da thingarru*

*Nanthi ngarra hadhagalad yingamberawatha da Memarl wangu-yu*
*Nanthi ngarra marrurru yingamberawatha da Mawurt wangu-yu*
*Ngarra kardu kunugunu dampunkathardumnhinda da pangu-yu*

Ah, my country! the land where Wadeye is
Ah, my country! Where the hills are, the hill Thuykem
Ah, my country! The hill Deida, the hill Bape
At the waterhole where the peaceful dove Dreaming site is
Where the old men used to live long time ago
Over there, that one
Ah, my country! Ah, my country!
Ah, my country! Ah, my country!
Ah, my country! Ah, my country!
Where the eucalyptus flowers Dreaming site is, at Memarl
Where the milky way Dreaming site is, at Mawurt
Where the old ladies drowned, over there [a Dreaming story]
**Nangu Red Sunset Band 11 – Kardu Yek Nangu** [Yek Nangu People]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1990-1995 circa]

Nangu ngarra ku nhin yingangarrawatha nganki-yu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu nganki-yu nganki-yu Yek Nangu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu nganki-yu nganki-yu Yek Nangu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu nganki-yu nganki-yu Yek Nangu
Da Yiliyi da Murum da Yengenbe da Kudantiga
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu nganki-yu nganki-yu Yek Nangu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu nganki-yu nganki-yu Yek Nangu

Nangu, our place where the carpet snake Dreaming site is
That’s us, Kardu Yek Nangu
That’s us, Kardu Yek Nangu
That’s us, Kardu Yek Nangu
Yilily, Murum, Yengenbe, Kudantiga
That’s us, Kardu Yek Nangu
That’s us, Kardu Yek Nangu

**Nangu Red Sunset Band 12 – Bangkarnin Nangu** [I am dreaminig Nangu]

Ngay-ka bemkarnin Nangu,
ngarra perrempinhingkal-yu
ngay-ka bintheput nanthi wurthirri ngarra pemanhay kathu
I Kardu-ka Yek Nangu
I Kardu-ka Yek Nangu
Ngay-ka bangkardu nonthi tina ngarra yingampatha pangu-yu
Ngay-ka damnhimarathin warda ngarra kura mamayel wurrarn-yu
I Kardu-ka Yek Nangu
I Kardu-ka Yek Nangu

I am dreaming Nangu
Where the two little people are kneeling down
I am listening to Wurlthirri coming from the sandhill
Yek Nangu people
Yek Nangu people
I saw where the sun Dreaming is
I am feeling sad now, I saw the water glittering
Yek Nangu people
Yek Nangu people

Nangu Red Sunset Band 13 – *Kardu Diminin*  [Diminin People]
[Cassimar Narru – October 2002]

*Ngay-ka Kardu Diminin Kardu Murrinh-patha-wa*
*Da palyrr pangu wathu kurran palyrr Bape i palyrr Tharnughen*
*I da ngarra nhilpin kahim nhilpin da ngarra Kumeway*
*I nganki-ka the ngumamaith ngarrim ku ngarra ngakumari pirrim-yu*
*Da ngarra palyrr karrim palyrr Kunbinhi-yu*
*Yile thangarangaradu da ngarra kangkur ngay pardiuppta-yu*
*I the ngumabaitnu ngani da ngarra putek karrim kanhi Wadeye*
*Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu Kardu Diminin-yu*

*Ngarra nanthi thathangadhay nhingamberawatha da Memarl*
*Ngarra nanthi marruru nhingamberawatha da Mawurt*
*Da Ngarra kardu kunugume pambungunthurbdumhinda da pangu-yu*
*Pultchen Pardjert i Naburup, Molljinj Bunduck i Kuruwurl*
*Kolumboort Dulla numi wangu-yu*
*I the ngumabaitnu da ngarra putek karrim kanhi Wadeye*

I am a Kardu Diminin man, a Murrinh-patha speaking person
I am coming from the place where the hills Bape and Tharnughen are
The place where the creek Kumeway is
I know where our dreaming sites are
On the hills, on the Kunbinhi hills
Father, show me where my grandfathers used to live  [Father’s Father]
I will always know where my land is, Wadeye
That is us, Kardu Diminin
At Memarl, where the eucalyptus flowers Dreaming site is
At Mawurt, where the Milky way Dreaming site is
At that place where the old ladies drowned
Pultchens, Perdjerts and Naburups, Mollinjins, Bunducks and Kuruwurls
Kolumboorts, Dullas are one [clan] there
And I know where our land is, at Wadeye

Nangu Red Sunset Band 14 – Irrminhinu  [Irrminhinu]
[Cyrill Ninal – 1990-1995]

Nganki-ka thanguwanu ngarnam kanhi-yu da Wadeye
Pule thurdangankalnu da ngarra nganki thatpirr-yu da Irrminhinu
Pule mardangunnumangannahet ngarrim-yu
Thurdangankalnu da ngarra nganki thatpirr-yu da Irrminhinu
da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu
Marda ngumannumangannahet ngarrim-yu da bematha wangu thirangarapenu tani
Nganki-ka thanguwanu ngarnam kanhi-yu da Wadeye
Pule thurdangankalnu da ngarra nganki thatpirr-yu da Irrminhinu
Pule mardangunnumangannahet ngarrim-yu
Thurdangankalnu da ngarra nganki thatpirr-yu da Irrminhinu
da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu
da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu da Irrminhinu

What are we doing here at Wadeye?
Brother, take us back where we really belong, Irrminhinu
Brother, we really want to go back
Take us back where we really belong, Irrminhinu
Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu
We really want it, we will always live there
Brother, take us back where we really belong, Irrminhinu
Brother, we really want to go back
Take us back where we really belong, Irrminhinu
Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu
Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu, Irrminhinu

Nangu Red Sunset Band 15 – Yek Maninh  [Yek Maninh people]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1993 circa]
Da thingarru Thindi, da thingarru Yelthirr
Da ngarra Kardu Yek Maninh pigunu-yu
Dangkardu da thinnan nhini-wa da Maninh-yu da-ka leinbka-wa
Kardu ngalantharr nuni warda kanam ngarra
Kardu kunugunu perrkenkanume panam kawu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Maninh pigunu-yu, pigunu-yu
Dangkardu da darrimurn bamam nhini-wa da Ngantermelli da ngarra darrimurn karrin-yu
Dangkardu nantih tina kanam wurran-yu ngarra kura lallingkin-yu
Kardu ngalantharr nuni warda kanam ngarra
Kardu kunugunu perrkenkanume panam kawu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Maninh pigunu-yu pigunu-yu

Ah, our country Thindi! Ah, our country Yelthirr!
Our Country, we are Yek Maninh clan
Look at the point, that is Maninh, it is a beautiful place
There is only one old man left now
and three old ladies
They are Yek Maninh clan
Look at the white sand, that is Ngantermelli, the beach is there
Look at the sun going down to the sea.
There is only one old man left now
And three old ladies
They are Yek Maninh clan

Nangu Red Sunset Band 16 – Nangu Country
[Cornelius Mollinjin – 1990-1995]

Ngay-ka nganawat da pangu-yu
Kudantiga da ngarra marda ngay thatpirt-yyu
Ngathat, Yiltyi, Anghenda, Ngurdemmu, Niripi
Nanthi ngarra tina yingampatha pangu-yyu
I ngay-ka ngudarnurtur da pangu-yyu
I da-ka bematha wangu ngominu da pangu-yyu
Nanthak da pangu wangu da ngarra kura mamayel dim
I da ngarra perremphinhipingkal
Nangu da ngarra ku nhin yingampahta-yu
Nangu, where the python made his dreaming site
I nanthi ngarra tina kanam wurran
And where the sun is going down
Damkardu kardu monthithip wurran
Da darrimurn ngarra Ninu
I da darrimurn ngarra Malgati
I da darrimurn ngarra Dithi
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu
Nhini-wa Kardu Yek Nangu-yu

I always go there
Kudantiga, the place where my heart really belongs
Ngathat, Yiliyi, Anghenda, Ngurdemnu, NirrpI
Where the sun Dreaming is
I grew up there
And I will always live there
Nanthak, where the sea is glittering
And the place where the two little people kneel down
Nangu, where the carpet snake Dreaming site is
And where the sun is going down
Look at the little people coming from a distance,
From the beach Ninu
From the beach Malgati
From the beach Dithi
That’s us, Nangu Clan
That’s us, Nangu Clan
That’s us, Nangu Clan

Nangu Red Sunset Band 17 - Kura Thipmam  [Kura Thipmam people]
[Sebastian Jabinec – 1993 circa]
Kardu kura shipmam makardu warda da ngaarra nganki-yu
Yile, thudungkarinu da ngaarra darrimurn palyrr thinan pangu-yu
I tharangkardonu da ngaarra putek nganki da pangu-yu
Da Memay i da Kerde da ngaarra nganki-yu
Yerrpilim, Ngamala, Wuopi da pangu-yu
I da ngaarra punban nhipilin Karringal da putek nganki-yu
Da Ngamala i da Pendal da ngaarra nganki-yu
I dangkardu palyrr nhini-wa karrim da Wullu
I dangkardu nhipilin Karrathu da pangu-yu
I da ngaarra punban da thumulithi da Nhili
Da Memay i da Kerde da ngaarra nganki-yu
Da Ngamala, Wuopi Karringal, da ngaarra nganki-yu
Da Ngamala i da Pendal da nganki-yu

There are no Kura shipmam people left at our country
Father, take them back where the beach and the promontory are
And you will point out to me that country
Memay and Kerde, our country
Yerrpilim, Ngamala, Wuopi over there
And from the salt plain, the creek Karringal, our land
Look at that hill standing, Wullu
And look and the creek Karrathu over there
If you walk on the saltplain that place, Nhili
Memay and Kerde, our country
Ngamala, Wupti, Karringal, our country

Nangu Red Sunset Band 18 – Wakal Mulgin  [Wakal Mulgin people]
[Robert Mollinjin – 1986-1987 circa]

Ngalantharr ngaki-ka markardu warda-yu
Da palyrr pangu kurran da Mathillindi
Ngarra kura thelanga da Yarra-yu
Da Mardonunganame da nganki-yu
Da Mardonunganame da nganki-yu
Yo, nganki-ka Kardu Wakal Mulgin
Kukpi nHINGAMPATHA da Nhulu
Ngunbalin thu malarntath yingampatha da ku Yeri
Da Mardanunganame da ngaki-yu
Da Mardanunganame da ngaki-yu
Yo, nganki-ka Kardu Wakal Mulgin
Kigay wangu pibimka ngarra thay panperluy dim
Da Miway ngarra thay thaila teret
Pay pangu wangu thuurru da Kurrui
Palyrr pangu waihu kurra Pulhengka da Kumbika
Da Mardanunganame da ngaki-yu
Da Mardanunganame da ngaki-yu
Yo, nganki-ka Kardu Wakal Mulgin
Yo, nganki-ka Kardu Wakal Mulgin
Nganki-ka Kardu Wakal Mulgin

There are no old people left,
At Madjellindi where the hills are
At the billabong Yarra
Mardanunganame, our country
Yes, we are Wakal Mulgin people
Where the black-headed python Dreaming site is, at Nhulku
Where the whip snake and the lightning Dreaming site are, at Yeri
Mardanunganame, our country
Mardanunganame, our country
Yes, we are Wakal Mulgin people
Two young men [little people] sit around a tree
At Miway where there is are many trees.
Keep going further, there’s Kurrui
Those hill around, Pulhengka and Kumbika
Mardanunganame, our country
Mardanunganame, our country
Yes, we are Wakal Mulgin people
We are Wakal Mulgin people
WAKAL BENGKUNH BAND
[23 Items]

Wakal Bengkunh Band 01 – *Song of peace for Mary*
[George Cumaiyi – 2003]

Oh Mary, Mother of God
Our heart is so filled with fear
As we sitting and praying to thee
Save our soul from all dangers of life, hear our prayers
Save our soul from the stone that threatens our all lives
Oh Mary mother, help us today, hear our prayers
As we pray in this Holy Rosary
Hail Mary, full of Grace
The Lord is with you
Blessed are you among women
And Blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus
Holy Mary, mother of God, hear our prayers
Pray for our sinners, and at the hour of the death *[sic]*
Find in your heart, to protect, to protect
As we pray in this Holy Rosary
Oh Mary, Mother of God, find in your heart to forgive
Show us how to love one another
Help us to be peaceful to one another
Save our soul from all dangers of life, hear our prayers
Save our soul from the stone that threatens our all lives
Oh Mary mother, help us today, hear our prayers
As we pray in this Holy Rosary
As we pray in this Holy Rosary
As we pray in this Holy Rosary
Amen

Wakal Bengkunh Band 02 – *Healing song*
[George Cumaiyi – 2003]
The heart of the Lord, so pure and bright
Shining for you and for me
The love of the Lord
For eterninty, come to the Lord
God the Saviour, save me
God forgiver, forgive me
God the Healer, heal me
My soul is in your hands
My Lord and my god, heal me
Come Lord Jesus, come on me
With your precious blood, fill me
With your heart and spirit
God the Saviour, save me
God forgiver, forgive me
God the Healer, heal me
My soul is in your hands
My Lord and my creed, I pray to you
Shine your light on me
Thank you Jesus, I will follow you
Everyday of my life
God the Saviour, save me
God forgiver, forgive me
God the Healer, heal me
My soul is in your hands
My soul is in your hands
My soul is in your hands

Wakali Bengkunh Band 03 – Mungonbie [Mungombie]
[George Cumaityi – 1986-1987 circa]

Da ngarra ngay bamngkardu, da ngarra ngay bamngkardu da Mungonbie
Ngipilin ngala da murrwurl-ka, da ngarra ngankungime-yu
Da darrinpirr da dwpungu, da darrimurr wangu
Angkilemmi, Pumurrri, Alawu, Karriyinthi, Tchindi
Yawullir, Pambara, Pamun, Ngapurr, Namur
Da ngarra ngay bamngkardu, da ngarra ngay bamngkardu da Theri
Kardu ngarra yawa, ku ngakumarl menti, ku ngakumarl ngay warrgi
Nebirl mardangananangur dangkardu ngaiburnu da thingarru Thinpili

I am looking at my country, I am looking at my country Mungonbie
Where there is a big river. Our country is a beautiful place
The grass plains, the jungle, the beach over there.
Angkileneni, Pumurryi, Alawu, Karriyinthi, Tchindi
Yawullir, Pambara, Pamun, Ngapurr, Namur
I am looking at my country, I am looking at my country Theri
Where the Little people, the green turtle Dreaming and my mangrove worm Dreaming are
Look in the middle of the ocean, that island, my country Thinpili
Angkileneni, Pumurryi, Alawu, Karriyinthi, Tchindi
Yawullir, Pambara, Pamun, Ngapurr, Namur

Wakal Bengkunh Band 04 – Kangathi Angkileneni  [My mother's country Angkileneni]

Da thingarru kanganthi, kardu kale nangiberti
Miernu Angkileneni
Da ngarra nanku, kaka ngay
Thangankardanu thurrru ku ngakumarl
Thurringathnu murrinh murrnak
Nganikhiedhi kru ngarra darrimurn
Angkileneni da lewhn-ka
Purrnu Pumurryi, mi bannkardunu mi karrrk
Purgimardaptnu lallingkin ngarra lallingkin tharanka
Miernu Alawu i ngarra Karriyinthi
Yilliyin da lewhn-ka
da ngarra nanku, kaka ngay
da ngarra nanku, kaka ngay

Ah, my mother’s country! Mother, take me [there]
I want to see Angkileneni
Your place, my uncle’s place [Mother’s Brother]
Show me the Dreamings
Tell me the old time stories
I want to play on the beach of
Angkilleni, a beautiful place
Let’s go to Pumurtyi, show me the cheeky yam
Sitting by the sea, where the saltwater is clear
I want to see Alawui, [and] Karriyinthi
Yillilin, a beautiful place
Your place, my uncle’s place [Mother’s Brother]
Your place, my uncle’s place [Mother’s Brother]

Wakal Bengkunh Band 05 – Tharwargar  [Tharwargar]
[George Cumaiyi – 1986-1987 circa]

Ngay-ka kardu ngalantharr Kardu Wakal Bengkunh-wa ngay-yu ngalantharr
Da ngarra ngay wangu nganapup, wakal ngay, wakal pigunu
Da ngay-ka Kirriyerta-wa, murrinh ngay-ka Tharwargar-wa kardu lala
The warda panthin ku ngakmarl, Murrkum Thin i Thimilwa ngay-yu
Ngarra ngay ngurrurudnu wakal ngay pangiriwanu da-mu da-mu

I am an old man, an old man of Wakal Bengkunh clan
I live there, my children, and their children
My place is Kirriyerta and my name is Tharwargar, I am a zamia palm fruit man
They [my kids] know my dreamings now, [and the Little People] Murrkum, Thin and Thimilwa
When I will go, my children will follow [living at] Kirriyerta

Wakal Bengkunh Band 06 – Da Nirn (Old Man’s dream)

Kardu ngalantharr Wakal Bengkunh da nirn kanawuit
Bangangarnirn da ngarra nganki Kirriyerta
Kardu Ngalantharr Wakal Bengkunh kamarl lelunh-ka
Du nginpunh yibimkarrk da ngarra nirn nihini-yu
Ngarra tutaun thangunu nungamngawuy ngunban warda ngaykopi warda kardu-yu
Kamarl nuni warda kathu ngari ninabibitha
Paramnganka darritu Murkum, Thin, Thimitwa
Ngarra ngunban ngudur-ka damgangan tharpu warda
Wakal ngarra wanu ngunban pana-yu?
Kardu ngunban da ngarra ngakila-nu ngarra palyrr
Da ngarra nganki-ka ngarra banngurtut karrim Kurruŋu
Kardu Ngalantharr Wakal Bengkunh kamarl leunh-ka
Dulginpunh yibimka da ngarra ninn nhinh-yu
Kardu Ngalantharr Wakal Bengkunh kamarl leunh-ka
Dulginpunh yibimka da ngarra ninn nhinh-yu

The old man of Wakal Bengkunh clan had a dream
He dreamt about us at Kinrinya
The old Wakal Bengkunh man with beautiful eyes
He cried real tears in his dream
We were swimming and when we came out from the water we looked somehow different
We were different persons, with different faces while we were looking at him
With our bodies, but their face: Murkum, Thin, Thimilwa [three Little People]
When we left he asked us
Kids, where are you going?
We are going to our country, towards the hill
Towards our country, where the baobab tree stands at Kurruŋu
The old Wakal Bengkunh man with beautiful eyes
He cried real tears in his dream
The old Wakal Bengkunh man with beautiful eyes
He cried real tears in his dream

Wakal Bengkunh Band 07 – Werntek Nganayi [Werntek Nganayi]
[George Cumaiyi – 1989 circa]

Werntek Nganayi Kardu Ngalatharr kardida
Da ka da kanganthi nukuwu
Da ngarra wurdangarurturt da kardida-yu
Kardu ngarra lallingkin Rak Kinmuli
Kardu ngalantharr Walkal Bengkunh wa nukunu-yu
Da ngarra darrimpirr ngala-wa da-yu
Nebil pangu wangu ngarra tina kanamun wurrarn
Nhini-wa da ngarra marda nukuwu-yu
Werntek Nganayi-wa da ngarra marda nukuwu-yu
Da ngarra lallingking tharanga-wa da-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra koka ngay pigunu-yu
Werntek Nganayi ngalburnu da Kinmul
Werntek Nganayi ngalburnu da Kinmul
Werntek Nganayi ngalburnu da Kinmul
Werntek Nganayi ngalburnu da Kinmul

An old man lives at Werntek Nganayi,
His mother's country
Where he grew up
Among the saltwater people, the Rak Kinmul clan
This old man of Wakal Bengkunh clan
The place of the big flood plains
Look where the sun is going down
That is where his heart is
His heart is at Werntek Nganayi
Where the clear saltwater is
Where his uncle's country is [Mother's Brother]
Werntek Nganayi and the island Kinmul [Docherty Island]
Werntek Nganayi and the island Kinmul
Werntek Nganayi and the island Kinmul
Werntek Nganayi and the island Kinmul

Wakal Bengkunh Band 08 – Our Country

Our Country, so far away
Where our grandfathers lived long time ago
And the lives they lived
so hard but free from destruction and pain that we live today
Sleeping under a bark hut house on stormy and rainy night
Keeping warm in the winter with bushfire all around
The sound of cicadas from dawn to dusk
And the kookaburra laughs in the morning
We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe
And proud for who we are
Our tribal language Marri Ngarr
And our country Kubuyirr
Sleeping under a bark hut house on stormy and rainy night
Keeping warm in the winter with bushfire all around
The sound of cicadas from dawn to dusk
And the Kookaburra laughs in the morning
We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe
Parmbuk and Madjindi, Thardims
And Themas, Muriel and Cumaiyi
We are from the Moyle plains so beautiful
Our tribal language Marri Ngarr
And our country Kubuyirr
The sound of cicadas from dawn to dusk
And the Kookaburra laughs in the morning
We are Wakal Bengkunh tribe
Parmbuk and Madjindi, Thardims
And Therna, Muriel and Cumaiyi

Wakal Bengkunh Band 09 – Song of Fr. Docherty
[George Cumaiyi – 1989 circa]

Morrinh nguribaitnu nukanu Yilan Ngala
Marra-re dinmardawuith Werntek Nganayi
Kardu pangamperaruit Kardu Rak Kinmul
Du warda pirrinkel kardu pangu na
Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi da murrwurl-ka
Kardu nganinda murrinh baninthalan
Yilan pangu kem-da Werntek Nganayi
Kardu warda panper kardu warnangat
Kardu Morrin-patha, Ke i Thangkurral
Werntek Nganayi Werntek Nganayi Werntek Nganayi da murrwurl-ka
Mi dampastrumurt nanthi dampastrumurt
Le warda paramnamurt Yilan Ngala-yu
Nhini-wa da murmuk-yu the pumabaitnu
Ngarra marra-re dinmardawuith-yu
Werntek Nganayi Werntek Nganayi Werntek Nganayi da murrwurl-ka
I want to tell you a story about him, Big Father [Fr.Docherty]
When he first arrived at Werntek Nganayi
He found these people, the Rak Khimul clan
He cried when he saw them
Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, it is a beautiful place
Two people went away and spread the word
That father was there at Werntek Nganayi
A number of people gathered,
They were Murrinh-Patha, Magati Ke, and Kardu Thangkurral people
He gave them food and clothes to cover themselves
They made him happy, Big Father
This is the old story we must understand
When he first came here
Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, it is a beautiful place
Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, Werntek Nganayi, it is a beautiful place

Wakal Bengkunh Band 10 – Ku Thithay  [Native bee (honey)]

Kardu kunugunu pambelunh dim da ngarra bengkunh ngay
Perremgka pirrin ku thithay kardu ngarra pangu-yu
Ngarra mayern wangu dirreyepup nanthi pubanthel
Kale neki nukun, Ave Marta
Thamari-wa ku lurrinhin
Wurlhinhu kathu nhinhirrin thungku wangu
Ngu bere matha wangu pumban
Kardu kunugunu-yu
Kardu lala, ngunhbalin, kumpit, werk, karrpur
Kardu mak mak, kanatriurturt
Nhini-wa kardu-yu

The old ladies are sitting in group at my country
They are sharing their sugarbags [native bee honey]
On the road I listened to them singing
Our Lady, Ave Maria
And their voice sounded like cicadas
You could see the heat and the smoke from the bushfires
But they kept singing
Those old ladies
Are [their totems are] zamia palm fruit, whipsnake, kangaroo, white cockatoo, magpie
Saltwater eagle, crocodile
That is them

Wakal Bengkunh Band 11 – Kangathi Kulthill  [My mother’s country Kulthill]

Da ngarra kanganthi nganki da Thinhi
Da tehanhka da matha
Da ngarra thamunh nganki warda pardipuuta-yu
Kaka nganki warda pana wa da pangu-yu
Kale nanganbertimu da Kulthill
Kardu ngarra Kura Thipman warda pardipuuta-yu
Ngumigernu ngira da darrinpurr
Nguberangarnimu ngira ngalantharr thamunh nganki wangu
Da thingarru Nangaungur
Da thingarru Yengaldar
Kale nanganbertimu da ngarra kanganthi nganki
Thirabilbil Yerrpilam dangkardu thinal
Nganka pirrim ngarra lallinkyin
Da ngarra thamunh nganki Ngunima warda kanam-yu
Kaka nanganbertimu da ngarra kanganthi nganki
Da thingarru Nangaungur
Da thingarru Yengaldar
Kale nanganbertimu da ngarra kanganthi nganki
Kale nanganbertimu da ngarra kanganthi nganki

Our place, our mother’s country: Thinhi
That beautiful place, just over there
Where our grandfather used to live  [Mother’s Father]
Our uncle goes out there now  [Mother’s Brother]
Mother take me to Kultihill
Where the Kura Thipmam clan used to live
I want to take a look at the plains
I want to think about the old people and our grandfather [Mother’s Father]
Ah, my country! Nganangurr
Ah, my country! Yengaldar
Mother take me to our mother’s country
From a distance you can see the promontory, Yerrpilam
And it is facing the sea
The place where our grandfather Ngunima lives now [Mother’s Father (classificatory)]
Ah, my country! Nganangurr
Ah, my country! Yengaldar
Mother take me to our mother’s country
Mother take me to our mother’s country

Wakal Bengkunh Band 12 – Mardinga [Mardinga]

Da ngarra nganki nganapup da darrinpirr ngala
Ngangurr ngarra thelpum kem da thingarru
Mardinga ngarra nhipilinh ku ngarra ngakumari kelempi
Yingangarrawatha ku thingarru
Da thingarru Ngalbi ngarra nhipilinh wakal
Ku ngarra nginu teret da ngarra nganki-yu
Nanthi ngarra thay malangan nanthi ngarra thapak
Yingangarrawatha nanthi ngakumari nganki-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki nganki-yu da murrowurl-ka
Da thingarru Mardinga da lelwu-ka
Yile neki danggarramuh da lelwu-ka
Da darrinpirr ngala da ngarra nganki-yu
Da ngarra nganki nganapup da darrinpirr ngala
Ngangurr ngarra thelpum kem da thingarru
Ngangurr ngarra thelpum kem da thingarru

Our place, the big flood plains country where we are living
Nganangurr where those houses stand. Ah, my country!
Mardinga, near the creek where the bandicoot
made his totem site. Ah, my country!
Ah, my country! Ngalbi where the small creek flows
Our place, where there are many freshwater turtles
Where the black plum tree and the fog
Made their totem site
Our country is a beautiful place
Ah, my country! Mardinga is beautiful
Our father left this beautiful place for us
The big flood plains
Nganangurr, where our house is. Ah, my country!
Nganangurr, where our house is. Ah, my country!

Wakal Bengkunch Band 13 - Da Thingarru Nganangurr  [Ah, my country! Nganangurr]

Da thingarru Nganangurr
Da thingarru Nganangurr
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Da thingarru Memay
Da thingarru Memay
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Dingarayepap nganamgar da ngarra nganki-yu
Namngan mayetep ku ngakunarl
Ngepan kardu murntak panam pana-yu
Nhini-wa le ngarnam da ngarra nganki-yu
Palyrr da thinam,
da thingarru Terrpilam
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngarra kangkurl ngay nukun
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Da thingarru Manadum
Da thingarru Wuwupti
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Da thingarru Wurlu
Da thingarru Kunbel
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Da thingarru Kulthill
Da thingarru Kulthill
Damganmardathin warda
Damganmardathin warda
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Damganmardathin warda
Ngay-ka Kura Tipmam
Ngay-ka Kardu Kura Tipmam
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Ngurdanturturt pangu da
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Ngay-ka Kura Tipmam
Ngay-ka Kardu Kura Tipmam
Da ngarra kankurl ngay nukan
Ngurdanturturt pangu da
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Da ngay warda
Dingarayepup nganamgar da ngarra nganki-yu
Namngan mayethep ku ngakumarl
Ngepan kardu muurtak panam pana-yu
Nhini-wa le nganam da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa le nganam da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa le nganam da ngarra nganki-yu

Ah, my country! Nganangurr
Ah, my country! Nganangurr

My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Memay
Ah, my country! Memay

My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Hear us crying for our country
You are playing with the totems
Our ancestors' spirits are there
[that's why] We're happy for our country

The promontory
Ah, my country! Yerpilam
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Manadum
Ah, my country! Wuwupti
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Wuulu
Ah, my country! Kunbel
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Nhini-wa le nganam da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa le nganam da ngarra nganki-yu

Ah, my country! Nganangurr
Ah, my country! Nganangurr
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Memay
Ah, my country! Memay
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Hear us crying for our country
You are playing with the totems
Our ancestors' spirits are there
[that's why] We're happy for our country
The promontory
Ah, my country! Yerrplam
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Manadum
Ah, my country! Wuwupti
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now
Ah, my country! Wurlu
Ah, my country! Kunbel
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
It is my place now
It is my place now

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Hear us crying for our country
You are playing with the totems
Our ancestors' spirits are there
[that's why] We're happy for our country
Ah, my country! Kulthill
Ah, my country! Kulthill
We are sorry now [we feel for our country]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
We are sorry now
We are Kura Thipamam
We are Kura Thipamam clan
My grandfather's country [Father's Father]
I grew up there
It is my place now
It is my place now
Hear us crying for our country
You are playing with the totems
Our ancestors' spirits are there
[that is why] We are happy for our country
[that is why] We are happy for our country
[that is why] We are happy for our country

Wakal Bengkunh Band 14 – Nangu Country
[Sebastian Cumaiyi – 1989-1992 circa]

Angenda Wumarr Yelum Ngatat
Ngalantharr numi warda kanam
Ngudemun, Niripi, i da Nanthak da Nangu
Ngalantharr numi warda kanam da pangu-yyu
Kunugunu perkenku warda panangka
Da pangankape panangka da pangu-yyu
Dithi, Murrum i da Ngude da Kerengbe
Ngalantharr numi warda kanam ngarra-yyu
Kunugunu perkenku warda panangka
Da pangankape panangka da pangu-yyu

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Ngudemun, Nirrpi and Nanthak, Nangu
There is only one old man left down there
Two old sisters are there now
These two sisters are looking after that place over there
Dithi, Murrum and Ngude, Kerengbe
Kirdenu lives at my mother's country
Only one old man lives there there,
Narndu

Wakal Bengkunh Band 15 – Kangathi Nadirri  [My mother's country Nadirri]

Da thingarru kanganthi
Kardu kale nanganbertim mani
Ngumyerrnu nhipilin
Ngarra nhupilin Nadirri
Da thingarru Kubyoomi
Kinhirr ngarra ku lehin dim
Perripulili Namathawal palyrr Yendiri da thingarru
Da thingarru, da Tiddim
Darrimurn Merridharr, darrimurn Purrimuni
Da thingarru kangathi
Da thingarru Lanpumen
Purirri Menmithudhu
Lampudimpu Wurdunguli
Ngaridithet da thingarru
Da thingarru kanganthi
Kardu kale nanganbertim mani
Kardu kale nanganbertinu mani

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Ah, my mother’s country!
Mother, taking me there
The river at Ngumuyermu
The river at Nadirri
Ah, my country! Kubuyemi
Kinhir, the leech Dreaming site
Perripulili, the hill Namathawal, Yendili. Ah, my country!
Ah, my country! Tiddim
Merridharr beach, Purrimuni beach
Ah, my mother’s country!
Ah, my country! Lampumen
Purirri, Menmithuthu
Lampudimpu, Wurdunguli
Ngaridithet. Ah, my country!
Ah, my mother’s country!
Mother, taking me there
Mother, taking me there

Wakal Bengkunh Band 16 – Lurrinhin [Cieada]
[George Cumaïyi – 1985 circa]

Ngay-ka ku lurinhin yingamwatha
Kardu Timihwa i kardu Thin
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr-yu
Dangkardu ku ngapapa yingamwatha
Ku ngarra kulurturturt damardal
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr-yu
Nanthi ngarra yerpala bebe-yu
Palyirr Kurangku ku karrak-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr-yu
Da thingarra Pengkini i Donhil
Da thingarra Pardina i Arlye
Da thingarra Mebarang, Palada
Da thingarra Magandarr i Kurda
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngay Kubuyirr-yu
Da thingarra Kanipuru i Thiwan
Da ihingarru Ngamanmarr i Nawarr
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngay Kubuyrirr-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra ngankiname-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra yel ngay nukun-yu

I am from the clan of the cicada ancestor,
[the clan of] Thimilwa and Thin [two Little People]
This is my country, Kubuyirr
Look at the sugar glider Dreaming site
And at the peaceful dove’s tracks
This is my country, Kubuyirr
The vomit and the the cycad palm fruit Dreaming
The hill Kurangu, the kookaburra
This is my country, Kubuyirr
Ah, my country! Pengkinu and Danhil
Ah, my country! Pardina and Arlye
Ah, my country! Mebarang, Palada
Ah, my country! Magarnrarr and Kurda
This is my country, Kubuyirr
Ah, my country! Kanipuru and Thiwan
Ah, my country! Ngamanmarr and Nawarr
This is my country, Kubuyirr
This is us, our family’s country
This is me, my father and his country

Wakal Bengkunh Band 17 – Kubuyirr  [Kubuyirr]
[Mark Pupili – 1985 circa]

Da-ka minihire-wa ngumierni Kubuyirr-yu
Da ngarra nganki-ka da lelung-ka da pangu-yu Kubuyirr-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Da ka darrinpirr ngala-wa da pangu-yu Kubuyirr-yu
Da ngarra nganki-ka da murrwurwurl-wa da pangu-yu Kubuyirr-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu

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When will we go and look at Kubuyirr?
Our beautiful country, over there, Kubuyirr
That is our country
Where the big flood plains are, over there, Kubuyirr
Our beautiful country, over there, Kubuyirr
That is our country
That is our country
That is our country

_Wakal Bengkunh Band 18 - Igin ka?_  [When?]

_Igin ka meri ga kunenbel ngathewul nigu_
_Na nidin ighindan murniri yu_
_Na angayigin ngaman kininpirr nhinala_
_Nidin ga kaganhe mawunigu_
_Igin ka meri ga kunenbel ngathewul nigu_
_Na dinin yighingan Thuwu_
_Na awu ngalubu waratgu_
_Na anga yigin ngaman kunuthethet gu_
_Nidinnga nintheni na pirrihi ku wa_

When will I go back to my own country?
Where the beach is
My grandfather left that place from me  [Father's Father]
I will stay there
Ah, my country, Thuwu!
Where bush food is plentiful
Where my grandfather used to live  [Father's Father]
I will stay there, where the big tree stand
Where my grandfather used to live, that is where I will stay

_Wakal Bengkunh Band 19 – Minthire?_  [When?]
[same song sung in Murrinh-patha]
Wakal Bengkunh Band 20 – Yirrnhilen
[George Cumaiyi – 2003]

Murrinh ngay-ka Yirrnhilen
Yel ngay-ka Kardu Yek Nangu
Da ngankunhinda-ka Irmminhunu
Ngarra kardu Tidha pana
I ngay-ka bangkardu Nangu
I da ngarra Nirrpi
Nanthi ngarra ngunga pirrim
Nhini-wa da ngankunhinda-yu
Da thingarru da Nhimarrin
Ngarra kangkurl ngay dawup
Mangka ngay worda kanapup-yu
Dangkardu da thingarru
I ngay-ka the nangthi da ngarra ngay-yu
Newuy ngay damngankarda-yu
Da Nganthatalin i da Ngurdemurn
Da Illiyi i da Ngunthok

My name is Yirrnhilen
My father is from Yel Nangu clan
Our country is Irmminhunu
Where the little people Tidha are
I saw Nangu
And Nirrpi
Where the sun dreaming is
That is our country
Ah, my country! Nhimarrin
Where my grandfather built [the houses] [Father’s Father]
Where my grandmother lives now [Father’s Mother]
Look! Ah, my country!
I saw Nangu
And Nirrpi
Where the sun dreaming is
That is our country
And I know my country
My great-grandmother showed me [Father’s Father’s Mother]
Ngalhalalin and Ngudemum
Illyi and Ngunthak

Wakal Bengkunh Band 21 – Mun Mun [Mun Mun]

Kardu kanugunu Yek Nangu kanam
Da ngarra nigunu kanapup Nangu
Da ngarra pemanhay ngala
Ku ngarra nhin yingampatha-yu
Kardu ngarra Tidha pana-yu
Mun Mun, Nardu, Karlingun warda pana-yu
Bere matha warda pana Yek Nangu-yu
Mun Mun kanam Nangu, Nardu kanam Anghenda, Karlingun kanam da Ngarinithi
Kardu marntak warda putek kumbam
Mu wakal marra deida kathu bamai dim
Kangkari kangkari pigunu thamunh thamunh wangu
Kardu thingarru Yek Nangu

An old lady lives at Nangu
Nangu is her country
At the big sandhill
Made by the carpet snake
Where Thida are [Little people of Nangu country]
Mun Mun, Narndu and Karlingun live now
They are the only ones left of the Nangu tribe
Mun Mun at Nangu, Narndu at Anghenda, Karlingun at Ngarinithi
The old people are all buried
But the new generation has been born
Their grandchildren are coming
Ah, our people of Nangu!
Wakal Bengkunh Band 22 – Nhipillin Nadirri  [The creek Nadirri]
[George Cumaiyi – 1985 circa]

Nhipillin Nadirri thurrulili darrimurn
Dumpungu da Pedirr puy wangu thurru
Wudingar da nana ngarra Thamanthe
Puy wangu thurrulili Thuwu da mana
Da ngarra ngay-ka Tidim Purumani darrimurn
Dumpungu Aradithet i ngarra Kubuweni
Nhipillin Nadirri thurrulili darrimurn
Dumpungu da Pedirr puy wangu thurru
Wudingar da nana ngarra Thamanthe
Puy wangu thurrulili Thuwu da mana
Da ngarra ngay-ka Tidim Purumani darrimurn
Dumpungu Aradithet i ngarra Kubuweni
Ngakumarl ngay-ka kumpith, lenhin i pangkithay
Wumarr i ku kala i kardu walakandha
Nanthi ngarra ngay-ka wangga
Nganam purrpkurr
Kangkurl ngay thangunu damangkarda-yu
Ngay-ka kardu lallingkin, kardu thangkurral
Wangga nanthi ngay-yu [kanhi-wa nanthi-yu]
Ngay-ka kardu walakandha

Walk on the beach, along the creek Nadirri
If you keep going, you will see the jungle at Pedirr
Wudingar up to the promontory, where the thamanthe is [an unidentified tree species]
Keep going, walk up to Thuwu
My place, Tidim, Purumani beach
The jungle Aradithet and Kubuweni
Walk on the beach, along the creek Nadirri
If you keep going, you will see the jungle at Pedirr
Wudingar up to the promontory, where the thamanthe is
Keep going, walk up to Thuwu
My place, Tidim, Purumani beach
The jungle Aradithet and Kubuweni
My dreamings are kangaroo, leach, and sawfish
Salmon, and bandicoot, and Little people [Walakandha]
My song is wangga
I’m dancing [it] now
My grandfather showed me [how to dance] [Father’s Father]
I am a saltwater person, I am from Kardu Thangkurral clan
Wangga is my song
I am a Walakandha

Wakal Bengkunh Band 23 – Wumarr [Wumarr]
[Prudence Pupuli and Benigna Bunduck – 1995 circa]

Da thingarru Wumarr kangathi ngay
Da ngarra kama mandim pangu-yu
Da ngarra Kal ngay pigunu i Wumarr da lelunhka
Da ngarra ku ngulum teret thaniku
Dangkardu ngarra bangurturt ngala ngarra nhipilin
Manda warda nunganirka pirrim
Da ngarra kal ngay pigunu Wumarr da lelunhka

Ah, my mother’s country! Wumarr
[I wonder] how it is
My mother’s place, Wumarr, a beautiful place
Where fishes are abundant
Look at the big baobab tree
Standing close on the edge of the creek
My mother’s place, Wumarr a beautiful place
EMU SISTERS
[14 Items]

Emu Sisters 01 – My Country

Woy ka karinim wuy ka talibic
Woy ka kanganan ka wutnamambu pingi
Wutnamambu ngananka Pundithawur pingi
Pundithawur ngananka alarwu pingi
Thenanga ther kunmelethe ka
Awu ni pingi kitikat kania ka pillimi i pe mi
Ma ga kitiipirrit kani-ya ka pumut kurri
Woy ka nihungan kumeltheta wuy na pumut kurri
Ma-ga kitiipirrit kani ya ka na pumut kurri
Itta in kumelthetheta ka wuy-ka na pumut kurri
Woy-ka ngatabingi pumentharii wanninan kani
Mi wulli la pinthiniranu kuriwu
Woy na itta in pingi kuriwu

This is our country
We are going down to the billabong
We’re going down to Pundithawur
To the billabong Pundithawur
Where my grandfather used to live [Father’s Father]
He used to go down to the billabong
And used to go to Pumut Kurri
This is where they used to live at Pumut Kurri
They used to go to Pumut Kurri
My father used to live at Pumut Kurri
They build a house there
Where the wild yam dreaming is
Where my step-father lives now.

Emu Sisters 02 – Kulingmirr [Kulingmirr]
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki Kulingmirr-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kangkurl ngay thangunu-yu
Panamgarapart warda da pangu-yu
Yel ngay warda pardiupta-yu
Marinthi da pangu wangu-yu
Minthire ngudirwurlu?
Damngamardathin da pangu-mu-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki-mu-yu
Ngathan thangkuwanyu thanamngamparti-yu
Thurrungarrawurl da pangu-yu
Nhini da ngarra nganki Ngaywari-yu
Nanthi ngarra Kuttirrien yingampathu
Marinthi the place over there
Minthire ngudirwurlu?
Damngamardathin da pangu-nu-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki-nu-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki-nu-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki-nu-yu
Nhini-wa da nganki-nu-yu

That is us, our country Kulingmirr
This our grandfather’s country [Father’s Father]
He left this place for us
My father used to live there
Marinthi, the place over there
When will I go back?
I am sad for that place over there
That is our country
Brother why did you leave us?
Come back there
That is out place, Ngaywari
At Kuttirrien, where the fog Dreaming is
Marinthi the place over there
When will I go back?
I am sad for that place over there
That is our country

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That is our country
That is our country
That is our country

Emu Sisters 03 – Munak  [Sister]
[George Cumaiyi – 1986 circa]

Munak nangiberti da ngarra neki Nebir
Ngarra thanga danet wurrani mammamardar darrinpirr
Puru ngarra ngakumari pibiyepupu lallingkin
Pumernu ngarra me neki ngarra ku kanurnurturt
Nebil thungku dempuri ngarra thinan Perrederr
Damnhimardathin kardu manthip ngarra nhipilin Panarki
Munak denkarnirn mani ngarra darrimurn da Thwu
Ngarra wakal damangunhпith ngarra kardu lallingkin
Puru purditut puru ngarra bangurturt Arinhi
Ngarra ngalanthar pananhepar da thingarru da neki
Puru ngarra paranthek mardapal wurrani Kungarbarl
Menbarbirpul Yile Neki thangarrumut da leunh-ka
Thangarrumut da leunh-ka
Thangarrumut da leunh-ka

Sister take me back to our place, Nebir
Where the pandanus trees are lined up on the edge of the flood plain
Let's go where our Dreaming site is, we will hear the sea
Crashing on our feet, where the crocodile is
Turn and look at the bush fire burning, at the point, Perrederr
I feel sad for the Little People who are coming from the creek Panarki
Sister, think about the beach at Thuwu
Where you gave birth to your babies, the saltwater people
Let's go down where the baobab tree is, at Arinhi
Where the old people live now. Ah, our country!
Let's go where the paperbark trees are lined up at Kungarbarl
Thanking God for giving us this beautiful country
For giving us this beautiful country
For giving us this beautiful country
Emu Sisters 04 – Mardinga Song

Da thingarru kangathi
Mardinga lelunhka
Kangkurl ngay pardipupta-yu
Darrinpurr ngala da pangu-yu
Nhini-wa kangathi nganki-yu
Nebil pangu thungku dempurl wurnan
Muthirr-wa da pangu-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kangathi nganki-yu
Pule minthire nangambertinu-yu?
Da ngarra nangku da Nami
Kura nhipilin ngala da pangu-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kal ngay nukun
Pule minthire nangambertinu-yu?
Da ngarra nangku da Nami
Kardu ngalantharr bangantikedek
Numi warda kanaam ngarra-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kanganthi-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kanganthi-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra kanganthi-yu

Ah, my mother’s country!
Mardinga, a beautiful place
Where my grandfather used to live [Mother’s Father]
Over there, at the big flood plain
That is our mother’s country
Look at the fire burning
The emu Dreaming country
That is our mother’s country
Brother, when will you take us back?
To our country, Nami
Over there at the big creek

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That is the country that belongs to my mother
Brother, when will you take us back?
To our country, Nami
The old people are all dead
There is only one left there
That is our country
That is our mother's country
That is our mother's country
That is our mother's country

**Emu Sisters 05 – Memarl**  [Memarl]
[Paula Jongmin and Martina Kundair – 2002]

*Kardu kigay kanhi-Ka*
*Da nukunu-ka da Memarl*
*Nanthi ngarra thahangaday yingampatha da Memarl pangu-yu*
*Nhini da ngarra marda ngay yu*
*Da thingarru, da Memarl*
*Ngay warda mayitu ngani da pangu yu*
*Nganililinu da pana-re*
*Thungku-yu ngarurutnu ngani*
*Yile nangiberti warda*
*Da ngarra ngay Memarl*
*Da ngarra nhini thalilditha*
*Ngart ngay-re kardu mamay ngadida*
*Da thingarru da neki*
*Kanhi-wa murrinh ngay-yu maruru-wa*
*Da thingarru da ngay*
*Da mange nukunu warda pirrim*
*Da thingarru da Memarl*
*Da thingarru da Memarl*
*Da thingarru da Memarl*

This teenager boy
His country is Memarl
Where the eucalyptus flowers Dreaming site is, at Memarl
He loves his country,
Ah, my country! Memar!
I will look after that place over there
I will walk around everywhere
I will burn [the grass]
Father, take me
To my country Memar!
Where you used to walk
When I was a child
Ah, our country!
My name is Maruru
Ah, my country!
Left alone!
Ah, my country! Memar!
Ah, my country! Memar!
Ah, my country! Memar!

Eau Sisters 06 – Fossil Head


Yile thurdungalgahu da ngarra nganki-nu
da ngarra nganki ihinnan karrim
Yile thangarrangkardu ku ngarra ngakumari-yu
The warda ngungumabaimu ngurru-yu
Nhini da matha the tangin da pangu-yu
Da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Nhini-wa da ngarra putek nganki-yu
Da Kumperl i da Kulthill
Nanthi ngarra bangutut da karrim

Father, take us back to our place
The place where the promontory is
Father, show us the Dreaming sites
So we will understand now and will look after them
You are the only one that knows that place
Our land
That is where our land is
Kumperl and Kuldhill
Minthiwuduy and Thurrwalpal
Where the baobab tree stands

Emu Sisters 07 – Wudipuli song

Da thingarru da Wudipuli
Kangkurl nganki da pardipupta
Kardu perkenku warda panangka
Da pangu-yu pumaytupne
Turdithur thurru da Derrindunbur
Thirawuurlbil da Nama
Da thingarru da Nama
Puguna warda pumaytunu pani da pangu-yu
Thirawuurlbil da Althama
Kardu ngarra mardinphuy pibingka
Ngarra kura nhipilin Althama
Da thingarru da Ngalbu
Da ngarra darrinpir ngala-wa
Thirawuurlbil da Namandi
Pubuy wangu wurrarn
Da ngarra darrinpirr wangu
Da thingarru da Namandi
Da thingarru da Tharrurr
Yile nganki pardillida
Da-ka nganki warda ngumayetnu ngani
Da ngarra nganku-yu
Da thingarru da Nama
Da thingarru da Nama

Ah, my country! Wudipuli
Where our granfathers used to live [Father’s Father]
There are only two men alive now
Over there they are looking after that country
Walk down to Derrindunburrr
Look at Nama
Ah, our country! Nama
Two men will always hold on that country
Look at Althama
Where two teenagers Mermaids live [Little people]
At the creek Althama
Ah, my country! Ngalbu
At the big flood plain
Look out at Namandi
Further that way
Towards the flood plain
Ah, my country! Namandi
Ah, my country! Tharrurr
Where our grandfathers used to walk [Father’s Father]
Now it is up to them to hold it
Our brothers
Ah, my country! Nama
Ah, my country! Nama

Emu Sisters 08 – Wudipuli Song

Wuy ngina wuy Wudipuli
Theranga tjerr kunidi tjiit arr
Viwidi tjutk pingi kamuinh wu
Kangi pingi ngubun nyurringuburmi wu
Nginiyahkut wayi Werrithumbu
Nginaahlkmi wayi Nama
Wuyi ngina Nama
Awe kangi pingi ngubunyitni ngubun
Wuyi pittiuw
Arrifbil wayi Alijma
Nan muni Kambi kawunh wu
Nan kawunh wu nan wayi Alijma
Wuyi ngina wuyi kangi
Wuyi ka mayil kilinga
Arrithibil wuyi nan Membi
Thenji wu kidipilkani
Nan mayil kilinga
Wuyi ngina nan Membi
Wuyi nginan Tjirul
Nan yita kangi kuniwurt wu
Awe kangi pingi nguburyit mi wu
Nan wuyi kangi wu
Wuyi ngina Nama
Wuyi ngina Nama
Wuyi ngina Nama

Ah, my country! Wudipuli
Where our grandfathers used to live [Father’s Father]
There are only two old people left there
We will look after the land too
Come down to a place called Werrithumbu
You will see the country Nama
Ah, my country! Nama
Brother, we are the only ones that will look after this country
That country
Look back at Altjima
Where the mermaids are [Little People]
They are living at Altjima
Ah, our country! Ah, our country!
Ah, our country! The big Moyle river plain
Look back at Membi
Where the bush fire is burning
At the Moyle river plain
Ah, my country! Membi
Ah, my country! Tjirul
Where our father used to go
Brother, we are now going to look after that country
Ah, our Country!
Ah, our country! Nama
Ah, our country! Nama
Ah, our country! Nama

Emu Sisters 09 – Namembali [Namembali]

Da thingarru da Namembali
Da ngaiburnu wakal
Nanthis ngarra thay tanga
pirrinhip da ngarra ngungumingki
Da thingarru da Thawuri
Da ngarra kangkuri nganki warra
Pardipupta da murnthak warra
Da thingarru da Yithiwari
Da murrurumka-wa
Yile, minhure-nu da ngubangkardune-yu
Da thingarru da Dimanarr
Da-ka darrinpirr ngala
Kangkuri nganki pardipupta
Da thingarru da Dirrangara
Ngarra mi magan danaribaway wurrar
Ngarra nipilin Althama
Kardu ngarra mardinphny pibingka
Da thingarru da Dini
Nebil thingku demburl wurrar
Da ngarra panthek kathu
Da thingarru Nganthamuri
Thirrawuiribiri da Ninthili
Ku ngarra ngalek yinganpatha
Kangkuri nganki pardililida
Da Thingarru da Perrewundan
Da Thingarru da Perrewundan
Da Thingarru da Perrewundan

Ah, my country! Namemi
The little island
Where the pandanus tree
stands on its own, at its Dreaming site
Ah, my country! Thuwuri
The place where our grandfathers [Father’s Father]
Used to live in the old days
Ah, my country! Yithiwarl
A beautiful country
Father, when will we see that place?
Ah, my country! Dimanarr
At the big flood plains
Where our grandfathers used to live [Father’s Father]
Ah, my country! Dirrangara
Where there are many waterlilies
At the creek Althama
Where the two mermaid teenagers live [Little People]
Ah, my country! Dini
Look back at fire burning that way
Coming from the paperbark tree [country]
Ah, my country! Nganthamuri
Look at Nithiti
Where the mosquito Dreaming site is
Where our grandfathers used to walk [Father’s Father]
Ah, my country! Perrewundan
Ah, my country! Perrewundan
Ah, my country! Perrewundan

Emu Sisters 10 - *Marri Ngarr People*


*Nganki-ka Kardu Marrinh Ngarr-wa*
*Da nganki-ka Wudipuli*
*Da ngarra kangkur nganki panamngarrapart-yu*
*Da-ka nhini-wa nganki-yu*
*Da thingarru kanganthi Ngantamuri*
*Da thingarru Perragundan*
*Da-ka nhini-wa nganki-yu*
Yile, minthire-nu nanganbertimi-yu
Ngarra putek nganki-yu?
Thangarangkardani ku ngarra ngakunari-yu
I the thathpirr the ngumabaitnu
Da thingarru Darrimannarr
Da thingarru da Dini
Da-ka nhini-wa nganki-yu
Da-ka nhini-wa nganki-yu
Da-ka nhini-wa nganki-yu

We are Marri Ngarr people
Our country is Wudipuli
The place our grandfathers left us [Father’s Father]
That’s our place
Ah, my mother’s country! Ngantamuri
Ah, my country! Perragundan
That is us, this is our land
Father, when will you take us
To our land?
Show us the Dreaming sites
So we will really know that place
Ah, my country! Darrimannarr
Ah, my country! Dini
That’s us, this is our land
That’s us, this is our land
That’s us, this is our land

Emu Sisters 11 – Munak Thangku-wa-nu?  [Sister, why?]
[Margaret Wundjar – 2002]

Munak Thangku-wa-nu thamnhipat-yu?
Mange ngay warda nganinu
Ngay i ngathan ngay warda nganingawuknu
Da ngarra putek konhi-yu
Munak Thangku-wa-nu thamnhipat-yu?
Mange nganki warda nganinu
Munak, thangku-wa-nu ngamngikangath-yu
Da pirripe thardida
Da ngarra putek kanhi-yu
Kardu-ka makardu warda ngay-yu
Ngamngapat warda
Da thingarru Perredarr
Da ngarra ngay ngadililida
Da-ka darrinpirr ngala
Da thingarru da ngay Namanti
Ku ngarra kananganthan yingampatha
Da thingarru da ngay Panarrki
Da-ka nhipilin ngala-wa
Da thingarry da ngay
Da ngarra ngay ngadililida
Kardu-ka makardu warda ngay-yu
NgurDarwurl warda ngarra Yile neki

Sister why did you leave me?
I will be by myself now
You left us alone, me and my brother
On this land [Wadeye]
Sister why did you leave me?
We will be by ourselves now
Sister, why did you live far from me
She lived there for long time
On that land [Darwin]
I'm not here anymore
I left you
Ah, my country! Perrederr
I used to walk around there
Around the big flood plain
Ah, my country! Namanti
Where the emu Dreaming site is
Ah, my country! Panarri
Where the big creek flows
Ah, my country!
I used to walk around there
I am not there anymore
I am returning to Our Father

Emu Sisters 12 – Da Thingarru Perederr [Ah, my country! Perederr]

Da thingarru Perederr
Da lelunhka
Da ngarra yil ngay-yu
Parilillida-yu
Thurruturt thurr
Da thinan Perederr
Thirawuirbirl-ka thungku dempurl wurr
Da thingarru Panarri
Da lelunhka
Thirawuirbirl-ka nhipiliu Panarri
Da thingarru da muthirr
Da lelunhka
Ngarra yel ngay-yu
Karililida-yu
Thirawuirbirl-ka damgku du wullil
Da ngarra yel ngay mukur
Da ngarra ngankungime-yu
Da ngarra ngankungime-yu
Da ngarra ngankungime-yu

Ah, my country! Perederr
A beautiful place
The place [where] my father
Used to walk
Go down
To the promontory, at Perederr
Stand there and look at the fire burning
Ah, my country! Panarrki
A beautiful place
Stand there and look at the creek Panarrki
Ah, my country! The place of the Emu
A beautiful place
The place [where] my father
Used to walk
Stand there and look at big hairy yam Dreaming site
My father’s country
Our country
Our country
Our country

Emu Sisters 13 – Kulingmirr  [Kulingmirr]

Kanginun kar nanmarri Ngarr wu karki
Wu peral kangi Kulinhmirr
Kumanparni ngaryeh wulni nan wuyi?
Tjem wuyi nginan Parnarrkin
Wuyi nginan? tjipeny pingi kuburrini arrwark
Ngipipim pingi nan wuyi tjerrr
Arriditjirru, wuyi pindi ngarr kanin
Wuyi nginar Lipandi wuyi nginar
Wuyi karr, wuyi karkinimi wuyi nginar Kulinhmirr

We are Marri Ngarr people
Our country is Kulingmirr
When will we go back to our country?
Ah, my country! Parnarrkin
Why are we here? Let’s go back
To our country
Arriditjirru and Lipandi: our country
That is our place, our country Kulingmirr

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Emu Sisters 14 – Marri Ngarr Country

Nganki-ka Kardu murrinh-ngarr-wa
Da nganki-ka da Pumurri-wa
Nanthi ngarra pumut pirim
Da pangu-yu da ngangkunime
Nebil-ka da palyrr karrim
Nebil da Kilili
Ngarra thu marlanthath yingampatha
Thurruturi thurrri da Perrederr
Da thingarru da thinan
Nhini-wa da ngangkunime-yu
Da murruwurlka da pangu-yu
Thurruturi thurrri ngarra nhipilin
Da thingarru da Namandi
Ngarra ku muthirr yingampatha
Ngarra ku muthirr yingampatha
Nebil-ka da Arrinthi
Da thingarru da Arritherengunbu
Kardu-ka manthip wurrar
Da ngarra darrirpirr kathu
Nhini-wa da ngangkunime-yu
Da darrirpirr ngala-wa
Da-ka murruwurlka-wa
Da-ka murruwurlka-wa
Nebil-ka da Panarki
Ngarra kura nhipilin da pangu-yu
Ngarra kangkarl nganki pardilibida
Nhini-wa da nganki
Wuyi kangi Arritherenbu
Manginpatherr i Thubu
Da thingarru da nganki
Da thingarru da nganki

We are Marri Ngarr people
Our country is Pumurri
Where the headache Dreaming site is
Over there, our country
Look back at the hills
Look back at Kiili
Where the thunder and lighting Dreaming site is
Go down towards Perrederr
Ah, our country! the promontory
That is our country
A beautiful country, over there
Go down at the creek
Ah, our country! Namandi
Where the Emu Dreaming site is
Look back at Arrinthi
Ah, our country! Arritherengunbu
You can see [Little] people
Coming from the Moyle river flood plain
That is our country
The big floodplain
A beautiful place
A beautiful place
Look back at Panarki
At the creek over there
Where our grandfathers used to walk
That is our country
Our country is Arritherenbu,
Manginpatherr and Thubu
Ah, our country!
Ah, our country!
HOT WHEELS BAND
[6 Items]

Hot Wheels Band 01 – Nanthak  [Nanthak]

Da thingarru kanganthi ngay da Nanthak
Da thingarru kanganthi ngay da Nanthak
Nanthak Nanthak da kanganthi da pangu-yu da kanganthi
Nanthi kal ngay demngarrawirturt da pangu-yu
Nanthi kal ngay demngarrawirturt da pangu-yu
Nanthak Nanthak da kanganthi da pangu-yu da kanganthi
Nanthi kal ngay demngarrawirturt da pangu-yu
Nanthi kal ngay demngarrawirturt da pangu-yu
Nanthak Nanthak da kanganthi da pangu-yu da kanganthi
Thamunh ngaypardipupta da pangu-yu
Thamunh ngaypardipupta da pangu-yu
Nanthak Nanthak da kanganthi da pangu-yu da kanganthi
Nanthak Nanthak da kanganthi da pangu-yu da kanganthi

Ah, my mother’s country! Nanthak
Ah, my mother’s country! Nanthak
Nanthak Nanthak, mother’s country, over there, my mother’s country
My mother is rising over there  [my mother’s totem: the sun]
My mother is rising over there
Nanthak Nanthak, mother’s country, over there, my mother’s country
My mother is rising over there
My mother is rising over there
Nanthak Nanthak, mother’s country, over there, my mother’s country
My grandfather used to live there [Mother’s Father]
My grandfather used to live there
Nanthak Nanthak, mother’s country, over there, my mother’s country
Nanthak Nanthak, mother’s country, over there, my mother’s country

Hot Wheels Band 02 – Kungbarbari  [Kungbarbari]
[Desmond Longmaic and George Cumaity – 1986 circa]
Our country is a beautiful place
Our country is a beautiful place
Where crocodile and the tree
Made their Dreaming sites, our place
Kungaribar Kungaribar, a beautiful place
Where my grandfather used to walk  [Father’s Father]
That is our country
We are Kardu Thay people
Go down the floodplain, look
At the big baobab tree standing alone
That’s us, our beautiful country
Arrinhi our country
Kungarbarl Kungarbarl, a beautiful place
Where my grandfather used to walk [Father’s Father]

That is our country
We are Kardu Thay people
Where there are a lot of geese
That is us, our beautiful country
Numuli, Numuli our country
Kungarbarl Kungarbarl, a beautiful place
Where my grandfather used to walk [Father’s Father]

That is our country
We are Kardu Thay people
Look back at Yeppermi
Where the tree lies under the water, over there
Yeppermi our country.
Kungarbarl Kungarbarl, a beautiful place
Where my grandfather used to walk [Father’s Father]

That is our country
We are Kardu Thay people

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Hot Wheels Band 03a – Three boys [English version]
[Wilfred Mardigan – 1992 circa – song originally in English]

I have three sons, they are far away from me.
They live in South Australia, Adelaide
When will I see the boys? They are far away, they are far away!
The name of the boys: F., B., E.
They are far away.
I want them home to show them their true life story
And all about the future, they are far away, in Adelaide.
I have three sons, they are far away from me.
They live in South Australia, Adelaide
When will I see the boys, they are far away, they are far away, from me!
The name of the boys: F., B., E.
They are far away.
They are far away.
Far from me,
Far from me.

Hot Wheels Band 04 – Thurrilili  [Walk]  

Thurrilili da darrimun da Thegi-wa
Thurrilili da darrimun da Thegi-wa
Da-ka murrwuruk-wa da pangu-yu da nganki-wa Thegi
Ngarra kura nhilipin-wa da Ditin
Ngarra kura nhilipin-wa da Ditin
Da-ka murrwuruk-wa da nganki-ka da pangu-yu da nganki-wa Ditin
Nyer pangu-re da Nginhelmen da murrwurak-wa da ka nganki-wa da pangu-yu da Yingelmen
Ngarra kardu ngalantharr perkenku warda kanam
Da-ka murrwuruk-wa da nganki-ka da pangu-yu da nganki-wa Nginhelmen

Walk down the beach, towards Thegi
Walk down the beach, towards Thegi
It is a beautiful place, over there, our country Thegi
At the creek, Ditin
At the creek, Ditin
It is a beautiful place, over there, our country Ditin
Go and look at Yingelmen, a beautiful place, our country Yingelmen
Where there are only two old men left now
It is a beautiful place, over there, our country Yingelmen

Hot Wheels Band 05 – Kardu Thay  [Thay People]  
Spoken:

Da darrinpirr da pangu-yu da nganki-wa da pangu-yu
Kangkurl ngay pardililitha da pangu-yu Kungarbarl-yu
Nyer pangu-re nanthi ngarra bangurtut karrim
Da nganki-wa da lellunh-ka
Da nganki-wa da lellunh-ka
Da darrinpirr da pangu-yu da nganki-wa Kardu Thay nukun-yu
Da pangu-yu Kungarbarl-yu
Nyer pangu-re nanthi ngarra bangurtut karrim
Da nganki-wa da lellunhka
Da nganki-wa da lellunhka

I am going to tell you a story about my floodplain. That is it, my old men are all gone, only one is left. P. That is it, that is the song.

The flood plain over there, our country,
My grandfather used to walk over there, at Kungarbarl [Father's Father]
Look there, where the baobab tree stands
Our country is a beautiful place
Our country is a beautiful place
The floodplain, over here, our country, we are Kardu Thay people
Over there, at Kungarbarl
Look there, where the baobab tree stands
Our country is a beautiful place
Our country is a beautiful place

Hot Wheels Band 06 – Three boys [Murrinh-patha version]
[Wilfred Mardigan – 1992 circa]

Mamay ngay-ka da ngathparr panarnumkarark
Minhirre purdingawurru
Kardu thay pigunu-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu
Mamay ngay-ka da ngathparr panarnamkarurk
Minthirre purdingawurlnu
Kardu thay pigunu-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu
Ku-ka pigunu-ka
Karnarturturt
Nanthi-ka thay-wa
Yingamberrawatha
Da-ka Yeppermi Yeppermi
Da-ka Yeppermi Yeppermi
Our country Yeppermi
Mamay ngay-ka da ngathparr panarnamkarurk
Minthirre purdingawurlnu
Kardu thay pigunu-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu
Kangkurl pigunu ka
Makardu wara-yu

My boys are far away
When will they come back?
They are Kardu Thay people
Their grandfather
Is not here anymore
My boys are far away
When will they come back?
They are Kardu Thay people
Their grandfather
Is not here anymore
Their dreamings
Are: crocodile
And tree
Our country is Yeppermi
Our country is Yeppermi
My boys are far away
When will they come back?
They are Kardu Thay people
Their grandfather
Is not here anymore
YINGELMEN BAND
[2 Items]

Yingelmen Band 01 – Da Yingelmen [Yingelmen]
[Don Pulthen and Valerian Nudjulu – 2002]

Da thingarru ngalburn karrim
Ngalburnu Derrimembi da murrwurika
Da thingarru Ngalburn karrim
Ngalburnu Derrimembi da murrwurika
Dangkardu darrimurn yihimangurr
Da Thengi da lelungka
Dangkardu darrimurn yihimangurr
Da Thengi da lelungka
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da pangu-yu
Yingelmen da thingarru
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da pangu-yu
Yingelmen da thingarru
Pay wangu thurru ngarra kura nhupilin
Nhupilin Ditin-wa da murrwurika
Pay wangu thurru ngarra kura nhupilin
Nhupilin Ditin-wa da murrwurika
Dangkardu darrimurn numi deida
Da Yelhuen da lelungka
Dangkardu darrimurn numi deida
Da Yelhuen da lelungka
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da pangu-yu
Yingelmen da thingarru
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da pangu-yu
Yingelmen da thingarru
Nier pangu-re da Yingelmen
Da murrwurika da nganki-yu

Ah, my country! The island
The island Derrimembi, a beautiful place
Ah, my country! The island
The island Derrimembi, a beautiful place
Look at the white beach
Thengi, a beautiful place
Look at the white beach
Thengi, a beautiful place
That is our country, over there
Ah, my country! Yingelmen
That is our country, over there
Ah, my country! Yingelmen
Walk a bit further to the creek
The creek Ditin, a beautiful place
Walk a bit further to the creek
The creek Ditin, a beautiful place
Look at the beach on the other side
Yelhuen, a beautiful place
Look at the beach on the other side
Yelhuen, a beautiful place
That is our country, over there
Ah, my country! Yingelmen
That is our country, over there
Ah, my country! Yingelmen
Look over there, Yingelmen
Our country, a beautiful place

Yingelmen Band 02 – Kardu Diminin Country
[Don Pultchen – 2002]

Da thingarru palyrr karrim
Palyrr Bape ngarra kura kulurduk yingamngarrawatha-yu da pangu-yu
Ngarra kangkuri nganki pardida da pangu-yu da lelunhka
Ngarra nhipilin da Kumeway da lelunhka da pongu yu
Nanthi ngarra thatangaday yingamngarrawatha-yu da Memarl da lelunhka
Nanthi ngarra marrurruru yingamngarrawatha-yu da Mawurt da lelunhka
Ah, my country! where the hills stands
The hill Bape, Kura Kulurduk over there
Where our grandfathers used to live, a beautiful place  [Father’s Father]
The creek Kumeway, a beautiful place over there
At the eucalyptus flowers Dreaming, at Memari, a beautiful place
At the Milky Way Dreaming, at Mawurt, a beautiful place
Where two old ladies drowned, over there, a beautiful place
Father, show me where the Dreamings are
Father, Ah, my country! Kunbinhi, a beautiful place!
Our place.
ROBERT MOLLINJIN
[9 Items]

Robert Mollinjin 01 – Kangkurl Ngay Bangamlele [My grandfather (Father’s Father) was attacked] [Robert Mollinjin – 1998 circa]

Kangkurl ngay bangamlele ku ngarra ngalbi
Ngarra nhupilin ngala da Thili
Kardu-ka kardipupta da ngalburnu Mune
Nukunu kardidum da ku militi-nu
Ku danthi kardu-nu
Kardu pudnamkardu Kudantiga kathu
Ku pamnithaypi ku militi-nu
Ngarra thay bangutut pardiputa-yu
Nukunu kardidum da ku militi-nu
Ku danthi kardu-nu
Nukunu wurdawuri kathu konantu
Ku ka bemiltamardabi mardangamur
Ku militi wardatu ngungamatu
Nukunu kardidum da ku militi-nu
Ku danthi kardu-nu
Kangkurl ngay bangamlele ku ngarra ngalbi

My grandfather was attacked by a crocodile [Father’s Father]
At the big creek, at Thili
Where people used to live, at the island Mune
He was there for a whole day to hunt birds
He brings [the birds] for the people
People are coming from Kudantiga
They are eager to eat these birds
At the baobab tree where they used to stay
He was there for a whole day to hunt birds
He brings [the birds] for the people
He went back
They meet each other in the middle [of the creek]
He threw the birds [to the crocodile]
He was there for a whole day to hunt birds
He brings [the birds] for the people
My grandfather was attacked by a crocodile [Father’s Father]

Robert Mollinjin 02 – Ngapan [Spirit]
[Robert Mollinjin – 2002 circa]

Ngay-ka ngurgurlwarl nganawuit
Kangkurl ngay pamaru thipinha warra
Ngarra da nirim-de bangkardu
Dhatu-wa diniha nanthi dirimu wangu
Nanthi waratutu nangat nanthi malkarrin
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Kunbinhi
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Memarl pangu
Ngalanthur ngay-ka makuwurl warra
Ngarra da pardipulta da kanhi
Ngapan dhatu-wa purdarmturi
Spirit was there coming down
Da ngarra ngay polyrr ngarra ngay pangu kurran
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Kunbinhi
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Memarl pangu
Ngay-ka ngudarmurtug ngarra lallingkin-re
Ngarra kardu Yek Nangu nukun da-yu
Nangu, Nanthak, Kudantiga
I da pangu wangu kurran-yu
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Kunbinhi
Ngapan ngay-ka wurdawurl da Memarl pangu

I fell asleep
My grandfather came to me  [Father’s Father]
I saw him in the dream
He was sitting there with the native bee design [painted on him]
He was singing Malkarrin
My spirit went back to Kunbinhi
My spirit went back over there to Memarl
There are no old men left
At that place where they used to live  
Their spirit is coming down  
At my place, where my hill stands  
My spirit went back to Kunbinhi  
My spirit went back over there to Memarl  
I grew up on the sea side  
In Yek Nangu country  
Nangu, Nanthak, Kudantiga  
And over there.  
My spirit went back to Kunbinhi  
My spirit went back over there to Memarl

Robert Molljin 03 – Wunamparrkit [Molljin – English version]  
[Robert Molljin – 1985-1986 circa]

My grandfather dreamt of Jesus  [Father’s Father]  
At that place called Tea Tree bay  
He gave him three special songs  
He went to Heaven by his vision  
The bird from the sky is coming down  
He is sleeping out there, in a pleasant country  
He wants to stay there forever  
The mother of Jesus loves us  
He went to Heaven by his vision  
The bird from the sky is coming down  
My grandfather dreamt of Jesus  
At that place called Tea Tree bay  
He gave him three special songs  
He went to Heaven by his vision  
The bird from the sky is coming down  
He went to Heaven by his vision

Robert Molljin 04 – Wunamparrkit [Molljin]  
[Robert Molljin – 1985-1986 circa]
Wunamparkit-ka benkarnin Kale Neki-yu
Da-ka Kulunduri pangu kannawult-yu
Nanthi ka tharrmatthi damnamut-yu
Nukunu dimmardawuith heaven da nirm-de
Ku-ka murulbe wurdarnurt kathu wurran-yu
Nukunu kannawult ngarra darrimurn thipman pangu-yu
Ngay-ka marda manganat ngonini da pangu-yu
Thangku-wa-nu Kale Neki mardamanhet dim

Mollinjin dreamt Our Lady
At the place called Kulunduri he had a vision
He gave him that song
He went to heaven by his vision
The bird [from the sky] is coming down
He had this vision at the black sand country
I want to stay out there forever
Because Our Lady loves us.

Robert Mollinjin 05 – Bungkarnin Nangu [I am dreaming Nangu]
[Featuring Nangu Red Sunset Band – see above Nangu Red Sunset Band 12]

Robert Mollinjin 06 – My Country
[Robert Mollinjin – 1982-1983 circa]

Ngay-ka ngantheum warda-yu
Da-ka minthire warda ngay ngurululu
Ngay-ka mere wakal lallingkin
Ngay-ka mere kardu darrinpirr
Ngay-ka kardu wakal bengkunh, ngay-ka kardu wakal palyrr
Ngay-ka kardu wakal palyrr, ngay-ka kardu wakal bengkunh
Ngay-ka ngudarturtur ngarra lallingkin-de-yu
Da-ka ngindiweide ngay nantheum
Pule, thurinhigkalnu da ngarra ngay Nilut
Pule, thudinhigkalnu da ngarra ngay Kanbinhi
Ngay-ka Kardo Diminin

400
Nanthi ngay-ka nanthi dhanba
Da ngay-ka palyirr wurrar pangu-yu
Pule, thudinhigkalnu da ngarra ngay Nulut
Pule, thudinhigkalnu da ngarra ngay Kunbinhi
Yile ngay-ka Pyelam, Batuk, i Manthita
Milen i Bathuk,
Yianbunhi i Kalandha
Pule, thudungalnu da ngarra ngay Kunbinhi
Pule, thurungalnu da ngarra ngay Nulut

I forgot [my country]
When am I going back to my homeland?
I am not a saltwater boy
I am not a flood plain boy
I am a inland boy, I am a hill country boy
I am a hill country boy, I am a inland boy
I grew up at the beach side
This is why I forgot
God take me back to my country Nulut
God take me back to my country Nulut
I am a Kardu Diminin
My song is Dhanba
My homeland is where the hills stand
God take me back to my country Nulut
God take me back to my country Nulut
My fathers are Pyelam, Batuk, i Manthita
Milen i Bathuk,
Yianbunhi i Kalandha
God, take them back to my country Kunbinhi
God, take them back to my country Nulut

Robert Mollinjin 07 – Old Man Longmair
[Robert Mollinjin – 1982-1983 circa]
Father, why is that old man buried at Werntek Nganayi?
They told me this story last year [last wet season]
Old man Longmair was his name
He is buried at Werntek Nganayi
Old men and women know that man over there
He knew those people
Old man Longmair was his name
He is buried at Werntek Nganayi
I will always go there by the beach
And I will always look after Werntek Nganayi
Old man Longmair was his name
He is buried at Werntek Nganayi
Old man Longmair was his name
Nganki-ka bematha wangu nganinu da ngarra kardu Yek Nangu nukan da-yu
Nangu da pemanhay ngala
Da ngarra darrimurn bupmandar wurrar
Ngay-ka bematha wangu damhimardathin kanam
Da kanhi da Wadeye da ngarra ngay

We grew up at Nangu, where the big sandhill is
I want to stay with them [Nangu people] all the time, at Nangu
At the big sandhill
By the beach, where the colours change [at sunset]
I am often feeling sad [when I am]
Here in Wadeye, my country
Mark Pupuli 01 – Yek Maninh Song

Da ngarra nganki-ka darrimurn ngala
Turulili ngarra darrimurn diyeup thurr
Ku werk pananherem ngarra dumpungu kathu
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Da murruruwirka da matha
Da murruruwirka da matha
Niyer Kempithihar-re dangkardu darrimurn
Yibimbangurr da Thindi wangu
Kura ka laljinging tharanga
Nhini-wa da ngarra nganki-yu
Da murruruwirka da matha
Da murruruwirka da matha
Kanhi-wa ku ngakumari nganki-ka
Ku werk, ku nal, ku thanga
Ku walet, ku kulangu, ku lathithin
Nhini-wa ku ngakumari nganki-ka
Kardu Yek Maninh nukun-yu
Kardu Yek Maninh nukun-yu

Our country is a big beach
Walk on the beach and you will hear
The white cockatoo singing from the jungle
This is our country
A beautiful place, that place over there
A beautiful place, that place over there
Look at Kempithihar, look at the beach
White sand at Thindi
The clear saltwater
This is our country
A beautiful place, that place over there
A beautiful place, that place over there
These are our Dreamings
White cockatoo, sea eagle, kite
Flying fox, mullet, lathithin [unidentified animal species]
Here are our Dreamings
Yek Maninh Tribe’s Dreamings

Mark Pupuli 02 – Da Kunbinhi [Kunbinhi]

Nganki-ka Kardu Diminin kardu Murrinh-patha-wa
Da nganki-ka Kunbinhi
Palyrr pangu kathu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Ngarra ngankunime-yu
Yelyel wangu kura kuluduk
Palyrr Thuykem, Bape, Ngalimbuk
Thuykem, Bape, Ngalimbuk
Kuneway, Kurintipip
I Kalinga, Wurrulk
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu
Nanthi maruwru yingampatha
Da Mawurt pangu-yu
Ngarra kardu kunugunu
Pampunguthardimhinda
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu
Da thingarru Nganimangal
Nanthi puluri wurinida
I palyrr Thalmuker
I palyrr Mayamungum
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu
Bunduck i Kolumboort, Perdjert i Kuruwurl
Pultchen i Narbarup, Mollinjin i Malakunda
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Da ngay-ka Kunbinhi
Da palyrr pangu kurran
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu
Ngarra ngankuneme-yu

We are Kardu Diminin, we are Murrinh-patha people
Our place is Kunbinhi
Over there where the hills are
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
Our Country
Yelyel, Kura Kulurduk
The hills Thuykem, Baps, Ngalimbuk
Kumeway, Kurintipip
And Kalinga, Wurrpurk
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
Our Country
The milky way Dreaming
Over there, at Mawurt
Where the two old ladies
drowned
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
Our Country
Ah, my country! Nganimangal
Where the Wax [Dreaming] is
And the hill Thalmucaker
And the hill Mayamungum
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
Our Country
Bunduck and Kolumboort, Perdjert and Kuruwurl
Pultchen and Narburup, Mollinjin and Malakunda
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
My country Kunbinhi
Where the hills stand
Our Country
Our Country
Our Country

Mark Pupuli 03 – *Mawurt* [Mawurt]
Kardu Diminin numi kanapup
Da ngarra nganki Yederr-yu
Nukumu-ka bematha wangu kanawat
Da ngarra nganki Yederr-yu
Murrinh-ka nuku-ka Mawurt
Nuku-ka Kardu Diminin
Yederr pangu-ka the war da kanthin
Ngarra ku ngakumari nganki-yu
Nganki-ka le patha-wa nganamna
Da kanapup wangu Yederr-yu
Kardu Diminin numi kanapup
Da ngarra nganki Yederr-yu
Nukumu-ka bematha wangu kanawat
Da ngarra nganki Yederr-yu
Murrinh-ka nuku-ka Mawurt
Nuku-ka Kardu Diminin
Nuku-ka Kardu Diminin
Nuku-ka Kardu Diminin

There is one Kardu Diminin man who lives
At our place, Yederr
He always goes there
At our place Yederr
His name is Mawurt
He is a Kardu Diminin
He knows the place over there, Yederr
Where our Dreamings are
We are happy for him
He lives there at Yederr
There is one Kardu Diminin man who lives
At our place, Yederr
He always goes there
At our place Yederr
His name is Mawurt
He is a Kardu Diminin
He is a Kardu Diminin
He is a Kardu Diminin
When will I go back there?
To our place were there are many crabs
That is where our place is, Yederr
My grandfather’s place [Father’s Father]
It is a beautiful place
The place, Mindhepirr, with the big river
Where there are many fishes
That is where our place is, Yederr
My grandfather’s place [Father’s Father]
It is a beautiful place
Go and look at the grass plains
Where there are many geese
Go in the jungle and look at them
The place where the girls are [young females Little people]
That is where our place is, Yederr
My grandfather’s place [Father’s Father]
It is a beautiful place
My grandfather’s place [Father’s Father]

Mark Pupuli 05 - Old people gone
[Mark Pupuli – 1986 circa]

Ngalandar nganki panthingeret
Kardu thingarru pananganbat
Da thingarru Yederr da mange nukunu pirrim
Thanguda mere nguludurr warda-yu?
Makardu warda
Ngalandar nganki pananganbat
Da thingarru Yederr da mange nukunu pirrim
Thanguda mere nguludurr warda-yu?

[The second part is a Magati Ke translation of the original Murrinh-patha]

Pindipindi therr pummelliwangala
Ambume mengina pumellingkirpirra
Way ngina Yederr way pundinangkani
Thipeye nganan ambu Kimmelwardath wu
Ambume mengina pindipindi therr pumellingkirpirra
Way ngina Yederr way pundinangkani
Thipeye nganan ambu Kimmelwardath wu?
Thipeye nganan ambu Kimmelwardath wu?
Thipeye nganan ambu Kimmelwardath wu?

Our Old people are all gone
Ah, my people! They left us
Ah, my country! standing alone by itself
Why can’t we all go back now?
Nobody [lives] there now
Our old people left us
My place is standing alone by itself
Why can’t we all go back now?

Mark Pupuli 06 – Kardu Yek Maninh [Yek Maninh people]

Nganki-ka kardu lallingkin
Kardu-ka Yek Maninh-wa
Nganki warda kanapup da pangu-yu
Da ngarra nganki Thindi-yu
Nganki-ka kardu lallingkin
Ngalanthur perrkenku warda panamka
Kumununu perrkenkanume panaam
Da dapumammhit panam
Da ngarra nganki Thindi-yu
Nganki-ka kardu lallingkin
Kanhi-wa murrinh pigunu-yu
Mangal Mangal i Karrin thanmuy
Kinhirr, Yiwirnda, Threwudi
Pigunu-ka Kardu Yek Maninh
Pigunu-ka Kardu lallingkin

We are saltwater people
We are Yek Maninh people
We are now living over there
Our country is Thindi
We are saltwater people
Two old men are still alive
And three old ladies
They are looking after the place
Our country is Thindi
We are saltwater people
Their names are:
Mangal Mangal and Karrin thanmuy
Kinhirr, Yiwirnda, Threwudi
They are Yek Maninh people
They are saltwater people

Mark Pupuli 07 – Kardu Diminin [Diminin people]

Nganki-ka Kardu Diminin-wa
Kardu Murrinh-patha-wa ngarnam kanhi-yu
Nanthi-ka dhanba ngarnam purkpurk-yu
Ngarra kangkurl nganki panamgarrapart
Da-ka diwa kathu palyrr kurran
Da Kunbinhi-ka dyiwa kathu kurran
Da-ka nhini-wa da nganki-yu
Da ngarra nganki Kunbinhi wangu

We are Diminin people
We are Murrinh-patha people
We dance dhanba
At the place our grandfathers left us [Father’s Father]
That is the place with the hills
That is Kunbinhi over there
That is our country
That is our country, Kunbinhi over there way
DAVID KUNDAIR

David Kundair 01 – Kardu kunugunu [Old lady]
[David Kundair – 1998 circa]

Kardu kunugunu da nirn kanawit
Nigunu-ka kardu warda nirn nhingurrkurrtha
Ingarra yungurrkurrthha
Kardu warda pumemkabirl
Kardu pule ngay nangki-yu
Ingarra nigunu dembirdurt-ka
Mamanawa kardu yehilbilbil
Nigunu-ka kardu warda mamdhep
Nigunu-ka mankanhipath
Kardu kunugunu da nirn kanawuit
Ingarra yungurrkurrthha
Kardu warda pumemkabirl
Kardu pule ngay nangki-yu
I Kardu ngalantharr nigunu-ka
Kardu warda pupudangkal
Da ngarra nukunu Perrederr-yu
I kardu darrikardu nigunu-ka
Da warda pubamngkardu
Da Perrederr dembirdurt-yu or demwirnturt-yu
Kardu kunugunu da nirn kanawit

An old lady had a dream
That her man was sleeping
And while he was lying down
He turned his head
She tried to wake him up
She taught her husband was awake
She was startled
She knew that her husband was dead
An old lady dreamt
That her man was sleeping
And while he was lying down
He turned his head
And her old man,
They took him back [the Little People]
To his place, Perrederr
And his countrymen
Then saw
Perrederr floating [as if it were in the mist]
An old lady had a dream

David Kundair 02 – Papa Ngala [Papa Ngala]
[David Kundair – 1992 circa]

Kanhi-we da ngarra wangu da Papa Ngala
Ngarra kangkari ngay pardipuptha
Thurnangam ngarra mayern ngala i ngarimawingkale warda
Ngarra kura ngipilinh da Ngurrkaminhinh
Pay wangu thurrulili-ka da kabim
Da ngarra nganki da Bomenhini
Thimarrowith pangu warda wangu ngarra palyirr kurran
Da thingarru da palyirr karri
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Pay wangu thurrulili-ka da kabim
Da ngarra nganki da Ngeronbe
Ngerembe thangunu-ka da kabim da ngarra mang
Da Damarday wakal
Damarday wakal thangunu-yu da kabim
Da ngarra nganki Daminaday ngala
Pay wangu thurrulili-ka da kabim
Da ngarra nganki da Kerde-yu
Da thingarru da palyirr karri
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu
Da ngarra nganki-yu da Papa Ngala-yu

I am going to Papa Ngala

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Where my grandfather used to live [Father's Father]
Go on the main road and turn off now
At the river, the place called Ngurkamininh
Keep walking, there is another place there
Our place Bemenhini
Going up that way where the hills are
Ah, my country! Where the hills are
Our place Papa Ngala
Keep walking, there is another place there
Our place Ngerenbe
From Ngerembe, another isolated place there
Little Damarday
From Little Damarday
Our place, big Darmarday
Keep walking, there is another place there
Our place Kerde
Ah, our country! Where the hills are!
Our Country, Papa Ngala
Our Country, Papa Ngala
Our Country, Papa Ngala
Cyrill Ninnal 01 – Kimul [Kimul]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1992 circa]

Da thingarru palyrr karrim da nganki-yu
Da Kimul da lelunhka
Da thingarru da thingarru da Kimul
Nganila ngarra palyrr
Dangkardu ngarra nanthi ngunga kanamnu warran ngarra lallingkin
Da thingarru da Kimul
Ngalantharr nuwi kardida da pangu-yu
Da Kimul da lelunhka
Da thingarru da thingarru da Kimul
Da thingarru da thingarru da Kimul

Ah, my country! Where the hills stand
Kimul, a beautiful country
Ah, my country! Ah, my country! Kimul
Climb the hill
You see the sun going down to the sea
Ah, my country! Kimul
One old man is over there
Kimul, a beautiful country
Ah, my country! Ah, my country! Kimul
Ah, my country! Ah, my country! Kimul

Cyrill Ninnal 02 - Nanthak [Nanthak]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 2002]

Kanbi-ka da ngarra nganki da Nanthak da lelunhka
I da ka ku ngarra ngupu teret d pangu-yu
Diyepup ngarra kura lallingkin panpapa pirrim ngarra darrimurn
Dangkardu nanthi ngarra ngunga kanamnu warran ngarra lallingkin

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Ngarra kardu warda ngalantharr numi kardida
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da Nanthak
Nhini-wa da nganki-yu da Nanthak

This is our county, a beautiful country
Where there are many turtle eggs
Listen to the sea making noises on the sand
Look at the sun going down to the sea
One old man is there now
This is our county, Nanthak
This is our county, Nanthak

Cyrill Ninnal 03 – Ngay-ka nganawuit [I was sleeping]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1992 circa]

Ngay-ka nganawuit ngarra ngala nanthi ngarra ngunga
Kardu ngakumarl panamhingea wuri pumanga lallingking kanhi kurrun
Dangkardu kalpa darntourturt warda da pangu Killangan-yu
Nanthak ngurdurwurlnu da ngarra ngay
Ngay-ka Yek Nangu nganapup da ngarra ngay
Ngarra kardu kungumun pindanganpe thungku tharringa thhay ngarra yidiyi
Dangkardu nanthi tina kanamnu wurrun da ngarra ngay lallingkin,
Nanthak ngurdurwurlnu da ngarra ngay, Nanthak

I was sleeping at the big sun place
The totemic man came next to me: ‘Get up! [he said] The tide is coming in!’
Look at the reef the tide is over it, over there at Killangan
I will go back to my country
I am a Nangu man, I live at my place
Where the old lady was burnt on top of the bush apple tree [old burial ceremony]
Look at the sun going down on the sea, at my place
I will go back to my country, Nanthak

Cyrill Ninnal 04 – Palyrr Numerr [Palyrr Numerr]
[Cyrill Ninnal – 1992 circa]
Pule, thurrungalkalnu da ngarra nganki da-yu
Palyrr karrim da-yu
Da Palyrr Numerr
Ngarra kangkurl ngay kardipupta
Da pangu-yu da-yu
Da Palyrr Numerr da-yu
Ngakumari nganki ku kanamkek
Nanthi ngarra marluk yingampatha deida
Da ngarra nganki da-yu
Da Palyrr Numerr
Nganki warda nganapup-yu pangu-yu
Da ngarra nganki
Palyrr karrim da-yu
Da Palyrr Numerr
Yile, thurrungalkalnu da ngarra nganki da-yu
Palyrr karrim da-yu
Da Palyrr Numerr

Brother, take me back to our country
Where the hills stand
Palyrr Numerr
Where my grandfather used to live [Father's Father]
Over there
Palyrr Numerr
Where our Dreamings, the rainbow serpent
and the Didjeridu made their Dreaming sites
Over there
Palyrr Numerr
We are now living over there
At our place
Where the hill stands
Palyrr Numerr
Father, take me back to our country
Where the hill stands
Palyrr Numerr
APPENDIX III
SOURCES FOR MALKARRIN AND DHANBA SONGS

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