

# CEREMONY

THE DJUNGGUWAN OF NORTHEAST ARNHEM LAND



## BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A FILM AUSTRALIA NATIONAL INTEREST PROGRAM

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## PREFACE

This background material has been compiled to complement the programs on *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* DVD.

The material is not comprehensive but serves as an incentive to a further study of Yolngu culture. It brings together a range of texts that will help to establish the social, historical and political context in which Yolngu ceremony is performed.

It includes previously published material as well as transcripts of interviews recorded specifically for the *Ceremony* DVD.

The references will help direct readers to areas for advanced study.

An accompanying *Ceremony* website provides access to further information, including scripts of the three Djungguwan films – *The Djunguan of Yirrkala* (filmed in 1966), *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* (filmed in 1976) and *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future* (filmed at Yirrkala in 2002). The website can be accessed through [learning@filmaustralia](mailto:learning@filmaustralia) **[www.filmaust.com.au/learning](http://www.filmaust.com.au/learning)**

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## SECTION 1 – WRITINGS ON THE DJUNGGUWAN CEREMONY

In 1966, anthropologist Nicolas Peterson was part of a specialist unit set up by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to document traditional ceremonies in remote communities. He and director Roger Sandall journeyed to the Northern Territory to film a Djungguwan. The resulting film was *The Djunguan of Yirrkala*.

Peterson also wrote notes to the ceremony, which are held by the institute. Extracts from those notes are published here in **Origins of the Djungguwan** and **The Myth**. His original spellings have been retained.

In 1970 Ian Dunlop started a long-term film project with the Yolngu of Yirrkala for Film Australia. The result was a series of 22 films known as *The Yirrkala Film Project*, of which *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* (1976) is one. In **Wawilak Narratives (A Text by Ian Dunlop)**, he writes about the three films of the Djungguwan – 1966, 1976 and 2002.

### 1.1 ORIGINS OF THE DJUNGGUWAN

#### Introduction

Nicolas Peterson wrote this account of the origins of the Djungguwan after speaking with Wandjuk Marika, about how Marika's grandfather and great-grandfather obtained the Wawilak story from the Mandhalpuy clan.

Originally the Wawilak story and the companion Djungguwan belonged only to the Wagilag, Liyagalawumirr and Mandhalpuy clans of central Arnhem Land. But sometime around 1918, the story and ceremony were exchanged and given by the men of the Mandhalpuy clan to a senior Rirratjingu man, Djuwakan Marika, from east Arnhem Land.

The sharing of this ancestral narrative confirms the close relationship between these clans and the sacred power the Wawilak story embodies for Yolngu. This creation story portrays the beginnings of Yolngu law, painting, ceremony and custom.

#### Extract from Nicolas Peterson's Notes on the Ceremony

##### The Nature of the Differences

At Yirrkala there is but one man who has the right to make the Djungguwan ceremony; he is the ritual leader of the Riradjingu. According to him his grandfather met the grandfather of some present day Mandalpui people near Elcho Island and they exchanged ceremonies. The Mandalpui gave the [sacred] emblem to the Riradjingu and received in return sacred objects from the dua Narra ceremony.

The Mandalpui form a totemic phratry [tribal division] with the Liagalowmir [the people of central Arnhem Land] but they have separate countries and different languages. As the Riradjingu obtained the right to make the [sacred] emblem from the Mandalpui people the emblem is associated with the Mandalpui waterhole and not Mirralmina the Liagalowmir waterhole. The present leader can only recall eight times during his lifetime when the Djungguwan has been made within the Caledon Bay-Melville Bay [northeast Arnhem Land] area, including his own circumcision.

It is clear without going into detail that the Waggilak mythology and the ceremonies that go with it are not indigenous to this northeastern corner of Arnhem Land. Neither the Ulmark nor the Marndiella have ever been performed in the Yirrkala area and the Gunabibi has only been staged twice as a result of southern contact during the war.

Since the travels of the two sisters pass through lands very distant from Yirrkala which for the most part are totally unknown to the people there it is not surprising that many of the specific references to place found in the Milingimbi versions are not found in the Yirrkala ones.

This creates a special problem for normally place is an extremely important mnemonic in the preservation of a mythological tradition. But when the named features of landscape, the waterholes and camping spots of the travellers are completely unknown to the people and not daily reminders of past events the myth could be easily forgotten. At Yirrkala these named places have for the most part disappeared and been replaced with an emphasis on the symbols and structure of the rite. New symbolism\* has been incorporated into the rite to relate it more directly to the myth and the mnemonic of 'real places' been replaced by a visually elaborate ground plan instead.

\* The Liagalowmir man from Milingimbi complained privately that there were too many poles around and that the ceremony was not being performed in the right way. He left before the end of the ceremony for a complex [set] of reasons but one included dissatisfaction with what he regarded as a wrongly run ceremony.

## 1.2 THE MYTH

### Extract from Nicolas Peterson's Notes on the Ceremony

It's only recently, with the commercial production of bark paintings and poles and growing European interest in Aboriginal culture, that myths have come to be told regularly and out of ritual context. Traditionally they would only be told during the performance of ceremonies and today it is only during such performances that details of the myth emerge.

A requested or spontaneous telling of the myth rarely includes these details, if the story is uninterrupted, only covering the main events. During a ceremony however, there is much discussion of details of particular songs, or items of ritual paraphernalia, body painting designs, ground layout, dances and the relationship to the actions and events that befell the dreamtime travellers.

The following is a spontaneous account of the travels of the two Waggilak sisters given on the day of our arrival to which a few minor additions have been made for clarity.

#### The Travels of the Waggilak Sisters

They came to Ngillipidji, the fire dreaming place, where they left stone spears. From Ngillipidji they walked down from the hills travelling through the bush and living on bush food. They were hunting, leaving the other Waggilak people and their husbands behind. They camped at many places catching food and eating it but we do not know the names of these places.

They came one morning to the lagoon where the snake lived and made a fire and camp there, and prepared to cook the food that they had brought with them. As they cooked each item it became alive again and ran off because they were near the snake. This happened to the yam, goanna, possum, porcupine and many other animals and plants. The two sisters were wondering what was going to happen but they did not know.

A baby was born from the young sister and she went down to the lagoon to get paper bark to lay it on. The blood from the after birth ran into the water and the snake lying deep inside the water smelt it, as he stood up inside the water he began to make rain. At first it was fine rain so the two sisters built themselves a hut and went into [sic] sleep, but as the snake emerged from the water the rain grew and he made thunder and lightening [sic].

The two sisters awoke. The elder sister started to dance and sing and was soon joined by her younger sister. They tried to stop the rain by dancing in a circle but they could not. The snake was too strong and came nearer and nearer until it was right in the hut where the two sisters had fallen asleep in exhaustion. First it swallowed the young sister, then the baby and then the elder sister.

There were three snakes in the area; one from the Wessel Islands at Marlpani, the one that swallowed the sisters at Mirrarmina and a third in Mandalpui country at Muduwurr. They were all standing high in the sky and they started talking to each other asking what they had eaten. Each snake was making rain and lightening [sic]. When the Wessel Island snake had spoken he fell down and coiled off through his country. The snake that had swallowed the sisters never moved. The Mandalpui snake was taller than the others for he was the most important snake and he asked the Mirrarmina snake what he had in his belly. I have swallowed those sisters and their baby but I am going to vomit them.

He fell to the ground with a crash and two days later he vomited them. During these two days the Waggilak and Rembarrnga people had come to search for the sisters but only found their empty hut. When he vomited them they fled to the Mandalpui place Muduwurr where the people found them.

### 1.3 WAWILAK NARRATIVES (A TEXT BY IAN DUNLOP)

A fundamental aspect of Aboriginal religion is the belief that, in creation times long ago, ancestral beings gave shape to the world as we know it today. They created the first people and gave them their different languages and the law by which they should live. These ancestral forces are still present in the world today.

The paths of different ancestral beings criss-cross the country linking people of different groups. Songs trace their journeys and in ceremony their epic deeds are relived. Through ritual song, dance and art, people are able to come close to the ancestral beings and receive their power.

For the Yolngu, the people of northeast and central Arnhem Land, two of the most important creator ancestors are the Wawilak Sisters. They created great ceremonies through which they taught the first ancestral people of this country, the Djuwany, the sacred and moral law which has been handed down until today. They divided their companions and the whole of the universe into two great divisions or moieties, the Dhuwa and the Yirritja. The Wawilak themselves are particularly significant for certain clans of the Dhuwa moiety.

As they travelled through Arnhem Land the Wawilak Sisters hunted, gathered food and made camp like the Yolngu of today; but like all ancestral beings their actions were creative and land transforming. As they travelled they sang, naming and thereby giving meaning to the country and everything upon it.

When discussing the ancestral realm, time and place are not necessarily linear as in western logic. The same creative acts can be thought of as having occurred at different places, sometimes by different manifestations of the ancestors. Their journeys do not fit into a neat linear narrative.

Today, when ceremonies are performed, the actual place of the ceremony is, in a way, transformed into the place where the ancestral beings originally performed those acts. The performers come close to, and almost become, the ancestral beings themselves.

One of the great ceremonies which the two Wawilak Sisters gave to the Yolngu is the Djungguwan. This DVD explores three Djungguwan ceremonies which were performed, and filmed, in northeast Arnhem Land over the last 40 years. The films are *The Djunguan of Yirrkala* (filmed in 1966), *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* (filmed in 1976) and *Djungguwan—Speaking to the Future* (filmed at Yirrkala in 2002).

The three different ceremonies recorded in these films portray overlapping parts of the story and the travels of the Wawilak Sisters as they journeyed through eastern and central Arnhem Land. As they travelled they revealed their Djungguwan ceremony to different clans in different countries. Today these clans are the owners or custodians of these different parts of the Wawilak story and its accompanying ceremony.

*Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* was shot in 1976. Gurka'wuy is in Trial Bay on the Gulf of Carpentaria, some 150 kilometres by bush track south of Yirrkala. This is Marrakulu clan country. Today it is the site of a Marrakulu clan homeland settlement. It is an important sacred site associated with the Wawilak and other ancestral beings.

Two other Marrakulu sites, Manybalala and Batjiwuy, are also closely associated with the travels and creative acts of the Wawilak Sisters in this part of Arnhem Land.

In the film *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* we are told that the two Wawilak Sisters came to Gurka'wuy from Nilipitji in Wawilak clan country far to the west. At Nilipitji they gathered stone tools for their spears and axes from a sacred quarry. The Wawilak then travelled east through rocky hill country towards Manybalala, Batjiwuy and Gurka'wuy with their companions, the Djuwany people. They divided the Djuwany and the whole of nature into the Dhuwa and the Yirritja.

At Manybalala/Batjiwuy/Gurka'wuy they created a great ceremonial ground – the gundimolk. Here they performed their Djungguwan ceremony and taught the first people their law, including the rules of kinship, marriage, social behaviour and land ownership. Today this law is taught, celebrated and handed on from generation to generation through the performance of the Djungguwan and other rituals.

In the *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* the Yolngu sing, and relive, the creation of the gundimolk:

*The Wawilak come into  
their gundimolk*

*Everything made glorious  
with feather string*

*They decorate their skin  
with scars of fire  
Everything made beautiful.*

There are different manifestations of the making of the original gundimolk. In one version two sugar-bag (wild bees' nest) hunters are searching for honey. Sometimes these are portrayed as the Mayawa or blanket lizard people, sometimes as two sugar-bag hunters called Gandjalala and Wuyal. The sugar-bag hunters cut down a great ancestral stringybark tree to get honey. The tree crashes to the ground and sacred honey impregnates the ground. Splinters of wood and honey bees fly off across the land spreading their power to different lands and different people. Ancestral honey and its accompanying power is an important theme in *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy*.

After it fell part of the tree trunk floated out to sea, forming the Gurka'wuy River as it went. It travelled as a hollow log to Gurka'wuy and became the home of two Djarrka, the ancestral water goanna. Marrakulu people think of themselves as Djarrka. These are closely linked to the Wawilak Sisters themselves.

When the Wawilak Sisters had finished their Djungguwan ceremony they continued their journey to the northwest. The Djuwany tried to follow them but the Wawilak chased them away. The Djuwany changed from human beings into spirit people, living in a sacred well near the mouth of the Gurka'wuy River. Today, when Marrakulu die their spirits join the Djuwany spirit people in the Gurka'wuy River. From here spirits enter afresh the wombs of wives of Marrakulu men, waiting to be born as a new generation of Marrakulu children. (Men always marry women from the opposite moiety and therefore a different clan from their own. Children belong to their father's clan.)

When they left Gurka'wuy the younger Wawilak sister was pregnant. They travelled northwest to central Arnhem Land – but for the *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* the story ends here. The Wawilak were passing out of Marrakulu country and Dundiwuy Wanambi, who invited us to film his Djungguwan, felt he could not tell those parts of the Wawilak story for which his Marrakulu clan did not have custody.

The 1976 Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy was held on Marrakulu land and was primarily initiated and organised by Marrakulu clansmen Mithili Wanambi and Dundiwuy Wanambi; however people of other clans played an extremely important part. Bokarra of the Manggalili clan was the senior son of the senior Marrakulu woman of her generation. As such he acted as manager, ensuring the proper performance of his mother's ritual. Other men from the Madarrpa clan whose mothers were Marrakulu acted as workers.

Most importantly, leaders from the Rirratjingu clan, Roy Dadaynga Marika, Milirrpum Marika and Wandjuk Marika, played pivotal roles in the ceremony. This is because the Rirratjingu and the Marrakulu share custodianship of the Djungguwan in northeast Arnhem Land.

The Djungguwan ceremony portrayed in *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future* was performed at Yirrkala, the main Aboriginal township in northeast Arnhem Land, in 2002. This is Rirratjingu clan country and this ceremony was, in the main, organised by Wanyubi Marika of the Rirratjingu clan. Because of this the primary (but not exclusive) perspective of this ceremony was Rirratjingu.

Wanyubi is the son of Milirrpum Marika and in 1976 Wanyubi was one of the young boys who were put through the first stages of the law of the Wawilak in the Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy. In 2002 he himself conducts the Djungguwan ceremony.

The other leader of the 2002 ceremony was Wukun Dennis Wanambi from the Marrakulu clan. Dennis is the son of Mithili, one of the ritual leaders of the 1976 Djungguwan. Like Wanyubi, Dennis wants to stage the Djungguwan to follow in his father's footsteps. He confesses to camera that when he was growing up he didn't listen to his father, but he also says he was taken to a Djungguwan and encouraged to paint by his father.

Dennis implies that, because of his participation in the ceremony as a young teenager, he has now been able to come back into 'the true way' and discover his Yolngu foundation. In *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future* we see Dennis painting Djarrka, the ancestral water goanna, on his Marrakulu clan pole. The same design, painted by Dundiwuy Wanambi, is featured in the 1976 Djungguwan. This painting expresses the Marrakulu clan's title deeds to its country.

Some time in the early 20th century, possibly 1918, senior men of the Rirratjingu clan journeyed to central Arnhem Land for a ritual exchange of sacred knowledge with leaders of the Mandhalpuy people near Elcho Island. With this came accompanying rights to ritual performance.

In the 2002 Djungguwan men sing of the journey of the two Wawilak Sisters on their way to Mandhalpuy country:

*The two Wawilak Sisters  
journey through the Mitchell Ranges.  
They travel with their mother clans.  
The sisters painted with white clay,  
their bodies glistening in the sun.  
As they travel with their spears  
Throughout the vast Mitchell Ranges.*

More significantly, the Rirratjingu gained rights to the 'end part' of the Wawilak story. In this the Wawilak travelled west to central Arnhem Land where their journey ended in a dramatic encounter with the ancestral python Witiitj. The Two Sisters camped beside the sacred waterhole where the ancestral python dwelled. They inadvertently polluted its waters and an angered Witiitj rose up and swallowed them. In the 2002 Djungguwan, Wanyubi Marika makes reference to this part of the Wawilak story through his painting on one of the ceremonial poles.

The 1966 Djungguwan of Yirrkala was primarily a ceremony restricted to initiated men and those being initiated. Only a small public part can be shown in this DVD. In this ceremony (possibly the first Djungguwan to be held at Yirrkala since the ritual exchange) there is clearly



more emphasis on the final part of the Wawilak story, that part that the Rirratjingu received rights to about 50 years earlier.

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Over the 40-year period during which these three Djungguwan ceremonies were performed, huge social changes have taken place at Yirrkala and throughout northeast Arnhem Land. Yirrkala's isolation was shattered by the development, on its doorstep, of an open-cut bauxite mine. The mining town of Nhulunbuy was built just 20 minutes drive from Yirrkala. With the town came a hotel and alcohol. The Yolngu lost the first land rights case in Australian history when they tried, unsuccessfully, to stop the development of the mine on their land. Yirrkala changed from a church mission to an Aboriginal township.

Throughout all this the Yolngu have struggled to maintain their language, their social organisation and most importantly their religion. The handing down of culture from one generation to the next has played a vital part in this. Right at the start of *The Yirrkala Film Project* (of which *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* is a part), Roy Dadaynga Marika says:

This is our chance to record our history for our children, for our children and our grandchildren. We should do this while we are still alive. Before we die we should make a true picture...our own Yolngu picture, that will teach our children our dances and law and everything – our singing, our own Yolngu culture.

At the end of *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* Dundiwy Wanambi says:

This is a history for new generation, and for new generation...so my clan, people, will use this same ceremony for ever and ever...

In the 2002 *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future* Wanyubi Marika says:

This ceremony takes us back to our law. Laws that were given to us by the two Wawilak Sisters. They came from Wawilak country, south of Arnhem Land. They travelled a long way towards our country. These colours represent the sacred and secret objects that they gave each clan. These paintings keep our culture and law alive and strong.

In the face of massive change the Yolngu continue the struggle to maintain, and celebrate, their own culture through the performance of ceremonies such as the Djungguwan.

## SECTION 2 – EXTRACTS FROM JOURNEY TO THE CROCODILE'S NEST

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

*Journey to the Crocodile's Nest* was written by Howard Morphy at the request of Ian Dunlop and Film Australia to accompany *Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy*, one of the films in *The Yirrkala Film Project*. The book was published in 1984 by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

Howard Morphy explains in his Preface:

The film was made by Ian Dunlop of Film Australia, and recorded the burial of a young child who died at a small Aboriginal settlement on Trial Bay in northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. Although focussed on a single burial ceremony the book is intended to provide an understanding of the Yolngu ceremonial system as a whole and, in particular, the way ceremonial performances are structured.

Yolngu ceremonies are dense with meaning and a detailed analysis of any one ritual episode can lead to a journey of explorations through an endless series of matrices of symbolic interconnections. I have focussed on the most general meanings and those most relevant to the objectives of the particular ceremony. At the same time I have attempted to show how a much broader range of understandings or interpretations can be evoked by the events.

Having analysed the semantics of the ceremony I go on to analyse the ceremony from a sociological perspective, looking at relationships between the participants, how these are reflected in the roles that people play and how the different groups involved in the ceremony affect its content. These are concerned with summoning up the powers of the Ancestral past and with the expression of symbolic themes.

Each Yolngu burial ceremony is a unique creation tailored to fit the particular circumstances of a death and the dead person's place within the social universe. Yet each ceremony shares a common structural core, and in each case the same principles are applied to give body to that structure, producing a surface form that is both unique yet comprehensible, that is organised on behalf of an individual yet reflects the structure of the society, that will never be performed in its entirety again in the same form, yet is an example of a distinctive cultural institution, a Yolngu burial ceremony.

For this section of the background material, Trevor Graham (writer/director of *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land*) has extracted sections from the book that relate to Yolngu history and social structures and the Djungguwan ceremony of northeast Arnhem Land. References are given to the chapters where the full text can be found. Howard Morphy's original spellings have been retained.

## 2.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF YIRRKALA

The first recorded contact Yolngu people had with Europeans was on 4 February 1803, when Matthew Flinders' ship, *The Investigator*, visited the people of Caledon Bay. For the next 130 years contact with Europeans was restricted to occasional encounters with explorers and mineral prospectors and one or two skirmishes with police punitive expeditions. Contact with outsiders was not, however, restricted to Europeans. For several hundred years up until 1907, coastal Arnhem Land was visited annually by praus from Macassar in South Sulawesi. The praus came in search of trepang and pearls. Contact between Macassans and Aborigines along the coast appears to have been on the whole friendly and mutually beneficial, the Aborigines supplying the ships' crews with food and some labour, and receiving in return some trade goods, the most important of which appear to have been iron, cloth and tobacco. These annual visits appear to have had a considerable impact on the Aborigines of the area and their voyages and other aspects of Macassan life are commemorated in song cycles and dances of people of the Yirritja moiety. The Macassans also introduced certain items of material culture, notably the dugout canoe and the long stemmed smoking pipe. There is however little evidence that they had any impact on the basic structure of society, though anthropologist Donald Thomson hypothesises that the ceremonial exchange cycles was stimulated by the impact of Macassan trade goods.

Intensive contact with Europeans began in the 1920s with the establishment of the Methodist mission stations at Milingimbi (1922), Yirrkala (1934) and Elcho Island (Galiwinku) (1944). Until the late 1930s the people of the east coast of Arnhem Land lived exclusively by hunting and gathering. After the Second World War increasing numbers of people spent part of the year at one or other of the mission stations until in the 1960s the majority of the population lived all the year round at one or other of these settlements. The Aborigines became increasingly dependent on European foods, in particular on flour and sugar, which replaced their carbohydrate staples. However, much of their protein requirements continued to be obtained through hunting and fishing. People maintained their links with their land, which in some cases was several hundred kilometres away from the mission station, both by making occasional return visits and by continuing to perform the songs and ceremonies associated with it. Indeed, members of some groups never resided permanently at a European settlement, but carried on their traditional subsistence activities at outlying settlements, visiting the mission station to take part in ceremonies or to receive medical treatment.

Until the early 1960s north-east Arnhem Land remained fairly isolated from the rest of Australia. The Methodist Overseas Mission acted as the main filter to the world outside, providing a small European and Fijian staff of teachers, health workers and advisors under the authority of the local Mission Superintendent. From the time they were established the Methodist missions were tolerant of Yolngu cultural practices and with a few exceptions did not interfere with the religious and ceremonial life of the people. The main emphasis of the missions was to develop economic self-sufficiency through agriculture and craft production and in the long term enabling the Aborigines to become integrated within Australian society as a whole through education. Although there had been some early attempts to set up cattle stations in the Arafura region, and occasional visits to the area by prospecting expeditions, on the whole white Australians had shown little interest in the region.

This situation altered drastically with the discovery and subsequent development of the bauxite reserves on the Gove Peninsula. The impact of mining has been greatest on the Yolngu of Yirrkala as this settlement is located in the centre of the mineral deposits. The most immediate threat was to their ownership of the land as their rights were totally disregarded in the negotiations for leases which eventually led to establishment of the mining town of Nhulunbuy and the processing plant and port at Melville Bay in the early 1970s. After a series of initial setbacks in court proceedings brought by the Aborigines against NABALCO and the Australian government, the people of Yirrkala were finally granted land rights in 1976 under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act. The Act, however, came much too late to prevent damage to their environment and disruption to their society brought by the development of the mining enterprise. Today Yirrkala is only some few miles from the new town of Nhulunbuy, the third largest in the Northern Territory. The proximity of the mining town has created an enormous problem of adjustment for the people of Yirrkala, resulting in increased interaction with Europeans, economic disruption, and the introduction of alcohol with its attendant problems.

One of the indirect consequences of the mining developments on the Gove Peninsula was that it gave added impetus to the outstation movement in the area. Outstations developed throughout much of Aboriginal Australia during the early 1970s as a means of stepping aside from White Australia in order to assert ownership of the land and establish an independent relationship with the wider socio-political entity. In the Yirrkala area it had the additional consequence of distancing the people from Nhulunbuy and enabling them to restrict access to alcohol. Outstations have developed through people moving away from the main settlements to establish small self-sufficient Aboriginal controlled communities in their own clan lands.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.3 YOLNGU CLAN ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

### Social Organisation

The Yolngu are not a tribe. The principal element of social organisation is the clan. In north-east Arnhem Land there are upwards of 60 clans, the members of which speak one of the dialects of one of the languages of the Yolngu people linguistic group.

According to Yolngu ideology each clan has its own language. Linguistically speaking, however, the differences between some of the clan dialects are minimal. In the region as a whole, five or six separate and mutually unintelligible languages can be identified. The majority of adult Yolngu are, in fact, multilingual and many senior men and women are able to understand all of the languages of the region.<sup>2</sup>

### Clans

Yolngu clans are patrilineal. Each clan is separately named and today clan members take a common surname, though in the past this was not the case.<sup>3</sup>

Clan membership gives an individual a number of important rights. Each clan owns defined areas of land and the ritual property associated with that land. The latter includes the songs, dances, paintings and sacred objects which refer to the Ancestral beings whose actions created the form of the land. As an individual progresses through life he or she acquires an increasingly important say in the management of the clan's resources and the performance of its ceremonial responsibilities. Men and sometimes women, if they show aptitude and willingness to learn, will be taught their clan's paintings and the ritual knowledge connected with them.<sup>4</sup>

One further complication in the Yolngu case is that mothers-in-law and wives should be members of different sections of clans from sisters' husbands and sisters' daughters' husbands and indeed they usually belong to different clans. The net result is that a man is closely related through marriage to four other clans or sub-clans, the clan of his wife, of his mother-in-law, his sister's husband, and his sister's daughter's husband. Because a person has a strong claim on women who are in the relationship of mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter to him, he is often tied to his mother-in-law's clan by descent as well as through marriage, his mother-in-law belonging to the same clan as his mother's mother.<sup>5</sup>

### Moieties

Clans in north-east Arnhem Land belong to one of two moieties, the Dhuwa or the Yirritja. The entire Yolngu universe is divided up between one or other of the moieties. The Ancestral beings who created the land, the land itself, the plants and animals that inhabit the land, the winds that blow across it from different directions and the ochres that lie beneath the soil are all either Dhuwa or Yirritja, never both. The moieties (and therefore clans) are exogamous. A person belonging to a clan of the Dhuwa moiety, must marry someone of the Yirritja moiety and vice-versa.<sup>6</sup>

1 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, pages 1–3

2 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 5

3 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 5

4 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 6

5 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 9

6 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 7

## Ceremony and Social Relationships

The social relationships between the participants in a ceremony is reflected in the roles that they perform and in the extent of their participation in particular ritual episodes. Rights in ritual episodes extend beyond the owning clan to (sister's) daughter's children to (sister's) children, and to members of the clans connected by the same Ancestral track and sharing rights in the same body of sacred law (madayin). Although the primary reason for selecting a ritual episode is based on the relationship between the deceased and the owning clan, the performance of that episode dramatises other networks of relationship that exist between members of different clans. This indeed may be the reason for the selection of one particular episode rather than another.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.4 CLAN CONSULTING AND OBLIGATIONS IN CEREMONY

Clan-centred relations are very important to the individual as they extend the rights and obligations that a person has beyond the network of his or her own clan. A man is most likely to obtain a wife by using as a basis for negotiation existing ties that he has with members of other clans (ones which he calls ngandi and mari). Other important rights exist in the religious and political spheres. I will consider first his relations with the clans he calls mother.

A person is the custodian of his or her mother's clan's ritual property and land. A clan must consult its senior sister's sons and daughters before it can perform major ritual acts that it has rights over and before it takes decisions that affect the management of its land and resources. For example, if a clan wishes to produce a particular sacred object it must first consult its waku (sister's children). Sister's sons will be taught to do the paintings of their mother's clans, will learn the words of their mother's clans' songs and the significant mythological referents that these have. In return for these privileges the sister's sons must produce the paintings and perform the dances on behalf of their mother's clan should they be asked to do so. For this reason the sister's sons are sometimes referred to as the 'workers' for their mother's clan. The sister's sons can also have de facto permission to hunt and gather over the land of their mother's clan. In all cases the degree to which an individual is free and able to exercise these rights depends on the trust in which he is held by his mother's clan, his willingness to learn, and the overall state of relations between the clans.<sup>8</sup>

People must treat senior members of their mother's mother's clan with respect and deference, especially those to whom they actually refer as mother's mother's brother. They should consult their mari clan and present its senior members with gifts. Overall relations with the mari clan are characterised by affection and friendship.<sup>9</sup>

Sociocentric clan terms are important in daily life as they not only reflect the major political alliances that exist at a particular point in time, but they also reflect individual networks of interaction.

The clan lies at the heart of Yolngu society. From the clan an individual's network stretches out to include members of clans with established links to his own, and beyond to an area where links are no longer based on precedent, where the connections are more tenuous and less binding, until finally they peter out altogether. Over time the network changes; clans die out, lands are alienated, new alliances are forged which will create the precedents of the future. Yet always the emphasis, at least publicly, is on maintaining the existing network, for the channels that have been opened in the past make the flow of communications easier, and ensure that there are safe places to go, and that the 'permission' remains.<sup>10</sup>

7 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 109

8 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, pages 11–12

9 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 12

10 From Chapter 1—Ethnographic Background, page 13

### Big Name Places and Chunks of Ancestral Law

Places of major mythological significance have sets of names associated with them that refer to the Ancestral beings whose actions transformed the landscape there or who are otherwise connected with the place. Big names, though not strictly secret, are not used in mundane contexts and are restricted in their use. Places can not be referred to publicly by such names and knowledge of their meaning is restricted in the same way as other aspects of the clan's sacred law.<sup>11</sup>

### Sacred Law and the Distribution of Knowledge

Knowledge of the sacred law, songs, dances, paintings and sacred objects associated with the Ancestral beings is valuable not only because it provides people with a means of recreating and contacting the Ancestral world but also because of its importance in sanctioning and authorising actions and statutes in the everyday world.

People have, or acquire, three sorts of rights to sacred law: rights of ownership, managerial rights, and rights as guardians, which can in certain circumstances be converted to ownership.<sup>12</sup>

### Djunggayar

These rights are distributed on the basis of group membership and relationship to other groups. Rights of ownership and guardianship are vested in members of a clan, rights of managership are vested in a group of individuals which cuts across clan affiliation. The sacred law of a clan (i.e. that body of law that refers to the creation of a clan territory) is owned by the clan members. People also have rights in the law of their mother's clan; that is, rights to the law of a clan of the opposite moiety to themselves. They use the knowledge of their mother's clan's law to produce paintings and sacred objects for that clan, and to perform dances on their behalf during ceremonies. Sisters' children must also be consulted by members of their mother's clan and their agreement gained before that clan performs any major ceremony or takes a major decision in relation to its land or property. Because the women of a clan marry men from a number of different clans of the opposite moiety, the group of sisters' children (waku) who share a mother's clan in common belong to more than one clan. This group of sister's children are collectively referred to as the djunggayar, or 'managers' of their mother's clan.<sup>13</sup>

People may also obtain rights in other clans on the basis of mythological connections which link their clan, their mother's clan and their mother's mother's clan to other clans on the same Ancestral tracks.

Knowledge is also distributed on the basis of age and sex. Women publicly have less access to knowledge of their own and other clans' sacred law than do men. They are prohibited from visiting the men's ceremonial ground during the performance of certain restricted phases of a ceremony, and are denied access to knowledge of some of the clan's sacred objects and dances. In practice women do acquire, as they grow older, increasingly more knowledge of the Ancestral law, and senior women are consulted about ceremonial matters. The public exclusion of women from certain events is more a sign of the relative lack of formal control women have over the clan's sacred law rather than their lack of knowledge.

In the case of men, public ideology accords more with actual practice, in that they gain increasing knowledge of, and rights in, Ancestral law as they grow older and take part in more ceremonies. They gain increased access to restricted contexts throughout their life until finally they gain the freedom of access to the men's ceremonial ground, which is the sign of a fully initiated man. Such progress is not automatic but conditional on willingness to learn and obey authority as well as being dependent on the exigencies of political life.<sup>14</sup>

11 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 25–26

12 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 28

13 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 29

14 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 30

Indeed the majority of ceremonies concern both initiation and fertility, the living, and the dead, and contain themes and events which cut across myth, moiety and context.<sup>15</sup>

Burial, though focussing on death, the final stage of the life cycle, is intimately connected with conception and the first stages of initiation through the concept of the rebirth of the spirits of the dead.<sup>16</sup>

A ceremony might be the final mortuary ceremony for one individual and the first initiation into men's ceremonial for another. At another level, individuals' life cycles vary, and the structure of certain ceremonies varies accordingly. For example, if a boy dies before being initiated into a particular ceremony, this may lead to the incorporation of components usually characteristic of that ceremony into his burial ceremony.

Though the majority of ceremonies involve the participation of members of both moieties, they predominantly involve the sacred law of the clans of one moiety only. The Yirritja and Dhuwa moieties both own a Ngarra (revelatory ceremony), a Dhapi (circumcision ceremony), and a series of mortuary ceremonies. Four other ceremonies performed by the Yolngu-speaking people, the Gunapipi, the Ngulmarkk, the Djungguwan and the Mandiyala, are owned by the Dhuwa moiety. Of the latter only the Djungguwan is regularly performed in the Yirrkala area.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.5 YOLNGU RELIGION AND CEREMONIES

Most religious systems involve certain notions about the nature of reality which are reflected in people's behaviour in everyday life and not simply in the context of religious practice and observance.

A central concept in Yolngu religion is the notion of spiritual continuity of the present with the Ancestral past. The Ancestral beings who created the order of the world and determined the shape of the landscape are still believed to be effective as agents in its continuation, in ensuring the fertility of man and natural species. Human beings are linked in many ways to the creative powers of the Ancestral world, through conception spirits and through the creation of Ancestral power in ceremonies. At death part of a person's spirit returns to the Ancestral domain and is reincorporated. The Ancestral beings also established links between men and natural species. They frequently took the form of natural species themselves thereby linking the species concerned with the human beings that they created. These links may be signified by prohibitions on eating the animals concerned in certain contexts and in the way people refer to the animal concerned. For example, a person whose mother is connected to the Shark Ancestor may refer to sharks of the particular species as 'mother'. Thus, man exists in continuity with the Ancestral past and in an ancestrally defined relation to the rest of the natural universe. This notion of spiritual continuity articulates with the basic structures and principles of Yolngu social organisation, with the moiety, the clan, and the ideology of patrilineal descent that underlies them.

All animal species belong to either one moiety or the other, never to both. Through his or her affiliation to a moiety a person becomes associated with the set of animal species belonging to that moiety. Each clan is most closely linked to a subset of those species, all of which will be shared with some other clans of the same moiety. But no other clan will have exactly the same set. The songs, paintings, dances and names of a person's clan will refer exclusively to the totemic species and natural phenomena linked to his clan. To the Yolngu a sufficient explanation of such a division of species and relationships is that the state of the universe was determined by the Ancestral beings who created the world and gave it form by naming the species of the environment and allocating them to clans. The same Ancestral beings allocated rights to human groups, rights in land, sacred objects, songs and dances. Through spirit conception and the release of their power in correctly performed ceremonies the Ancestral beings are seen to be continuing and necessary factors in the reproduction of the world as each generation passes.

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15 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 31

16 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 32

17 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 32



To the Yolngu the framework for action and interaction in everyday life is one constructed in the past by the Ancestral being – the Yolngu today are simply ‘following the way’ of the Ancestors.<sup>18</sup>

### The Spiritual Cycle

Ancestral beings left behind them reservoirs of spiritual power in the countryside. Such places often form reservoirs of conception spirits, which are thought to be effective in the conception of children. People usually have a conception spirit which is associated with one of the major Ancestral beings who created their clan's territory. The conception spirit always comes from an Ancestral being of their own moiety.<sup>19</sup>

As a person grows older and participates in more and more ceremonies he or she establishes a continuing relationship with the clan's Ancestral beings. In ceremonial contexts the power of the Ancestral beings, which is objectified in the sacred objects and paintings, can be transferred to participants through their having the designs painted on their bodies and by having the power words of the songs sung over them. Thus, as they grow older, people accumulate spiritual power.

When people die their spiritual component returns to the land associated with the Ancestral beings from whom it was derived. It then becomes part of the reservoir of Ancestral power, to be called upon again to act on behalf of clan members, as a conception spirit, during the performance of ceremonies or in guiding souls of dead clan members.<sup>20</sup>

The Yolngu ceremonial system makes sense only when seen in terms of the integration of individual life cycles within an all-encompassing cosmic scheme in which the present is continually being recreated through the Ancestral past. Every death leaves a gap in the social world and disrupts the spiritual well-being of the clan. The dead person had social and ceremonial roles and had established an intricate network of connections with the Ancestral world through his or her participation in ceremonies during their life. At a pragmatic level this network of connections is manifest in the knowledge an individual has acquired the respect in which he or she is held as a result of the ceremonies they have been through.<sup>21</sup>

### Spirit Journeys

At a more general level, a person's spirit can be thought of as connected to all the other clans of the moiety who are participating in the ceremony, the spirit being conceptualised as journeying to important places associated with each of them. In this way the spirit's journey is seen as analogous to the journeys that a person may make during his or her life, visiting many of the important sites associated with the Ancestral beings of his moiety.<sup>22</sup>

### Participation in the Ceremony and the Distribution of Knowledge and Authority

[The Djungguwan ceremonies of 1966, 1976 and 2002]<sup>23</sup>, like almost every other Yolngu ceremony, had their initiatory and instructional side. The way in which people participated in the ceremonies depended in part on their status and on the degree of knowledge they possessed about the ritual events that were performed.

The ceremonies also provided a context for passing on knowledge to the younger generation, and, in certain cases, giving them authority, by instructing them in certain dance steps and ritual actions, and by delegating important tasks (to certain individuals), such as painting [the poles]<sup>24</sup>.

18 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 15–16

19 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 19

20 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 20

21 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 33

22 From Chapter 6–Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 107

23 Editor's adaptation of 'The burial ceremony for the Madarrpa child...' from Chapter 6–Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 111

24 Editor's adaptation of 'coffin lid' from Chapter 6–Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony



Many of the dances performed had not been seen before by the majority of participants in the ceremony, because the context for performing certain dances occurs infrequently. The ceremony provided a context for learning the dance through participating in it.

Throughout the ceremony young men were encouraged to participate fully in the dancing and senior men and women continually shouted instructions to them at the same time urging them to greater effort. Some people were more prominent as instructors than others.<sup>25</sup>

The role played by the younger men in the ceremony is not a simple reflection of their lack of knowledge, it is more a sign of their status within the clan. When senior members of their clan are present younger men are expected to take a minor or perhaps supportive role in decision-making and in the singing of the clan's songs. On occasions when senior members of their own clan are absent, younger clan members may play a much more active role by leading the singing of their clan's songs, especially if they are known to be good and knowledgeable singers. Status, moreover, is not simply a function of age and knowledge but also of position within the clan. Young men who are the senior members of their generation (as eldest sons of eldest sons) are more likely to play prominent roles than their younger brothers.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.6 WANGARR – THE ANCESTRAL PAST

Yolngu make a distinction between the time when only wangarr (Ancestral past) beings existed and the time, up to the present, when the earth has been inhabited by human beings 'yolngu yuwalk' (lit. true human beings, to be distinguished from Ancestral beings who took human form). These two periods overlap, so the first yolngu yuwalk, the founding human ancestors of each clan, interacted with many of the wangarr beings associated with their clan territory.

In a sense the Ancestral past continues into the present, for although they are no longer seen wandering the earth, the wangarr beings are still influential. They are manifest in the form of sacred objects, designs and power names and their spiritual power (marr or ganydjarr) is thought to be a vital force in ensuring the continued reproduction of human groups and in maintaining the fertility of the land.

In the Ancestral past, before human beings were created, the wangarr beings, frequently in groups, travelled across north-east Arnhem Land on epic journeys, during which they encountered other wangarr beings travelling in different directions.<sup>27</sup>

In their journeys the Ancestral beings created, through their actions, the form of the landscape. The routes they took became water courses, lines of trees or sandbanks. Where they cut down trees, valleys were formed. Where they dug in the ground, water flowed and springs were formed. Where they bled, ochre deposits were created. And where they died, hills and rock formations remained. Their every action had a consequence on the shape or form of the landscape which remained as a sign or evidence of their action.

The Ancestral beings took many different forms; some were anthropomorphic, others had the shape of plants or animals, while still others were inanimate objects such as rocks. They were not, however, bound by the constraints of the everyday world: if they were trees they could walk, and if they were stones they could speak. Furthermore, they could change their shape and one form to another. In this way the Ancestral beings were able to transcend the boundaries of the everyday world, dissolving the distinctions between animate and inanimate forms and between one species and the next. As well as creating the form of the world they gave it order by naming the species of plants and animals that they saw on their journeys, and by establishing rules of behaviour and cultural practices that they expected the human groups who succeeded them to follow.

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25 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 112

26 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, pages 112–113

27 From Chapter 2—Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 17–18

Having defined the order of the world, the Ancestral beings then instructed the human groups who succeeded them how to live according to the rules they had made. In the case of the Dhuwa moiety, the Djang'kawu sisters, two female Ancestral beings, created the first members of the respective Dhuwa moiety clans by taking them from their own bodies, together with the sets of sacred objects associated with the land. In the case of the Yirritja moiety the creation myths are more localised and less explicit, but the link with Ancestral creativity is still acknowledged. The founding human ancestors of each clan were instructed by one or other of the major Ancestral beings in the performance of ceremonies associated with the land. They were shown how to manufacture the ceremonial paraphernalia, and taught the songs that the Ancestors had sung and that recalled the events of their journeys. Each clan was given its own distinctive form of speech and given rights to an area of land. The continued occupation of the land by the clan was to be conditional on its members performing the proper ceremonies associated with that land.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.7 SONGS, DANCES AND PAINTINGS – THE SUBSTANCE OF CEREMONY

The substance of Yolngu ceremonies is the enactment of the events and actions of the Ancestral beings who created the land, the re-statement of the laws that they made. It is manifested through the songs, dances, paintings, objects and sequences of action that make up ceremonial performances. To the Yolngu these are not only media of expression, but also part of the essence of Ancestral beings themselves. They provide a means of becoming directly involved with the world of the Ancestral past.

Each clan possesses a set of songs, paintings and sacred objects that can be referred to collectively as the clan madayin, which we will term 'sacred law'. The clan's sacred law relates to the action and evidences of the major Ancestral beings who created the clan's land. The law of each clan is linked to and overlaps with the comparable law of several other clans of the same moiety. This is because the law refers to the Ancestral beings whose journeys always covered the territories of more than one clan.<sup>29</sup>

### Designs

Some clans are said to share the same songs with other clans along the same Ancestral track. Usually, however, the songs belonging to each clan along a track will differ in some respects from those of every other clan; they may have a different clapstick rhythm, some differences in the songs words or differences in the sequences in which they are sung. Even in the case of individual songs which sound identical there will be differences in the locational references the words are understood to have. In the case of paintings, the relationship between clans is signified by similarities and differences in the form of clan designs. Thus, clans on the same Ancestral track may all own designs which are derived from a diamond pattern yet each clan will own a unique variant of that design.<sup>30</sup>

### Songs

Songs (manikay) are performed by groups of men accompanied by clapsticks and a didgeridoo (yidaki). Songs are organised in sets which relate to particular Ancestral tracks. The song words recall in detail the events that occurred at particular places on the journey. The Ancestors lived lives in many respects identical to the lives of Yolngu today, eating, sleeping, observing the world, fighting and giving birth. The songs record the details of their everyday life, and on the surface the majority of the songs concern quite mundane things. Many topics repeat themselves at each stage of the journey of the Ancestral being just as the routine of everyday life is repeated daily. At every place an Ancestor stopped he may have named the same natural species or hunted for the same type of food. The sequence in which the songs are sung is structured according to the stage of the journey and the time of day the event took place. The time-space co-ordinates are a vital part of the meaning of Yolngu songs, for the songs focus attention on a particular event associated with the life of an ancestral being that occurred at a particular moment in time: an event which, in Yolngu thought, gave meaning to a part of the landscape, a tree or a crack in a rock, or to an animal

28 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 18–19

29 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 20

30 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 21

species, by isolating it and linking it in with the grand scheme of creation. In ceremonial performance each Yolngu song is repeated several times with slight variation.<sup>31</sup>

### Dancing and Acting

Dance plays a major role in Yolngu ceremonies. Yolngu often refer to their dances as 'acting', this is acting the events of the Ancestral past. Men and women perform different dances, though there is an overlap between the two styles and frequently both participate in the same ceremonial episodes. Although there is some room for improvisation the dances are based on set patterns of movement which are learnt from an early age. As with songs and paintings the dances refer to the events of the Ancestral past and are re-enactments of the events themselves. They are the dances the Ancestral beings performed and taught the Yolngu to do.<sup>32</sup>

### Women's Dancing

The main form of women's dancing is that of accompanying the singing of clan songs. Hand and body movements mime characteristics of animal species referred to in the songs, while the feet perform rhythmic steps to the beating of the clapsticks. The extent to which women dance depends partly on their inclination, except at major phases of a ceremony when they are expected to perform as a group. Women's dances are more stilted than the men's though there are areas of improvisation.

Men's dancing does not as a rule accompany the singing of sequences of clan songs but takes places at a particular phase of the performance, and usually marks a particular event in the ceremony. It is more elaborate, and frequently involves individuals adopting different roles and performing complementary movements. The lead is taken by one or two dancers, ideally those with a special talent, while other men either follow their steps or respond to the leading dancers as a chorus. Women sometimes join the chorus of male dancers and in certain ceremonies take the leading role.

Men's dancing often marks a major structural phase of a ceremony or signals a central event such as lifting a body into a coffin, separating young male initiates from their mothers or erecting a memorial post. The more elaborate dance sequences may be more appropriately defined as theatrical events, in which dance is integrated with beating of sticks, incantations and mimetic chants, the marking of patterns in the sand, the use of burning brands showering sparks about and so on.

All the dances and most other components of these theatrical phases of ceremonies have set forms which are owned by clans. Only people with rights in the clan's sacred law, and with the authority of the clan's elders, can perform them.<sup>33</sup>

### Ancestral Designs

Ancestral designs (miny'tji) are among the major manifestations of Ancestral beings which can be reproduced by humans. The same design can take many forms; it may be produced as a sand sculpture, as a design in strings, or in painted form such as a body painting, bark painting or on a ceremonial post. Details of the design will vary according to the medium employed and the space available.

Painted designs are in a sense extensions of the Ancestral beings themselves for each design has its origin in mythological events. It may be the impression left on the body of an Ancestral being by the mark of the tide as it washed over him as he lay on the beach, or a pattern etched by fire on the surface of a clapstick or on the shell of a turtle in the Ancestral period. The basic form of the design is incised on the wooden core of the clan's sacred objects, which themselves represent the bones of the respective Ancestral beings. The designs are thought to contain the power of the Ancestor and can be used for transferring that power to clan members.

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31 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 21–22

32 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 22

33 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 22–23

Each clan owns many variants of a set of basic designs which belong to one of the Ancestral tracks crossing its land. Each version represents a specific event or stage on the Ancestor's journey and hence refers to a particular sector of clan land. The meanings of the design include reference to both topographical and mythological attributes of that place.<sup>34</sup>

Individuals have major clan paintings painted either on their bodies or on an object identified with them on several occasions during their lives. At circumcision young men have their chests painted with a design belonging to their own clan or their mother's mother's clan or a clan linked to them mythologically. Later on when going through a major stage in their initiation or after having seen one of the clan's sacred objects for the first time, further paintings may be produced on their chests. In ceremonies both men and women are linked with paintings similar to those on posts and sacred objects, and at death they have designs painted on their bodies and/or on the lids of their coffins. Such paintings can be a sign of people's status as initiates and members of clans, and a means of placing them in contact with Ancestral powers to give them strength or, in the case of death, to ensure the reincorporation of their spirits into the Ancestral world.

The right to set the design form is vested in a few senior men of the owning clan and of clans standing in the relationship of sister's child and [sister's] daughter's child to the owners. In the majority of cases painting takes place in secluded areas from which women and children are excluded. Younger men may assist with paintings, in-filling the designs with cross-hatched lines under the supervision of those who set the designs. Today women of some clans assist with this part of the painting. Once the paintings have been completed they may be displayed publicly or they may remain restricted, in that woman and uninitiated men are denied access to them. This depends not on the design itself but on the ceremonial context in which it is produced. A painting on a coffin lid is unlikely to be seen publicly while a similar or identical design painted on a youth at circumcision can be seen by all.<sup>35</sup>

### Ochre Protection

Yellow ochre represents the blood of the Yirritja moiety as red represents the blood of the Dhuwa moiety. The painting of the body is a sacrament that is said to renew and strengthen the blood of participants in a ceremony, in particular a ceremony following the death of a member of the respective moiety. However, as a sacrament it also places people in a state of ritual danger where the power of the blood could affect them adversely. Thus, red and yellow ochre are usually painted on people after potentially dangerous phases of a ceremony have been completed, after a body has been buried, after they have recovered from illness or after a sacred object has been revealed to them. The action of this painting is said to 'free them' from danger, though perhaps it is better interpreted as a sign that they are now no longer in danger from the contagious powers of pollution or from other dangerous mystical powers.<sup>36</sup>

### White Ochre

White paint protects people from pollution, being, for example, the colour painted on the hands of people preparing a decaying body for secondary burial. It is the pigment most frequently used on the bodies of dancers in burial ceremonies and its use on the bodies of the majority of participants in the Yellow Ochre ceremony makes perfect sense. Indeed, Dundiwuy later on supported the explanation when he said:

'... (white paint) it pushes away the Mokuy spirits – and it keeps the bad smell (of the decaying body) so it doesn't get into the skin.'<sup>37</sup>

34 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, page 24

35 From Chapter 2–Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 24–25

36 From Chapter 5–The Structure of Ceremony, pages 83 and 85

37 From Chapter 5–The Structure of Ceremony, page 85

## Dilly Bags

Dilly bags (bathi) decorated with feather string are sacred objects (madayin) though they are individually owned and, on occasions, displayed publicly. Such dilly bags represent those carried by the Ancestral beings. They have designs woven into them that signify particular Ancestors and clans and, like the paintings, are associated with defined areas of land. The feather string from which the tassels are made and with which designs are sometimes woven into the body of the bag, is itself of considerable ritual value. As well as its symbolic meaning (referring to attributes of Ancestral Beings) feather string gains its power through association with particular ritual contexts and by being connected with stages in the life history of individual clan members. The same length of string may have begun life as part of a longer skein of string unravelled at ceremonies, draped over and stretched between objects and actors. It may subsequently have been used as a headdress worn by an initiate at his circumcision ceremony, and later on wound around a restricted sacred object then finally used to form one of the tassels of a clan member's dilly bag. Feather string thus has an individual history that connects people with different sacred objects, used in a variety of contexts, to the Ancestral world. Feather string tassels are one of the manifestations of the Ancestral world, and hence putting them in the coffin places the deceased in direct contact with the clan's madayin (sacred law).<sup>38</sup>

## 2.8 THE DJUNGGUWAN CEREMONY

The ceremony that most clearly incorporates themes of the relationship between life and death and of the continuity that transcends generations is the Djungguwan. The Djungguwan is both a final mortuary ceremony and a celebration of life and reproduction. It is held as a memorial for recently deceased Yolngu whose spirits are thought to have returned to the Ancestral domain. Posts are created with designs that represent both the deceased person and one of the Ancestral beings connected with his or her clan. The Djungguwan may even provide the context for the re-enactment of the primary burial ceremony in which the possessions of the deceased are either burnt or buried in a coffin beside the posts.

As well as being a final burial ceremony the Djungguwan can also be used as a circumcision ceremony for members of both moieties. Boys undergoing initiation are identified with one of the posts which becomes a medium for the inter-generational transfer of Ancestral power (to borrow a phrase from Nancy Munn). This ceremony abounds with images of fertility and growth. The memorial posts (which represent the dead and the Ancestral beings) are connected by long skeins of white feather string. As the initiates sit between, the posts are gently shaken so that down falls on the initiates below. A trumpet call *dumar* representing the Ancestors, is blown over the string and towards the surrounding group of men, women, and children, symbolising the transfer of Ancestral power. Indeed, Warner reports that the power of Ancestral spirituality generated in the Djungguwan ceremony was so great that it was thought likely to result in pregnancies.<sup>39</sup>

Yolngu ceremonies are dense with meaning and a detailed analysis of any one ritual episode can lead to a journey of explorations through an endless series of matrices of symbolic interconnections. A much broader range of understandings and interpretations can be evoked<sup>40</sup> by a Yolngu ceremony like the Djungguwan.<sup>41</sup>

Each Yolngu ceremony is a unique creation but one that shares a common structural core. And in each case the same principles are applied to give body to that structure, producing a surface form that is both unique yet comprehensible, that is organised on behalf of individuals and clans and reflects the structure of Yolngu society.

Ceremonies like the Djungguwan [filmed in 1966, 1976 and 2002] will never be performed in their entirety again in the same form, yet they are examples of a distinctive cultural institution.<sup>42</sup>

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38 From Chapter 5—The Structure of Ceremony, page 95

39 From Chapter 2—Yolngu Religion and Ceremonies, pages 34–35

40 From Preface, page x

41 Editor's adaptation of 'by the events' from Preface, page x

42 Editor's adaptation of Preface, page xi

## 2.9 GURKA'WUY – THE SITE

Gurka'wuy is a Marrakulu clan settlement or outstation on Trial Bay on the west coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was established by Dundiwuy Wanambi, the leader of one of the Marrakulu lineages, and other members of the clan in 1973. Dundiwuy had spent his early years in the area during the 1930s and 1940s before moving to Yirrkala soon after the end of the Second World War. Trial Bay is very rich in marine resources, and the shell middens at intervals along the shore testify to the relatively high population density of the coastal strip in the past. Close to Gurka'wuy settlement is the site of one of the camps established by Donald Thomson on his coast-watching patrol of the early 1940s where a great peace-making ceremony (makarrata) was held between members of the distant and previously hostile Yolngu clans. Thomson brought the clans together as part of a guerilla force planned to harass any Japanese military landing. Offshore, close to one of the many small islands that are scattered across the bay, is the place where a Japanese lugger came to grief in the 1930s and a little to the south on the Gurka'wuy river is the site of an earlier skirmish between Yolngu and the occupants of a Macassan prau who interrupted a secret phase of a Djungguwan ceremony in the early years of this century.

In 1976 the Gurka'wuy settlement consisted of a number of wood and corrugated iron huts 50 metres or so from the beach. By dirt road it is a six hour journey from Yirrkala. In the wet season the only access is by plane, a single engined Cessna, which lands on the hand-cleaned airstrip that slopes down almost to the beach. For most of the year the people of Gurka'wuy live in two camps on the beach, using the iron huts to store their possessions and to seek shelter when it rains. The Marrakulu clansmen and their wives camp in the shade of a line of casuarina trees that mark the boundary between the Dhuwa moiety land of the Marrakulu clan and the Yirritja moiety land of the Gumatj clan. Just below the camp two small rocky promontaries extend from the beach into the sea, manifestations of the male and female Water Goanna Ancestors associated with creation of the Dhuwa moiety land. Further along the beach is the camp of the second major clan grouping at Gurka'wuy, the Madarrpa. This consists of a series of temporary shelters constructed out of wood, iron and canvas. The Madarrpa clan is of the Yirritja moiety. Over the years many Madarrpa men have married Marrakulu women and today the Marrakulu is mother's clan to many of the Madarrpa living at Gurka'wuy.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.10 WOMEN AND THE LAW

Women's relationship to the madayin, or 'sacred law' of the Ancestral world, rests on the same basis as that of the men. Their relationship is established not through their husband but through membership of their own clan. Both men and women have rights in their clan's madayin and in that of their mother's and mother's mother's [brother's] clans.<sup>44</sup>

In selecting ritual episodes and in determining who to invite to the ceremony at least as much emphasis was placed on the links through women as on links through men. However, despite the importance of female relatives in determining the structure of the ceremony, they do not play, at least publicly, a prominent decision-making role in organising the ceremonial performance. The ongoing decisions as to which songs to perform next, whether the mother's mother's (brother's) group's rituals have been sufficiently represented in the ceremony and so on, are made by the senior men without obvious reference to women. Indeed, women, unlike the young men, are excluded from the arena in which most of those decisions are made as they must keep away from the hut in which the painting is being made.<sup>45</sup>

As far as women's knowledge is concerned, the first point to be made is that women are as aware as men are of the social relationships among groups and individuals that underlie the selection of ritual episodes. It is the sociological significance of the ritual episodes as much as their restricted meanings that influence their selection. Indeed, the most restricted meanings are often only of significance to a few senior clan members and are not part of the currency of meanings widely shared by the participants in a ceremony. Such meanings are therefore not

43 From Chapter 4—*Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy*: The Participants and Setting, pages 51–52

44 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 113

45 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 114

relevant for actors in the selection of a particular ritual episode, even though they may contribute towards its 'meaningfulness' for some of the participants and have an important function in the overall system of restricted knowledge that creates power through secrecy.

Women do have far greater access to knowledge of the madayin than the apparent restrictions placed on them would suggest. Senior clanswomen are acknowledged, in particular by senior men, to be authorities on the clan's law and they are consulted on matters of ritual significance. They therefore possess the knowledge required to contribute to the decision-making process, though they are rarely asked to do so in a public arena.<sup>46</sup>

Women's actions are patterned by the structure of the ceremony as a whole but it would be wrong to see them as simply following the lead of men for their actions have considerable autonomy. Their dancing is considered to be a vital component of the ceremony, and the more energetically women dance, the more successful the ceremony is thought to be. Yet although men may expect and encourage women to participate, they do not as a rule order or instruct them to do so. The extent of their participation is consequently a sign of the degree of their approval of and agreement with the events that are taking place. Although their participation is formally restricted in certain contexts, elsewhere they have the freedom to participate fully, anticipating the dances that are to be performed by the men, and on other occasions merging in with the group of male dancers.<sup>47</sup>

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46 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, pages 114–115

47 From Chapter 6—Sociological Aspects of the Burial Ceremony, page 116



## SECTION 3 – YIRRKALA POLITICAL HISTORY

The text for this section of the background material on Yirrkala political history has been drawn from *Mabo—The Native Title Revolution*, a CD-Rom and website produced by Film Australia. The spellings and styles of that publication have been retained.

**The Tradition of Bark Painting at Yirrkala** and **The Yirrkala Bark Petition** were written by Tim Rowse and Trevor Graham, **Milirrump v Nabalco Pty Ltd** was written by Garth Nettheim and **Public Reaction to the Gove Decision** was compiled by Trevor Graham.

### 3.1 THE TRADITION OF BARK PAINTING AT YIRRKALA

Art, for the Yolngu, has long been a system of communication through which they have articulated their political structures, their spiritual inheritance and their unshakeable sense of being owners of the lands into which they are born. Through the forms and symbols of their paintings, and through the social practices by which the meanings of those paintings are told, withheld and exchanged in rituals of birth, death and initiation, Yolngu enact the enduring coherence of their society. Art is no mere past time [sic] for Yolngu, and it is more than beautiful decoration for its own sake. Yolngu art is one of the essential practices by which they reproduce themselves as a civilisation. It is integral to their politics, their education and their religion.

The Methodist missionaries who lived among Yolngu at Yirrkala from 1934 saw value in Yolngu art and so encouraged, for their own reasons, its continuing production. As brokers of paintings on bark to the outside world, the missionaries hoped to allow Yolngu a wholesome contact with the wider Australian economy and to encourage other Australians to respect Yolngu as human beings, rather than dismiss them as mere savages.

Howard Morphy, an anthropologist who has lived among Yolngu in order to appreciate the social significance of their art, has written that 'by the mid-1950s Yolngu had begun to appreciate the value of their art as a means of both asserting cultural identity and attempting to get Europeans to negotiate with them on their own terms. Yolngu organised ceremonies for departing missionaries, visiting politicians, and occasionally for anthropologists, that usually involved the gift of paintings and other objects of material culture. Such ceremonial presentations of gifts continue to the present'. [Source: Howard Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: art and an Aboriginal system of knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 17, 19]

The 1963 bark petition was not the first time Yolngu had used their art to convey their senses of ownership and sovereignty to Europeans. In 1959, Yolngu had erected outside the church on Elcho Island a structure consisting of representations of sacred objects and collections of bark paintings belonging to many of the clans of the region. According to Morphy, 'they were among the clans' most valuable property, objects of ritual power, and in Yolngu terms the most important things they had to give. The intention of the leaders... was not to reduce the power of the objects by releasing them from their shroud of secrecy but to assert to Europeans that Yolngu too had objects of great spiritual power and that they were willing to open these up to Europeans if Europeans were willing to reciprocate.'

### 3.2 THE YIRRKALA BARK PETITION

Public criticism of the proposed excision of Aboriginal land near Yirrkala mission encouraged Kim Beazley (snr) MHR to introduce a motion to the House of Representatives in March 1963 calling for Commonwealth government recognition of Aboriginal land title. He and fellow MP Gordon Bryant visited Yirrkala in July 1963, to hear locals' grievances. Though it is not clear who first thought of sending a petition, on bark, to Parliament, Beazley certainly encouraged the idea.

The bark petition was received in the House of Representatives on 14 August 1963. The Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, moved that the petition be rejected; its twelve signatories, he argued, were unrepresentative of Yolngu opinion. A second version was sent. This 'second edition' petition was on paper and marked with thumb prints (which Yolngu had



recently begun to use to operate Commonwealth Savings bank accounts) rather than with clan symbols. In translation it read:

The Humble Petition of the Undersigned aboriginal people of Yirrkala, being members of the Balamumu, Narrkala, Gapiny, Miliwurrwurr people and Djapu, Mangalili, Madarrpa, Magarrwanalinirri, Gumaitj, Djamparrpuynu, Marrakulu, Galpu, Dhalnayyu, Wangurri, Warramirri, Maymil, Riritjinu, tribes, respectfully sheweth –

1. That nearly 500 people of the above tribes are residents of the land excised from the Aboriginal Reserve in Arnhem Land.
2. That the procedures of the excision of this land and the fate of the people on it were never explained to them beforehand, and were kept secret from them.
3. That when Welfare Officers and Government officials came to inform them of decisions taken without them and against them, they did not undertake to convey to the Government in Canberra the views and feelings of the Yirrkala aboriginal people.
4. That the land in question has been hunting and food gathering land for the Yirrkala tribes from time immemorial; we were all born here.
5. That places sacred to the Yirrkala people, as well as vital to their livelihood are in the excised land, especially Melville Bay.
6. That the people of this area fear that their needs and interests will be completely ignored as they have been ignored in the past, and they fear that the fate which has overtaken the Larrakeah tribe will overtake them.
7. And they humbly pray that the honourable the House of Representatives will appoint a Committee, accompanied by competent interpreters, to hear the views of the Yirrkala people before permitting the excision of this land.
8. They humbly pray that no arrangements be entered into with any company which will destroy the livelihood and independence of the Yirrkala people. And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray God to help you and us.

Under pressure created by the petition's favorable publicity, the Menzies government agreed to an inquiry by a select committee into the Yirrkala Aborigines' grievances. The committee's unanimous report did not recommend any significant change in government policy, and the excision went ahead, after certain assurances of 'protection' of Aboriginal people had been negotiated between the government, the mission and the mining company. Though the inquiry had demonstrated that the Yolngu grievance lay partly in not having been included in negotiations about mining, Yolngu continued to be excluded from meetings where decisions were made about their land. Dismal as the inquiry's formal result may have been from the Yirrkala Aborigines' point of view, the experience of talking directly to the visiting parliamentarians had, in the opinion of the Reverend Edgar Wells, Yirrkala mission superintendent, 'altered for ever the balance of power in the conduct of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory.' [Source: E.A.Wells, *Reward and Punishment in Arnhem Land 1962–3*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1982, p.96]

### 3.3 MILIRRPUM V NABALCO PTY LTD

The issue of recognition of pre-existing Aboriginal land rights was presented to an Australian court, for the first time, in what is known as The Gove Land Rights Case, *Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd* (1971).

The court was the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, constituted by a single judge, Justice Blackburn. While the judge held, firmly, that the evidence before him showed that the Yolngu plaintiffs before him had a system of law, he felt bound by the precedents to conclude that 'the doctrine [of native title] does not form, and has never formed, part of the law of any part of Australia'. He said:

On the foundation of New South Wales,... every square inch of territory in the colony became the property of the Crown. All titles, rights, and interests whatever in land which existed thereafter in subjects of the Crown were the direct consequence of some grant from the Crown. The plaintiffs, who cannot point to any grant from the Crown as the basis for the title which they claim, cannot succeed...

(Justice Blackburn also decided that, even if native title *did* form a part of Australian law, that the claim would fail for other reasons. One such reason was his conclusion that the plaintiffs' relationship to their land was not 'proprietary'. Another reason was the proposition that any surviving native title would have been extinguished by legislation or executive policy authorising grants of land throughout the territory.)

No appeal was taken from the decision by Justice Blackburn at the time. What did happen was that the Australian Labor Party promised that, when it was elected to form the Commonwealth Government, it would recognise Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory. The ALP, led by Gough Whitlam, was elected in 1972. It established an inquiry to recommend *how* to recognise such land rights. The report by Sir Edward Woodward formed the basis for the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 as eventually enacted by the Coalition Government led by Malcolm Fraser. Acts providing for statutory Aboriginal land rights were also passed by most of the State Parliaments.

### 3.4 PUBLIC REACTION TO THE GOVE DECISION

The legal defeat of the Yolngu attracted public sympathy for their complaint, which was reflected in some newspaper editorials. However, the recommendations made in *The Age* editorial of 29 April 1971 fell short of recognising an Indigenous *right* to land.

The Aboriginal tribes of the Gove Peninsula have lost their two-year battle for ownership of their land. In an historic judgment handed down on Tuesday, Mr Justice Blackburn set aside their claims to traditional ownership (and, by implication, those of other Aboriginal groups throughout Australia). Instead he held that when Captain Arthur Phillip laid claim to Australia in 1788 every square inch of the colony became the property of the Crown. Mr Justice Blackburn took 262 pages to explain and justify his decision. In the process he leant heavily on a principle which has a long history of acceptance among nations – at least among victorious ones. In crude terms it is the Darwinian principle; the strong survive, the weak go to the wall. In the judge's more elegant terminology, it is the principle that in the past the whole Earth was open to the industry and enterprise of the human race, and the more advanced peoples were therefore justified in dispossessing the less advanced.

It is hard to see how Mr Justice Blackburn could have come to any other conclusion, regrettable though it be. To have found for the Gove tribesmen would have been to turn the clock of history back. In legal terms it would have meant setting aside the explicit canons of British law for the unwritten and largely unknown ones of tribal custom. How could any court ever decide what laws applied with any tribe in the period before the First Fleet's arrival? In the absence of records too, how could a court decide where any particular group or tribe's traditional boundaries began and ended?

But while Mr Justice Blackburn's judgment may be realistic when viewed through the white man's eyes, we can hardly expect it will seem the same to the Gove tribesmen and to the other 130,000-odd Aborigines throughout Australia. They are entitled to feel dismayed and disappointed. Not only have they lost the land rights argument; they have also lost a measure of security. None of the nation's native reservations is safe any longer from industrial depredation. Today it is a \$310 million bauxite-mining consortium, which is dispossessing them at Gove. Who knows what projects tomorrow will bring?

To Aborigines this will seem as further proof of the white man's willingness to trample on the rights of native people and to exploit them as they did in the early dark days of colonising. To avoid this charge the Federal Government has an obligation to

legislate to give Aborigines a much stronger measure of protection than they now enjoy. As an act of conscience, if not as an act of justice too, the Government should also be prepared to make freehold land grants to groups which can prove they have the necessary skills and economic know-how. In America, Canada and New Zealand, land grants have been made by statute or by executive policy, as Mr Justice Blackburn noted. This should be Australia's policy too. On grounds of humanity alone, this is the least we can do. [Source: Editorial, *The Age*, 29/4/1971]

## SECTION 4 – MANIKAY (SONG CYCLE) OF THE DJUNGGUWAN 2002

Twenty-three verses of songs were recorded from June to September 2002 during the filming of *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future*. They are reproduced here in Yolngu Matha with an English translation by Wanyubi Marika, Raymattja Marika and Trevor Graham. The English, however, is an interpretation of the *meanings* of the songs. It is not meant as a *literal* translation. It is used in the film to give an indication of a song's meanings. Yolngu ceremonial songs have both public and restricted layers of meaning. The restricted meanings convey deeper religious and spiritual concepts and contain sacred names.

The verses are reproduced and numbered here in the order in which they were shot. This order is not meant to imply that this is the definitive order of the verses of the Djungguwan. Nor does it imply that these are the only verses that can be sung in the staging of a Djungguwan. It is simply a record of what was filmed in Yirrkala in 2002.

The verses sung in the 1976 film *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* are similar to those reproduced here, but there are many differences in words, meanings and the locations that were sung about. Each Djungguwan ceremony may have a similar core of songs, but the exact nature of what is sung will depend on where the ceremony is held, who is leading it and the boys being initiated into the ceremony.

The verses here were often sung in any one sitting many times over, often employing different rhythms of the accompanying bilma or clapsticks. Sometimes a yidaki or didgeridoo also accompanied the singing. From time to time they were sung by an individual, Wanyubi Marika, but most often they were sung by a group of clansmen or members of the Rirratjingu and Marrakulu clans combined.

The translations were completed over a period of several weeks in Yirrkala. They are reproduced here with permission from Wanyubi Marika and Raymattja Marika.

**1<sup>ST</sup> VERSE**

Merriki ngupan ngarru Nuka-Dhuminmin  
 Yalawayalawa Byngirinydjii  
 Yolngu wayanguya ngarrung wayawanitjuman  
 ngandiny nhangal Warrayngu  
 Dhapindamany Gurutjuruny ga.  
 Yolngu Gumulumirri Dawayuna  
 ga waripu Yolngu Dhukululu Barrupa  
 Rarrkararrka Muniwaynguru  
 Ga waripun Yolngu Butjala  
 Djalimana Baranutjpi Wirriwirnga  
 Gapan milngmilthurru ga  
 Gudatpa (gara) milngmilthurru  
 Gurrkurr ngupan ngaraka  
 Burrkun Waymamba dilimbitj

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters  
 journey through the  
 Mitchell Ranges.  
 They travel with  
 their mother clans.  
 The sisters painted  
 with white clay,  
 their bodies glistening  
 in the sun.  
 As they travel with  
 their spears  
 throughout the vast  
 Mitchell Ranges.

**2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE**

Lalarrmanydja lalarrmanydja  
 Lalarrmanydja lalurrngumpi  
 Lalarrmanydja dhupungali lalarrmanydja yudungali  
 Lalarrmanydja yudumunga  
 Djilpin Manybalala  
 Djilpin Gawutjurr  
 Yakumingan ngarrung

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters  
 sing the sacred song cycle  
 of their ceremony  
 ground and country.  
 Making explicit for  
 women and children  
 the place where everyone  
 will come together.

**3RD VERSE**

Merriki ngupan ngarru Nuka-Dhuminmin  
 Yalawayalawa Byngirinydjii  
 Yolngu wayanguya ngarrung wayawanitjuman  
 ngandiny nhangal Warrayngu  
 Dhapindamany Gurutjuruny ga.  
 Yolngu Gumulumirri Dawayuna  
 ga waripu Yolngu Dhukululu Barrupa  
 Rarrkararrka Muniwaynguru  
 Ga waripun Yolngu Butjala  
 Djalimana Baranutjpi Wirriwirnga  
 Gapan milngmilthurru ga  
 Gudatpa (gara) milngmilthurru  
 Gurrkurr ngupan ngaraka  
 Burrkun Waymamba dilimbitj

**Interpretation**

Following the escarpment  
 of the Mitchell Ranges,  
 the two Wawilak Sisters  
 journey along the ridges  
 breaking shrubs as they go.  
 They come across their  
 mother clans.  
 White clay on their bodies  
 glistening in the sun,  
 spear heads glistening  
 in the sun  
 the sisters follow the  
 backbone of  
 the escarpment.  
 Treading on the  
 Yirritja path of the  
 nightjar hawk.

**4TH VERSE**

Dharuk ngaka (Wirrkul Manawunynha)  
 nhawu ngali gne-ngupanmin ngayiwu gundimulk ku,  
 lalarryumanda Djilpingu ngayiyubungu

**Interpretation**

Listen to the  
 Wawilak Sisters.  
 Hear them talking about  
 the preparation for the  
 sacred ground.  
 Listen to them as  
 they discuss  
 how the law is in  
 the sacred land.  
 In the songs, dance and  
 knowledge taught to  
 the Rirratjingu clan.

**5TH VERSE**

Wulada-lada Wulada-lada  
 Rulmi-rulmi Rulmi-rulmi  
 Gitjbapuy dharuk gurr nyalnyal dharuk  
 Dharukma djawun laklaknha yolnguny, Raymattja Yolngu,  
 Djoduku, Garrbiltja Rongamulany Yolnguny

**Interpretation**

The warbler 'spirit' bird  
 imitates the Two Sisters  
 Lak Lak and Raymattja,  
 as the sun sets in the sky.  
 Mimicking the language  
 of the Yolngu people  
 they speak together of  
 creating a ceremony ground.

**6TH VERSE**

Ngayi ngarrung ngamangamayun  
 bampulayuman gundimolk  
 djalk'thun buma maramangum  
 dipulum, dharukmurru ginmurru  
 Wulakimurru Wularrmurru  
 Molk ngarrung buma ngamangamayun  
 ngayiyuman djarrambal yuman  
 dhurrundhirruman Ngadakarruman Baykaliuman

**Interpretation**

The sovereign place is  
 being established,  
 the sacred ground Bambula.  
 Talking, singing and dancing  
 their song lines  
 Lak Lak and Raymattja  
 shifting the sands of time,  
 sculpting their sacred  
 ground.  
 Sacred ground called  
 Djarrmbal, Ngadakarr  
 and Baykali.

**7TH VERSE**

Dhumar Batpirrirri  
 Dhumar Waykarrina  
 Rirrakay djalk'thunyin  
 Yirmalli Badingaya  
 Ralmarrami burrumpurra  
 Marrngalma Muypandhu Djaningirr  
 Waykarrina Waykarri  
 Nininiyun Nyungungung  
 Djapunu dhayan  
 Ngayili dhayan djilpinli  
 Ngayili dhayan Molkli

**Interpretation**

The swarm of the  
 honey bees  
 Batpirrirri and  
 Waykarrina  
 echoes through sovereign  
 and sacred Yolngu land.  
 The droning of the  
 honey bees captures  
 knowledge in the  
 Yolngu sacred places  
 and binds an everlasting  
 covenant on the  
 sacred ceremony ground.



**8TH VERSE**

Dharuk ngaka (Wirrkul Manawunynha)  
 nhawu ngali gengupanmin ngayiwu gundimolk  
 lalarryumanda, Djilbingu ngayiyubungu

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters  
 discuss the creation  
 of their ceremony  
 ground.  
 The sisters dance and sing  
 revealing their law  
 making a covenant with the  
 Rirratjingu clan  
 through their ritualistic  
 song cycles.

**9TH VERSE**

Manguwadin ngayi nhangal lalarrmandja  
 Lalarryumanda Djilpin Bambula Yuduyudu yudungarri  
 Djatjat gulan newarrwari  
 Munditja – munditja Djaybiny – djaybiny  
 Mutpu mutpu

**Interpretation**

Happy are the Wawilak  
 Sisters as they dance  
 with joy on their sacred  
 ceremony ground.  
 They celebrate the ritual  
 law they have given  
 to the Yolngu.  
 The law comes to life  
 and is celebrated.

**10TH VERSE**

Banabana Rirritji Goyum Daltji  
 Lambarr Goyum Burrtjulul, Mayatili, Merrikinga  
 Yilkanhu Ralmarrami Burrumburra

**Interpretation**

The Wawilak Sisters  
 journey along  
 the ridge of an  
 escarpment.  
 They see wattle trees and  
 other shrubs.  
 They give names to  
 the plants  
 and surrounding country.

**11TH VERSE**

Wulada Gawukthunnyen lambarrnga  
 Burrtjululinga, Mayatilinga,  
 Marrayinbulwuy, wayinma balarrwalarrwuy  
 Wayinma, banambal, nhangal, warrarra, gutiwa  
 Bilibili, manthuda, djelangurr  
 Gurrrnyalnyalnyal dharuk Gitjpapuy  
 Wulmunglthun wanga

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters  
 journey through open  
 woodland country called,  
 Burrtjulunga, Mayatilinga  
 and Marrayinbulwuy.  
 They see the spirit warbler  
 bird singing in the forest.  
 The sisters sing the song  
 of the spirit bird as  
 they journey onwards  
 just as the sun sets  
 across the sky.

**12TH VERSE**

Nyinnygar Nyinygarrma (repeated four times)  
 Ganabun Ganabun (repeated four times)  
 Barrwula Barrwula (repeated four times)  
 Nukuyalparr Marwuywuy Djitjigara  
 Gurwawurrwa

**Interpretation**

The Two Sisters finish  
 their journey at  
 Marwuywuy near  
 Ramingining.  
 As they rest they see  
 bubbles coming from  
 the sacred spring.

**13TH VERSE**

Wirrkul Madayin, wirrkul Djumakan, wirrkul  
 Djuwakan, wirrkul Djilpinbuy wirrkul  
 Lalarrmandjawuy

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters  
 reveal themselves.  
 Their sacred law and  
 knowledge is given,  
 joining clans and families  
 to where they come from.

**14TH VERSE**

Malpiny – Malpiny malpiny, wirrkul Manawuny  
 Wirrkul Djuwaybi, wirrkul Madayin  
 (Repeated four times, each with different bilma rhythms)

**Interpretation**

With their bodies  
 painted,  
 the Wawilak Sisters sing  
 and greet the Yolngu clans.  
 They make a covenant  
 with the Yolngu  
 through law and order,  
 rituals and designs,  
 songs and language.

**15TH VERSE**

Yolngu – Laklak, Raymattja Yurruptun ngarru  
 Dhuniya merriku ngupan Dhadutjmana  
 Matpu, Matpupuyngu, Dhurumala  
 Dhurumuwuy,  
 Wirrkul manawuny wirrkul Djuwankan  
 Wirrku; Madukan yarruthun ngarrung  
 Dhuniya Gawukthuna Gongthu warrarra  
 Gongthu Ganambalyu, Galngam bulunyidi,  
 Galngam Ramanha – Ramandjarri  
 Ngayi ngarru guyangi Lalarrmandja lalarrngumpi  
 Djilpin guyngin ngayiyilpin

**Interpretation**

The Two Sisters  
 Lak Lak and Raymattja  
 approach the hills of the  
 sacred place, Dhadutjmana.  
 They come adorned with  
 feather down  
 and painted bodies.  
 They sing the cry of  
 the spirit bird,  
 while the sun lowers  
 in the sky.  
 They're travelling to their  
 sacred ceremony ground  
 at Dhadutjmana.

**16TH VERSE**

Lalarrmandja – lalarrngumi  
 Lalarrmandja – lalarrgubi  
 (both lines repeated four times)  
 Lalarrmandja – Yudumunga  
 Lalarrmantda – Yudumunga  
 Dhadutjmana, Mambalala, Raymangirr  
 Dhurumuwuy, Bulkany-bulkany, Gawutjurr  
 Dhurumula, Banmala, Bulkany Bulkany  
 Matpu – Matpupuyngu, lawurrminy, Dhulparrarra

**Interpretation**

The Two Sisters sing  
 the ritual song  
 for their  
 ceremony ground  
 and the law of their  
 sacred sites and country  
 as they journey  
 across Arnhem Land.

**17TH VERSE**

Miyalkundi – Miyalkundi (repeated twice)  
 Miyalkundi – Djamurrukundi (repeated twice)

**Interpretation**

The two Wawilak Sisters sing  
 for the women and children  
 beseeching them to  
 learn their law.

**18TH VERSE**

Dhalumana – Dhalukurru dhalukurru (repeated)

**Interpretation**

Lak Lak's son, Dhaluk,  
 sends a message,  
 'Yolngu should follow  
 the law of the  
 Wawilak Sisters'.

**19TH VERSE**

Ratjalkurru – Ratjalkurru  
 Ratjalkurru – Ratjalkurru

**Interpretation**

The sisters chant of the  
 ritual designs  
 etched on their bodies  
 beseeching everyone to  
 follow their law.

## 20TH VERSE

Ganabunbun – Ganabunbun  
 Ganabunbun – Ganabunbun  
 Ganabunbun – Djulurri

### Interpretation

The sisters sing  
 of the paintings on  
 Dhaluk's body  
 and beseech everyone to  
 follow their law.

## 21ST VERSE

Dharpa Galupana Galupana, Muiyariyari  
 Mali Yolngu Djoluwa Malkarratjpi Gurutjgurutj  
 Dharpa dharri Yiminda Goymululu  
 Gupurana bilwilka Ganawanga

### Interpretation

The spirit of the  
 Wawilak Sisters  
 now lives in the hearts  
 of the Yolngu.  
 Together they've made  
 an everlasting covenant  
 to keep the law,  
 ceremonies, designs  
 and knowledge alive for  
 future generations.

## 22ND VERSE

Women wailing and chanting in front of ceremonial pole.  
 The Yolngu Matha was not documented, but an interpretation was provided

### Interpretation

The spirits of Milirrpum  
 and  
 Roy (Dadaynga) Marika  
 are in the law that  
 the Wawilak Sisters  
 gave to the Yolngu.  
 Our father's law, wisdom  
 and knowledge lives on.

**23RD VERSE**

Wirrkul dhayan ngayinga lalarrmantja  
Djilpinnga Gundimulknga, Dhupungali  
Wangarrtjanga Bambulangau  
Galngam bulunyidi galngam Ramandjarri  
Burruwurrkumi, Mangidami wirrkul dhayan  
Manguwadjin ngayi nhangal lakarrmandja  
Lalarrgumi Djilpin nhangal

**Interpretation**

The Two Sisters stand in  
their ceremony ground,  
bodies adorned with  
paintings and feathers.  
They wear head  
and arm bands  
decorated with feathers.  
The sisters teach their laws  
and celebrate with,  
the Yolngu clans.

## SECTION 5 – INTERVIEWS

The introduction and mini-documentaries on *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* contain segments from interviews with people associated with the Djungguwan ceremonies and films of 1966, 1976 and 2002.

Transcripts of the complete interviews are reproduced here, in edited form.

### 5.1 BAKAMUMU MARIKA

Bakamumu Marika is the leader of the Rirratjingu clan. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Yirrkala in October 2004.

Q: Why is the Djungguwan such an important ceremony for the Yolngu?

Bakamumu: The importance of the Djungguwan is discipline towards our young people, not to steal anything from their mother or their father, not to insult the mothers and fathers and sisters, their families. That is the importance of the Djungguwan ceremony.

Q: Where did the Djungguwan originate?

Bakamumu: The Djungguwan was originated in central Arnhem Land by a group called the Mandhalpuy who is associated with the Wawilak Sisters. And the bunngul [ceremony] and the bilma which is an important clapstick that has been passed on from central Arnhem Land to the Rirratjingu in eastern Arnhem Land.

Q: How did the Rirratjingu get the Djungguwan?

Bakamumu: The Djungguwan originated in central Arnhem Land, and then the clapstick for the Djungguwan came here. I was told the story that a man called Moonlight handed the ceremony over to our grandfather Djuwakan [Marika] and it has been handed down ever since. The Djungguwan has been used from one generation to the next.

Q: Why is Wawilak so important a story?

Bakamumu: I strongly believe the Wawilak Sisters are the creators of the law and the law givers of the Djungguwan and that's where it all begins with the Wawilak Sisters. Like God have given Moses ten commandments, we have ten commandments.

Q: Do you remember going through the Djungguwan?

Bakamumu: I remember back in 1967 or '68 that I went through the Djungguwan, that was my first step towards manhood and I went through that raypirri [discipline], that Djungguwan. For a young boy like me it was a really frightening thing. I was afraid. At the same time I was courageous enough; my father was there to protect me. I knew that I was being protected and that I had to go through this to be a man, to become a man.

Q: What was so frightening for you?

Bakamumu: The song lines, the songs, the dancers, the ritual things that we had to do. That was frightening to me. Imagine a young boy sitting in front of a huge fire with a group of old people sitting around you, chattering about this, it's a frightening thing.

Q: What do you feel today when you see your grandchildren go through the Djungguwan?

Bakamumu: I am intending to let my grandchildren go through the same thing, the Djungguwan. It's an emotional thing, an emotional ceremony, people will cry when children go through it. You won't see your children for weeks, a couple of weeks, it's that emotional for the parents. That's what my mother did, she cried for me the whole week while I was in the Djungguwan. She was losing me. Because I am becoming a man while I am in the ceremony.

Q: Why do the women cry?

Bakamumu: They are crying because the boys have become a man and they are crying because my father's spirit was in the boys. This is where the crying came. It was an emotional ceremony that we had.

Q: How long did your Djungguwan take?

Bakamumu: It took a couple of weeks and I was there all alone. And I was crying for my mother because I missed my mother and my grandmother.

Q: How relevant is the Djungguwan today?

Bakamumu: If we keep practising then the Djungguwan will live on regardless of whether we live in two worlds. It needs maintaining in our culture. That's the only way Djungguwan will live on.

## 5.2 WANYUBI MARIKA

Wanyubi Marika is a leader of the Rirratjingu clan. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Yirrkala in October 2004. (See also **Biography** Section 6.3.)

Q: Why is the Djungguwan so important for the Yolngu?

Wanyubi: The Djungguwan is very important for us Yolngu in this area for its discipline. It is important because it will stop young people from making trouble, stop them from stealing and teach them the law. So they will respect their mother, fathers, brothers and children. So that they can be Yolngu in their mind, spirit and inside themselves. And stand for their culture and law.

Q: Where did the Wawilak Sisters come from originally? And why are they so important?

Wanyubi: The two Wawilak Sisters they came from a far place. They came from the west where the sun is setting. When they were travelling they were at the same time giving languages to the different people. What we are speaking now. Wherever they travelled they would stop and give language to the clan they stopped at.

Then they came over to the hill here, they climbed the Rirratjingu hill. That's why we got the clapsticks from them and the law from them and also the painting designs.

When we sing, we're singing about the country and how the sisters travelled through the countryside and how they gave names to the trees, the birds, the rocks. Even the Yolngu Yirritja people they named them too. As they travelled they saw the Yirritja people and sang their song.

The gundimolk [sacred sand sculpture] we use during ceremony it comes from sacred places. It was given by the sisters to the old people, to our great grandfathers and their fathers before and our ancestors before them. They took the songs, the clapsticks for this law.

There is another sisters story we can't talk about that came from Marwuywuy Djakalarr in west Arnhem Land, David Gulpilil's country. The sisters came from there and came towards here. And Wuyal the sugar-bag man was travelling at the same time, so there were three of them. From there they went to a Dhuwa area naming tribes, giving them special bilma and paintings. From there they went to another place and country. Every time they travelled and stopped at a place, same time changing languages, changing designs and so it goes.

Q: What was it like for you as a little boy going through the Djungguwan?



Wanyubi: When I went into the Djungguwan ceremony it was at Gurka'wuy, me and a boy now deceased. It was in the '70s, maybe '76. And I saw their law when I was only young. I didn't really know. I wasn't up to their level. I was only young, maybe 10, 11 or 12 years old. I was still young and couldn't know what was happening fully. I didn't fully know the law and culture.

I was expecting that I would only get my face painted. I went into the Djungguwan following the old people's law and culture. Because the law for the Djungguwan is that the law and culture for the Two Sisters they must always have a young boy ready for initiation at the same time songs must be sung getting ready for the boys for the initiation. That's why we boys went in to the Djungguwan.

That law was hard and also the spirit, spirit went in. We felt we were in another world. But we felt we were accepting that initiation law. When we were getting our face painted, and they put the red ochre on us, and put on those special white armbands and headbands we were told that they were what the Two Sisters used to put on their own children. And that is going back to the law and culture. The song that they use water preferring to that law and culture. Water going down and the song for water. When they start to sing the water song it was the same as the sisters sang for their children.

We just went with them not knowing what was happening. We just followed them. Because rules are by law that we were just expecting that law of the Djungguwan there at Gurka'wuy. They were only talking and giving us discipline and after that we had to have the girrikirri [hot stones]. The Djungguwan was finished that night, the next day we had to have girrikirri to make us free to talk and eat freely and talk to our fathers and mothers freely. And our fathers and mothers must have girrikirri too so that they can talk to us freely. Talk to me, feed me. This is the law and culture for the Djungguwan. That is how it is.

Q: What do you feel about your children going through the Djungguwan?

Wanyubi: Our children should go through the Djungguwan learning the law of the Wawilak Sisters because it teaches them raypirri – discipline – and respect, it teaches them manners. When the boys are brought to the Djungguwan and have their face painted and wear special armbands they are prepared for initiation. That's part of the discipline, part of the respecting that the old people taught us. To keep the law of the Yolngu and our spirituality we should go back to that system of law.

Q: Can you talk about the designs on the poles?

Wanyubi: On the first pole the images are representing the Djuwan Sisters and on the other end the image represent the malpim malpim ground that the Wawilak Sisters made.

Q: Can you talk about the face designs?

Wanyubi: The white dots represent the foam of the water bubbles. And they also represent the flowers of the stringybark tree. It's the way the Wawilak Sisters painted their faces and their children's faces. So it is very important to Yolngu that you put that design on when you are entering into the Djungguwan ceremony, and when you leave as well. You can't go in with normal skin, you have to be painted up as part of respect for the law.

Q: So when you are singing and dancing it is like you are the Wawilak Sisters?

Wanyubi: Yes, it's like we are in their world, in another dimension world.

### 5.3 DJUWALPI MARIKA

Djuwalpi Marika is a leader of the Rirratjingu clan. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony – The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Yirrkala in October 2004.

Q: Could you talk about why these poles are so special?

Djuwalpi: The name of these two poles are Madukan and Djumakan. They also have another name called Djuwakan. These poles are not new. They are very old and have been used in the past, a long time ago when the Two Sisters handed them over and when they travelled on their journey. From a place called Muiypan Gumumuk they headed towards our country.

These two poles here represent a person or people who have passed away and are no longer with us. The designs tell us they are from the Rirratjingu clan. The other thing is that the poles also represent two other clans, Marrakulu and Marrangu. The Wawilak are like us, the Rirratjingu.

When the poles come out and are shown, they are bringing out the spirit of the dead people that they represent. The poles are showing their spirit and the old ancestral law.

There at Yamuna, behind the cemetery, an old Djungguwan ceremony took place [in 1966]. The Djungguwan was controlled by Mathaman, Mawalan, Dadaynga, Milirrpum and Wukaka. That's where that Djungguwan was happening.

These two poles represent the people who are dead. The designs on them are the water goanna Djarrka and a sacred palm tree and water. You can see these special places at Gumumuk and Marwuywuy and Yirrma. That's where our sacred song line starts, there.

This Djungguwan law is special and yes it also disciplines Yolngu who are in trouble or making trouble. It also unites us as a people. It can also help resolve old troubles. And now we are making it strong again for the old people. We are following in their footsteps and making it happen again and standing on our foundation.

A long time ago there was a Djungguwan ceremony, another name for it is Djayminy. The Mandhalpuy [west Arnhem Land clan] came and handed it over and it turned into a Rirratjingu ceremony here at Yirrkala and here we are now standing strong and breathing with this law.

Q: Can you talk about the Wawilak Sisters and why the Wawilak Sisters are so important to the ceremony?

Djuwalpi: There are two Wawilak that I understand. One Wawilak coming from Manpalala area and one coming from a place called Gumumuk. They gave the Marrakulu and Marrangu tribe their Budumpal [ritual law]. They then handed down the Budumpal to the Rirratjingu clan which we use today. It gave us power and authority to do the Djungguwan today.

We sing and use the song lines, that's part of our journey. We are related to the journey of the Wawilak Sisters and travel with them. That comes from the time of creation, the birth story of the two Wawilak Sisters.

Q: Can you remember when you were a little boy going through the Djungguwan and what it felt like?

Djuwalpi: When I was a little boy about nine or ten my father took me to a Djungguwan. A special ceremony was held to commemorate the death of a Gumatj man who had passed away and there was a Djungguwan there at Yamuna and I stayed there overnight with some young people. And they showed us the ceremony.

I felt that I am in a different sort of world now. I'm entering into a different world. After this I can't talk. I was frightened, I was shaking and for a whole week I couldn't talk to my mother. I could only talk to my brother-in-law, that was the rule for the Djungguwan. I can only talk to my brother-in-law, not to my mother or my father. I swear to God it was scary, our father were alive then and it was very scary.

Q: Where does the Djungguwan fit today given that you have the white man's law as well as your own law?

Djuwalpi: Djungguwan is a part of us, it's our foundation, our backbone, our authority. We talk by using our clapsticks and when I lean on this pole I feel my spirit that I belong to my spirit

and that the Djungguwan is alive today.

Q: Do you think it will be relevant to future generations?

Djuwalpi: This is good for young children growing up, watching it and seeing how we perform the ceremony. Listening to the clapsticks. Listening to the story. Seeing how people relate to each other in the ceremony. And we don't want to lose that.

#### 5.4 IAN DUNLOP

Ian Dunlop is a filmmaker who made the 1976 film *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy*, part of a 22-part series *The Yirrkala Film Project*. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Sydney in November 2004. (See also **Biography** Section 6.6.)

Q: Why did you initially go to Yirrkala and what was your intention?

Ian: In the late '60s – 1968, I think it was – the Department of the Interior as it was then called asked the Commonwealth Film Unit, which is what Film Australia was then called, to make a record film of the development of the Nabalco mine which was just about to start. They saw this as an example of the wilderness of the north being enriched with great, exciting developments and at the same time Dr HC Coombes – 'Nugget' Coombes, who was the chairman of a little think-tank called the Office of Aboriginal Affairs – suggested that a film be made or a record be made of the impact of the mine on the Yolngu, the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala.

So early in 1970 I went up there not knowing what I was going to find or what would come out of it, what kind of film or record. I went up there. I'd never been to Yirrkala, I knew nothing about Yolngu culture at all. And I met Roy Dadaynga Marika, who was a leader of the Rirratjingu clan that owns Yirrkala and the land at Yirrkala and he was chairman of what was then called the village council. And I told him what I was up there for and he said, well he'd take it to council, his council, and discuss it, and he did that without me.

Roy said yes, okay, we've approved the idea of this film and want it to have three elements. The first is Yolngu culture. We want you to make a record for our children, a history for our children of our culture and our ceremonies. The second is we want you to show the impact of the mission on our lives – and mind you the mission had been there since 1935 – and thirdly we want you to film that thing which is going to cause us worry, the coming of the mine. And they could see that it was going to have a huge effect. So those are the three elements they wanted filmed. I certainly had no idea that it was going to be a long-term project filming over eight big filming trips over 13 years and documenting and editing for 26 years. I had no idea of that at the time.

Q: Why do you think it evolved that way?

Ian: Oh, because I got hooked...I got so interested in the situation. I just got very involved in Yolngu culture. We did a huge amount of filming, we did a lot of ritual filming, we did a huge ceremony with the Rirratjingu clan and another huge ceremony with the Manggalili clan – two of the clans I worked with very closely. I started forming a relationship with Dundiwuy Wanambi. He was a Marrakulu clan member who became one of my closest colleagues and in fact became a good friend and eventually was the man that invited me to film the Djungguwan.

In 1974 it was the start of the clan Homeland Movement, an incredibly important movement. So the project developed more than [just showing] the direct impact of the mine on the Yolngu. This was always there but it became to a certain extent how Yolngu culture or how their life's changed. And one of the major things was the development of this clan Homeland Movement, which was absolutely brilliant. All these beautiful small settlements up and down the coast and inland of the Gulf of Carpentaria where the Yolngu were their own masters and mistresses and it was a real blending of traditional and western technologies and lifestyles.

Q: What was the reception that you received?

Ian: On the first filming trip the first thing I filmed was, in fact, a village council meeting where we discussed the filming and it was very interesting the reaction. The village council, in fact, consisted of all the clan leaders. All these wonderful old men, most of whom or all of them probably had been born before the days of the mission. So they'd really come up with the full law and the first thing was I explained about the project and then Roy took on the theme that he'd discussed with me in the research trip about the film having three elements. And he drew three circles on the ground. This is Yolngu culture – we want you to record this as history for our children. This is the mission – we want you to record our life now as it is living with the mission. And then he drew the third circle – this is what's going to worry us, this is the coming of the mine, we want you to record this.

Q: Why did you want to film the Djungguwan in 1976 and what were your intentions?

Ian: Dundiwuy first invited me to Gurka'wuy, which is the clan settlement about 150 kilometres south of Yirrkala, and I first went there in 1974 at the start of the clan Homeland Movement. Dundiwuy was setting up his own clan homeland. He wasn't the leader of the Marrakulu, he was a middle-aged man then. But he was the spokesman, he was the driving force and he was setting up his settlement. And I went down there and filmed him doing this. And whether at this time he said look, you know, I'm going to have a ritual opening ceremony of Gurka'wuy some time and I'd like you to film me.

So in 1976 I went up with Dean Semler, who had worked a lot with me up to now at Yirrkala, and Rod Simmons, a sound recordist – both very sympathetic to the situation. And [we] arrived in Yirrkala, went down to Gurka'wuy where Dundiwuy was and I was a bit alarmed. No preparations, nothing at all. Here we all come, you know, in the western way everything should be all cut and dry.

Nothing at all and we sat down and we chatted and I thought, come on Ian, you know, remember the Yolngu way of doing things.

And so we went back to Yirrkala. Dundiwuy did mention that he thought that the ceremony might be a Djungguwan. It didn't mean anything to me. So we went back to Yirrkala and he and Mithili, who was the leader, the actual leader of the Marrakulu clan, and I had a meeting with Roy in his office in the council office. And from this meeting it evolved that definitely it was to be a Djungguwan ceremony, whatever that might be.

Well it, the Djungguwan, is one of the most important ceremonies for northeast Arnhem Land. It is associated with the two Wawilak Sisters who are two of the most important ancestral beings of northeast Arnhem Land and they are very, very closely associated with the Marrakulu clan and with Gurka'wuy.

And also the Rirratjingu and the Marrakulu shared custodianship of the Djungguwan ceremony in that part of Arnhem Land. Each clan has custodianship of different elements of ceremonies because ceremonies tend to spread across country, in this case from eastern Arnhem Land to central Arnhem Land.

Q: Was a filming style something that you had to think about in terms of covering the ceremony?

Ian: In this kind of filming I'm tremendously dependent upon the cameraman because a lot of the decisions and choices are made through the camera. I'd worked with Dean Semler at Yirrkala in 1971 so he knew the kind of filming, the style of film I like, in particular with ceremonies. He knew I liked long takes, I mean long in time, long takes. Ideally long sequences filmed in one take. With a song you've got to start at the beginning, go through to the end. It's no good starting halfway through. So you've got to start filming, you've got to anticipate when a verse is going to start and you start okay and you just keep going as the film goes through. He knew that we had to be absolutely flexible. It was impossible to know exactly what's going to happen. Then I could ask, you know, what's going to happen next. They might kind of say, oh we're going to do this, but you never knew exactly how it was

going to be, where it was going to be. So the camera was handheld, we were really flexible, we were ready for anything at any time and we were ready to just keep going and, I mean, Dean and Rod were just wonderful, you know.

I remember after we'd been filming for several hours and I'd say, okay that's it, wrap it up, you know. They started putting things away in the boxes. All of a sudden I heard [claps hands] clapsticks going, oh excuse me, you know, and we'd be out doing it again. So it was total flexibility, flowing with what happened, getting in tune with the kind of things that were happening, trying to anticipate. Of course in those days it was very different from filming with digital. We were filming 16mm film, the magazines were ten minutes. So you only had ten minutes to film, which with my style of filming long takes it's a real problem. So one of my main jobs was working out all the time we filmed this, have we done enough of this, what do I think is going to happen, should we stop in case some fantastic thing is going to happen and we run out of film. We've only got six magazines loaded, Dean can't shoot and load at the same time. So all this kind of planning had to go on all the time. And with filming the ceremony, I suppose what I was also was the second pair of eyes. Dean was filming what he was seeing, I was looking around and then I'd say, look what's going on there. I'd gradually, I'd gently grab Dean's shoulders and he'd know Ian wants me to move, so I'd move him around and then he'd come on beautifully framed by magic on what was happening at this side and then move back again.

I asked Dundiwuy if I could interview him about things because I wanted this film to be not just a film of the Djungguwan but I also wanted to find out what Gurka'wuy meant to Dundiwuy, what the land meant to him. And so I asked him if I could film him doing a kind of a walk along the beach because he'd already told me about the important sites on the beach. But once we started this it was up to him, you know, and we started it at a mangrove tree which wasn't really a mangrove tree. It was really a stringybark, a mythological stringybark tree, and we talked about this and then we walked along the beach until we came to a place where there was some rocks and he called this place Gurka'wuy. And he said this is the place where Djarrka, the two water goanna, two very important ancestral beings, and of course this is all symbols for important forces, the two Djarrka water goanna ancestral beings first came ashore and gave this land to the Marrakulu clan, and I didn't realise he'd picked up a little stick and then in the wet sand he drew his bark painting of the two Djarrka and the hollow log that floated out from the Gurka'wuy River. He drew this in the wet sand at the very spot where the Djarrka had come ashore.

So he was drawing his title deeds to this land right there. I had no idea he was going to do this. That was one of the most brilliant things I think I've ever filmed. So it comes as a good example of how they really in a way had control of the situation, you know, of the filming, especially in things like that, that I didn't know. So yeah, nothing was planned really, it just went.

Q: What was your intention in terms of making the film?

Ian: Well, by this stage in my filmmaking career I suppose I'd started specialising in, for want for a better term, ethnographic film or anthropological-type filming, which was for me a kind of a serious, scientific-record kind of filming where I was trying to show other people's cultures as fully and as clearly as possible with as much respect as possible.

So I wanted to make as detailed a record of the Djungguwan ceremony in this case as possible and in the filming of it, that was my objective. I didn't really think much of who's my audience except I knew that one of my audiences was the Yolngu. I knew the Yolngu wanted this full record. So I knew that forget anybody else, I couldn't go wrong making a full record for them. Now the problem starts when you get to the cutting room because then you do have the conflict between the full record and making a film. I always wanted to make a film, of course, which people were going to see. So just how much repetition could you have in it? How much did you have to cut?

The Djungguwan was the only ceremony I filmed at Yirrkala at which I filmed a whole lot of restricted material. Dundiwuy wanted me to film the restricted as well as the open public material for his record. But he said, you know, you show this to anybody [makes sound of

throat cutting]. So it was quite clear that it was restricted material. So I filmed a whole lot of beautiful stuff of men in their men's shade preparing for the ceremony and I filmed some very exciting restricted ceremonial stuff. When I was ready to cut the Djungguwan film, which wasn't until some years after I'd shot it because I was on other ones, Dundiwuy came down to Sydney and stayed with my family and me in Sydney.

And each day we'd go to Film Australia and sit down at the editing machine and go through the material, you know. What's this, what's that, what did he say, what did she say, why, why, why? Driving Dundiwuy mad as far as I could see. Getting this vast amount of information and beginning to understand the richness of it all, the many layers. And in this process Dundiwuy pointed out clearly what was public, what was restricted, what translations I could give of songs and dialogue.

So the first thing I did was make a full-record film, which was ten hours long, which was a strictly record film. It had no documentation, no subtitles on film. That was the full record for Dundiwuy and the Marrakulu clan and then after that I set about making the general version. In those days everything wasn't being made for television. It didn't have to be the television 50-minute hour, you know, and people at Film Australia were kind of used to me making long films so I wasn't worried about that.

And it came out at three-and-a half-hours. But I decided to divide it into clear sections and I kind of called the film a film monograph because I wanted people to think of it as like a book with volumes. You pull it down from the shelf, you read one volume one night, perhaps pull it down read another, then you go back and look at it again. Something that can be looked at and studied, over and over again. The Wawilak story is a beautiful story.

The Djungguwan has three main elements. It is a celebration of the law of the Wawilak. It is an initiation into that law for the young and it is a memorial, a final farewell for the dead and there are all those elements in the Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy.

Q: Can you talk about what your technology was and if that aided or hindered the task of recording the ceremony?

Ian: In those days it was 16mm sync sound. We had ten-minute magazines. We probably had six magazines which all could be loaded at one time. I can't remember whether we did on that trip. We had two types of stock for daylight and night-time stock which meant you had to anticipate which kind of stock to put in your camera. So all the time you had to be aware of how much film you had and anticipate how much filming you thought you were going to do at that particular time. After you'd shot a certain amount – say ten, 20 magazines – when the opportunity arose you either took or sent by somebody else the film back to Yirrkala and then it was flown down to Sydney. You had no idea of course what your material was going to be like, whether you'd succeeded or not, whether there were any technical faults. It went through the laboratories and then a message came back to Yirrkala or else came back to the radio.

But we never saw the actual footage until we got back to the studio. So you could never show it back to the people then. So it was an act of faith on their part that you were getting what they were hoping you were getting and, well, faith on our part that we were getting what we hoped we were.

Q: Are there any disaster stories?

Ian: One of the worst disasters occurred on that trip but it wasn't actually in filming the Djungguwan. When we were there at Gurka'wuy, in fact we'd just started filming the preparations for the Djungguwan and a baby died which was incredibly sad. But the father of the baby, Dundiwuy, who was my host, asked us if we'd like to film the funeral ceremony of the baby. So in fact the preparations for the Djungguwan completely stopped and over the next few days were preparations for the funeral ceremony for the baby. Because it was a baby the funeral ceremony was, in Yolngu terms, a fairly simple ceremony. Now the main ceremony only took one day and it was a beautiful ceremony and from the filming point of view I thought it was good because it was understandable what was happening. It was the way people dealt with death, it was the way the spirit of the child was symbolically taken on its

journey back to its clan. Although the baby was going to be buried at Gurka'wuy, the baby belonged to another clan, the Madarrpa clan, and symbolically its spirit was being taken back through ancestral tracks and ancestral people to its clan.

And the last scene was absolutely beautiful. It was at dusk, the sun was setting through the trees, a trench had been dug in the red earth and crocodile was one of the main ancestors for the Madarrpa. And the men with dilly bags with feather pins hanging down were dancing crocodile up to the grave and the box with the baby, the eggs of the crocodile would be laid in the nest. Oh, it was just physically and symbolically absolutely beautiful. I thought, wow what a climax. We sent the rushes back to Sydney and when I got back to Yirrkala I rang up to get a report on the rushes and I remember my assistant back in Sydney he said to me, oh all fine except for one reel. There was a power failure in the lab, the machine stopped and all the footage, you know, every loop film goes through loops in the bath, they're just bleached white. I said, oh what reel?, and he said reel whatever it was, reel 96, and I looked up in my book – 96 – the climax and I wept. It was the only time I've wept on location. Any other part, you know, there was a lot of repetition, you know, if that part had gone it wouldn't have mattered. This was the climax, I just couldn't believe it. But actually when I got back to Sydney I did what no one else had done, I got all the little bits together and bits was all faded and that and we got a sequence out of it. But we missed so much brilliant filming. Oh technical things, it's just a nightmare!

The Djungguwan, okay, we missed a lot of very important restricted, no we missed a little bit of important restricted dancing because we ran out of film and we went on recording the sound. We raced back. Actually Howard Morphy who was with me, the anthropologist, he actually raced back and got more film and brought it. So we didn't miss anything and quickly loaded and went on. So all the time technical things happen. It's a miracle that it gets done at all actually. I mean I can't think of them now but they're always these terrible technical problems that happen but you solve them and it's always the problem of the heat and the dust and the dirt, you know, trying to keep the equipment clean. What do you do with it, you're at Gurka'wuy, it's horribly hot, humid. There's no fridge, there's no ice, no house to put it in. You put it down on the sand in a fridge box which doesn't have any ice in it, you hope it keeps cool.

Q: Can you talk about how the organisation of the ceremony worked?

Ian: I wish I knew. Okay, with every ceremony there are – [this is] just what I think, I wouldn't say I know of course – there are certain set elements. I mean with a Djungguwan, you know, it is a celebration, it is an initiation, it's a memorial. So there are certain set elements that go with these. But as well as this there are infinite possibilities of how these things should be put together exactly, what song's a song. Some I'm sure will always be sung, others maybe, maybe not. Some dances may or may not be performed. What determines this? Firstly what the ceremony is. Okay, it's a Djungguwan. Where the ceremony takes place. Gurka'wuy. Who are the people who are involved? Dundiwy, the Marrakulu clan and the Rirratjingu clan plus some others. Who are the people who are involved? The key people, Dundiwy, Roy Marika and others. The fact that we were there also, we were filming, we obviously didn't change what they were going to do, but we might have influenced it to a certain extent in that sometimes Roy would say come on do this, well you're being filmed kind of thing. So we were part of the scene. It wasn't being put on for us and they didn't do these things for us, but obviously were influenced in that way. Okay now how did it actually happen when we were there? This is very difficult, this is very difficult to understand, especially if you don't speak Yolngu and you don't know what people are talking about. Okay they might tell you, okay we're going to start the singing this evening. Okay they're going to sing but how? Who's going to come, how, when? You don't know. It appears to happen but obviously people know all the time, they are in fact singing or saying instructions to each other, you know, hurry, come, we're going to do this, we're going to do that.

A lot of this you don't know though until you get the stuff translated back in the cutting room. They obviously had discussions amongst themselves about how things are going to happen. Very often there are discussions at the point of a ceremony, like for instance one of the most important sequences when a boy who's going to be taken into the men's shade for the first time. He's going to start his journey of initiation and before this his face is painted as the

Wawilak Sisters painted their faces in ancestral times and today. Because when you talk about ancestral times, it's not a time in the past, it's in the past but it's in ever-living time as well. So the men were gathered in, in the public shade, not in the private shade, the public shade, and they were about to paint this boy's face and I think it was Dundiwuy who asked, are we going to start the singing with the fresh water or the salt water, and someone, maybe Roy or Milirrpum, another leader said, we'll start it with the fresh water, we'll start with the fresh water flowing out of the Gurka'wuy River and then with the turn of the tide, the salt water with all its power would flow back over the sacred well at the mouth of Gurka'wuy waters, would flow back to Gurka'wuy just as the paint will flow over the boy's face. So right there and then they were determining exactly the song that was going to be sung. There were probably other songs that could also have been used to portray this but that is the one they sang.

So all the time different elements, exactly how they sing and perform because they were all related, are decided on the spot. I mean the major thing was they decided at this stage we're going to paint the boy and they told us presumably, I can't remember that they were going to do this. But the actual details evolved as it happened. All the time through they might sing... Okay, they were building the gundimolk ceremonial ground. Dundiwuy and Roy with dilly bags in their mouths had danced curlew with this long beak spearing the ground, giving it power and after this they were still singing and I remember someone said shall we go on singing curlew or should we turn now to the gundimolk itself. Oh we'll sing, we'll sing curlew one more time then we'll move to the gundimolk. So all the time decisions were being made. So it was totally impossible for us to know exactly what's going to happen because in that particular case once they started singing gundimolk, the gundimolk ground then they changed and all the boys with branches of stringybark tree, the feathers of the honey bees, they danced honey bee with this marker, the long feather string. The path of the honey bee they danced it to the, over the gundimolk ceremonial ground and then they got out Dhumar, the sacred trumpet of the bee fly that regards and looks after the honey bee. And they blew this trumpet with this deep, sacred sound over the ceremony ground. We had no idea this was going to happen you just flow with it. They knew but I mean who of them knew it. I don't suppose the Yolngu men knew exactly. They were being instructed. It's a very flexible thing within a certain framework.

Q: Can you give me an idea of what's in the restricted version?

Ian: It's the preparation of certain objects which when they had been prepared and were put in place became public knowledge, okay. So to jump from that to the end, on the final day the women and children woke up at dawn – oh it was beautiful. It was dawn, we were sleeping on the beach and I heard just a single clapstick and a single voice of Milirrpum, one of the Rirratjingu leaders, singing Wawilak. Oh – and there on the gundimolk ceremonial ground were the three Djuwan poles of the Wawilak Sisters that hadn't been there the night before and there they were. Okay, so much of our filming was the preparation for what we saw on that final dawn. It started off in the bush and this wasn't ritual as it were. I mean it was ritual in that they were dealing with sacred objects but it was just the getting the materials for the ritual objects.

But then most of it was in the men's shade which was, I can't remember, say a hundred yards from the main camp at Gurka'wuy. It was a bush shade and no roof, just a thick wall. And it was like a men's club and the men would retire every day and they would slowly work on these objects and they would rest and they would chit chat and talk about the things that I'm sure men talk about in their men's clubs. And then someone would start singing and someone would start painting and sometimes it's very relaxed and sometimes it got more intense. And it just went on and on and it was incredibly intimate. We just sat there and we just went with it and in a way it's a pity this can't be shown because it's such beautiful stuff. It was so relaxed and so intense and so beautiful. So that's what a huge amount of the restricted material is. And then on the final night before the final ceremony there was some very intense ritual that went on.

Q: How close was Dundiwuy in the filming and post-production and how essential was he to what you did?



Ian: As far as I'm concerned Dundiwy was totally central to the filming of the Djungguwan. It was he who invited me to film it. It was he who was my host at Gurka'wuy. It was he who was basically my guide and friend throughout. Oh we used to have wonderful times sitting on the beach, afterwards when we were relaxing. Dundiwy loved coffee and I'd always have a box of little goodies that Rosemary had made, my wife had made me, and we used to sit on the beach and drink coffee and eat these and talk about things.

Anyway so he was my guide and he did incredibly important things. Like what I think you see one of the most important things was not the ceremony itself but that walk that Dundiwy did with me along the beach showing me, showing me the ancestral sites, showing me what Gurka'wuy meant to him, what the land meant to him and his Marrakulu clan. But when the actual ceremony began he seemed to me to play a less important role. I mean without doubt the main role was played by Roy Dadaynga Marika. Why? Well partly because Roy was a very strong character. He was a very important person at Yirrkala politically, socially and ritually. He was a brilliant song man, he had a wonderful singing voice and I don't know exactly what the relationship between the Marrakulu and the Rirratjingu was as far as the Djungguwan was concerned. It is to me a fascinating and somewhat mysterious connection. It could be in some way at that particular point in the time in some aspects the Rirratjingu might have had some kind of – precedence is perhaps too strong a word but some kind of authority. Whatever it was it was without doubt the Rirratjingu and Roy who played the dominant role in the actual performance of the ceremony. I mean another reason could well have been a purely practical one. The Marrakulu was a very small clan. I mean there were virtually only two Marrakulu men there, Dundiwy and Mithili. The Rirratjingu was a much bigger clan and there were several very important leaders there. So that was just practical reasons.

So it was Roy who was the main song man and the main conductor of the ritual. However Dundiwy played, he was always there, he played an important part, the dancing. I think that Dundiwy thought of himself as not a very good singer because he never took a lead in that but he was a very good dancer and he played in all the important dancing, he played a very important part. Sometimes with Roy, sometimes with other people, these intense dances when they put their dilly bags, which are full of power, their decorated dilly bags in their mouths and they dance these really dangerous dances with these spears ending up you know, curlew, the night bird, Wuttji, the spinefoot fish, mosquito. They didn't in fact do mosquito this time but all these things with dangerous things which are dances of revenge and dances spear into the ground and opening it up. Dundiwy was always there dancing these ferocious things and Dundiwy could be quite a strong, ferocious man if he wanted to be. So he did these dances but otherwise he was kind of not one of the main participants. However in the editing process he was the pivotal man. It was he who came down to Sydney on several occasions and documented the material. Dozens and dozens and dozens of hours of documentation which I would get which would be transcribed. At the end of one trip we'd have 30 hours of documentation and I felt the window's opened a little bit. I'm beginning, just beginning to get a little bit of understanding about what all this is, the real meaning of it.

Q: Did you become close at that time?

Ian: Yes, we did. He stayed, that's I suppose when we became close. He stayed with Rosemary and my family and we tended to work at Film Australia in the morning and it was very intense, you know. I mean it's awful being asked what's this, what's that and I pushed him as far as I could. And he spoke pretty good English but sometimes I couldn't understand what he was saying and I'd ask him over again until [makes sound] he cracked, you know, and he said I told you that, you know oh I've blown it. So it was an exciting, good, intense time and then we'd go home and have lunch and then we'd sit in the garden and he'd always bring down a bit of half-finished bark painting of the Wawilak, of the gundimolk, and in this case it was the gundimolk and the Wawilak Sisters and the Djuwan people dancing around it. He'd bring this back half finished with his ochres and we'd sit on the lawn. I have a bush garden and the rainbow lorikeets would come down and sit right by him and he'd say, oh it's my totem and they used the rainbow lorikeets and you filmed it in your film. And he had cut a bit of Rosemary's hair because her hair was good, he'd cut her hair for this long brush and he'd sit and he'd paint. And then in the evening we'd sit down and we'd have a few beers and we'd talk about things, everything. It was wonderful, yeah. So I really got to know him and it was good.

Q: In one film Roy gets really angry and then in another Dundiwuy does. Can you comment?

Ian: I don't know, I really don't know, but it's all to do with the participation. Well, I guess it was halfway through the ceremonies and if it's not already clear let me explain that ceremonies, Yolngu ceremonies, aren't just a ceremony. A ceremony consists of many parts which happen over many days and so we were about halfway through all this and just about everybody who was going to arrive had arrived. Not terribly many people. In terms of the number of people, it was a fairly small ceremony. In terms of importance, it was a big ceremony and most of the people were, I suppose, probably Rirratjingu and their families, which of course involved other clans because you always marry someone of a different clan. And a lot of the time the young people were I guess not taking part. They were sitting around watching and that and we'd just filmed a very intense part where the young boys had been led for the first time in their lives into the men's shade to start their journey to manhood, to start learning the law. And they'd then been brought out ceremonially and the women had formed a very sacred malpim ground, a circle which was very, very closely to do with important parts of the Wawilak story. And when this was over and, you know, everybody started going back to their camps sitting down and all of a sudden Wandjuk started berating the people and I didn't know exactly what was going on. I knew that he was talking about culture and I guess he was berating them for not doing things properly or not taking part. And then Roy took over and he walked up and down. I think he had spears in his hand or used the spear-thrower and he really gave these people hell. And I could tell because English words kept coming in and then he was obviously talking about their culture and didn't they respect it, why weren't they taking part. It was only after when Dundiwuy translated this to me I fully understood what he was saying. And yes he was saying, look we've come down here, Dundiwuy, my brother, my cousin has invited me here. We're performing this incredibly important ceremony at one of its homes at Gurka'wuy, not at Yirrkala. It's terribly important, why aren't you people taking part? We want to teach you. Are you just becoming like white people just nothing? Are you just going to go off and drink and lose your culture? We've got to hold it strong. If you don't help I'm going to leave, I'm going back to Yirrkala. I'm going to wash my hands of this. We'll all just become like white people. We won't have our culture.

So it was this kind of lecture...It was probably the kind of lecture that happened all the time, you know, in the old days in the bush when the old men felt that the young men who had probably really been put through it but felt they weren't performing well. They'd probably gone on but it was a bit more serious and the boys probably ended up being speared if they hadn't performed well. So it was probably a traditional thing but now it had in a way more meaning because losing your culture was becoming a real critical thing, especially with this nightmare of grog that was happening at Nhulunbuy, the mining town, which was oh such a nightmare. Whereas down here at these clan homelands were so beautiful because there was no grog. Here was a real opportunity to do things well and Roy was disappointed because the young people weren't taking part as much as they could. So I think that's what it was about. Now how much he was doing also because we were filming I have no idea. I mean he didn't ask us to film this. We weren't going to film. I mean we didn't know it was going to happen so I don't think that had anything to do with it. But we did start filming which might have wound him up. This is the kind of thing one would never know. But I can't say more than that about why it happened and it's interesting that it should also have happened. It did happen in other ceremonies that I filmed. Once again in 1971, again with Wandjuk, a Rirratjingu thing, and at the end part of the ceremony Wandjuk again berated the people for coming to the ceremony drunk and you know, which was the same kind of thing.

Q: Can you talk about the value of the Djungguwan in an anthropological sense and for the Yolngu?

Ian: I do think that the Djungguwan is important from an anthropological point of view because I do think it is a full and detailed record of a very important event that occurred at a very important point in time. This was a time with the Yolngu at Yirrkala when the last of the generation of elders who had been born in the bush before the days of the mission and had gone through the full law in the bush was still alive. And when the knowledge was really still there and here were some of these people conducting this ceremony and instructing the young and it was at Gurka'wuy, which is one of the new clan homelands, which is one of the

most important events, aspects of Aboriginal life in Australia at that time. It spread throughout northern and central Australia this moving away from settlements and missions back to clan land.

So it was a very important point in time and I was lucky enough, privileged enough to be there at the right time with a friendship like the one I had with Dundiwuy and with people at Yirrkala in general. I'd been there many times to be able to do this. And then to have Dundiwuy documenting it and other people, Nancy Williams, Howard Morphy, Frances Morphy, other Yolngu. A huge amount of documentation went into it but the primary one was Dundiwuy documenting this material. Of course only a small part of the documentation is in the film itself. So I think the film and the documentation is an important document and I think the more you see it the richer it becomes and the more beautiful it becomes. The Wawilak story is a beautiful story.

And I think and I'm sure I know that it is important for the Yolngu and as far as I'm concerned this justifies the whole Yirrkala project. The Yolngu when I first went back to screen this material and I always took the film back to screen before it was released to make sure it was all okay. And I remember the first time I took it back and at the end of the screening, this would happen to quite a few people, at the end of the screening everyone got up and left. I was expecting them to be clapping or jolly good. I thought, oh my god, you know, but of course from their point of view what they had seen was a perfect record of what they'd done – excellent, you know, that's what we expected, you know, that's why Ian was there, and they went off. But the next day people came up to me and said, oh you know, that was a really important record of our culture. So I knew not to expect that kind of a reaction. After that I tended to screen a film, I took film back just for one, usually one person, the clan leader or my host, and their reaction was always very simple and quiet. The important thing was that they'd say, no you've done that wrong or that.

But what happened was after I started finishing films I kept getting requests for copies of the film on video. By this stage it had all been transferred to video up at Yirrkala. At first I used to buy copies myself, you know, and send them up and I thought you know, this can't go on, more and more get sent up. So then I arranged for Film Australia to deal with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka, the arts centre, to get the films at cost price virtually up there and they could sell the films very cheaply to the Yolngu. And I remember at one stage I think there was an order for 600 videos, I think it was. So all these videos were being sent up to Yirrkala and the Yolngu were looking at them. And they had a video-player in one of the studios of the art centre and they screened the films non-stop and little children would sit there watching them and this was just going on all the time. And then I went up once, one of my last trips to get permission. I remember, it was something like 20 years after the mines had been going and the Yolngu had the workshop to assess how has this affected us and during this they'd screened one of the films.

The first film in fact – oh not the first one I finished, but the film of the filming of 1970–71 called *Pain For This Land* which included this village council meeting when the elders were talking about it and it showed the first effects of the film. And they screened this and apparently it was a very moving experience for them because there were all the old people foretelling what was going to happen and they were met. And then the next day they invited the general manager of Nabalco, the mining company, to their workshop and of course it was a different general manager from the one who'd been there in 1970 and he came along and what did they do? They sat him down in front of the screen and they screened that to him and about a week later the public relations officer of Nabalco got in touch with marketing [at Film Australia] and ordered a whole lot of films for their staff screening at Nabalco. I think this is what happened so you know, here it was having this important kind of political effect.

So there are all these kind of things happening and then as you yourself tell me, when you filmed the Djungguwan in 2002 Wanyubi and Dennis asked you to screen the film at your place so that they could see how it was in '76. So there is this kind of tremendous use of the films and this to me is a really, really exciting thing. This really does raise an interesting question, problem about what happens when you film, in particular, something like a ceremony. It is both a very valuable thing but it also has dangers which provided you're aware of them are okay. I've told you about the wonderful things. It is a record, it is a wonderful

record and you can go back and go back and study it in detail. It is also so students can do that.

It's also a record for the Yolngu themselves because you know, their culture is a non-literate culture. It was handed on from generation to generation in instruction, in song, in dance and obviously with every generation it changed a bit. But these changes started happening more rapidly with the coming of the mission, and then with the coming of the mine it happened even more rapidly. The boys undoubtedly aren't being instructed in a way they were intensively when their lives were in the bush. So it's only right that they should, the Yolngu should, adapt other methods of recording and helping them to record their culture, and if any anybody is a master at adapting to technology it's the Yolngu. They can just adapt to a situation, adapt to technology. It's not something mysterious, you know, they've adapted to vehicles, guns, adapted to film as a recording technique. So that's good, but the dangers are that when you film something you might as it were fossilise it. People might tend to think when you film a ceremony, that's the definitive event, this is the Djungguwan, especially I think probably the Yolngu don't think this. I think they're probably aware this is what happened then. But I think with us balanda, white people, with academics, with students, they think oh this is the Djungguwan ceremony. It's not.

This is the Djungguwan that I and Dean and Rod filmed at the invitation of Dundiwuy at Gurka'wuy in 1976 with the Marrakulu clan and the Rirratjingu clan and the Madarrpa clan who were also living there and various other people in this situation at the time when also Dundiwuy wanted it to be the ritual opening of Gurka'wuy. So there were all these elements coming together that made the Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy in 1976. It was a unique event. Every ceremony is a unique event even if it's another Djungguwan. The Djungguwan at Yirrkala in 1966 was a unique event. The Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy in 1976 was a unique event. The Djungguwan at Yirrkala in 2002 was a unique event. And provided you realise these are unique events, none of them are definitive, then with luck our filming won't fossilise these events but enrich them.

### 5.5 TREVOR GRAHAM

Trevor Graham is a filmmaker who made the 2002 film *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future*. He was interviewed by Denise Haslem for *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Sydney in November 2004. (See also **Biography** Section 6.1.)

Q: How did you come to make the Djungguwan film?

Trevor: In 2002 I initially went to Yirrkala to make a film about law and order issues in the community. Principally a lot of young men were winding up before the court and going to jail. The film I ended up making was about the thorny issue of alcohol and alcohol addiction in an Indigenous community. But parallel to that I was also very interested in Yolngu customary or traditional law and how that could be used to not so much solve but influence those issues about why so many young fellas were going to jail. So within about three weeks of being in Yirrkala I met Wanyubi Marika. Wanyubi is a member of the Rirratjingu clan. Wanyubi knew that I was a filmmaker in town, so to speak, to make a film about law and order issues. So he approached me to ask me whether I was interested in filming a Djungguwan ceremony and once I knew a little bit more about what the Djungguwan ceremony was about, that it was about discipline and that it was about disciplining young men and the participants involved, I began to become more involved and interested in following the ceremony and making a film with Wanyubi about that ceremony. So we sat down, we had a meeting, we talked about it, we had several meetings in, in effect. And about three or four weeks later we started filming down at the men's camp. The very first stages of the ceremony where they begin to paint the poles.

Wanyubi himself was someone who is concerned about the young men in the community and why they were getting into trouble with the court system. And I suspect the fact that we were a Film Australia crew and that Film Australia had that history with Yirrkala through Ian Dunlop's films. And also that Wanyubi's father, Milirrpum, had been in an Ian Dunlop film in the 1976 Djungguwan. In fact, I suspect that some of that came into his thinking about wanting us to film the ceremony. But I had no doubt at all that the ceremony was something that was

uppermost in his mind, that he wanted it to happen and the fact that we were incidentally there to make another film.

Q: What was it like working with Wanyubi and Wukun Dennis Wanambi?

Trevor: The first part of the filming that I did at Yirrkala was me myself alone, flying so to speak as a solo operator. So I was shooting and recording sound and of course the crew that came later on there was a woman DOP [director of photography]. Had she been there earlier, she wouldn't have been able to go down to the men's camp anyway because as the name implies it's for men only. So I would spend hours and hours and hours, just about every Saturday, Sunday, many days during the week after work when the fellas would go down to the camp to paint, I'd spend hours and hours down there with them painting. It was a bit like a mixture of being in an artist's studio and at a boys' club in many respects. The artistic endeavour and I guess the sacred nature of that went into the painting of the poles, the preparation of the poles, the singing of the songs, the sacred songs around the preparations of the poles. All of that was an extraordinary experience to witness. The actual detailed work, the very fine work of putting the cross-hatching onto the poles, was something that I kind of marvelled at I think and I hope that shows in, well I believe that shows in, the filming.

But there's another side of the camp which I found I could relate to very easily and this was a bunch of boys on their own having a great deal of fun. And so there are scenes that I shot where, you know, they'd be cracking jokes, they'd be carrying on and a hell of a lot of teasing took place. And this is a real feature of Yolngu men together, Yolngu people probably as well but my experiences with the men a lot of teasing goes on. So there's things like they're painting very sort of seriously, seriously, seriously and then someone will say, God you're ugly, and you know, just little sort of jokes like that would break the silence and break the kind of the intensity of the artistic pursuit so to speak. And so it was a combination of something that was very serious and amazing to watch. But on the other hand a lot of profanity and a lot of joking as I said. So it was fun and I really enjoyed myself being there and over that period of time – we're talking about probably about three weeks to actually paint the poles. So hours and hours spent down there.

Over that period of time I became quite close to Dennis Wanambi in particular but also to Wanyubi Marika and very much enjoyed their company. I was learning about what they were trying to do, what the Djungguwan ceremony was about, but also about the problems that they were encountering within their social life with things like the proximity of the Nhulunbuy township, the mine, things like alcohol abuse. I began to learn quite a lot about their attitudes towards those things and their aspirations and their hopes that Yolngu culture could be held together through staging things like the Djungguwan ceremony.

Q: What approach did you take with the film?

Trevor: Well I had filmed a funeral ceremony not long before we started filming down at the men's camp at the very first stages of the preparations of the Djungguwan. And whilst I was filming that funeral ceremony I missed a very crucial moment. I wasn't there because I was told this particular event was going to happen the next day. So of course I didn't go and I was buggered at the time, so I was glad to have a rest. But as a result of missing that I quickly kind of realised that yes, I do need to listen to what people are saying but I also need to kind of maybe not take it too literally. That when they say something's going to happen, it might not happen then on the spot and it might happen tomorrow, or it might not happen until the next day. So you begin to kind of intuitively get a bit of feel for being there. Basically being there, spending a lot of time and waiting. So it's a bit of a waiting game filming a ceremony because you never really know exactly when something is going to start, when it's going to finish. And you very much have to go with the flow but have a bit of an ear open for are things going to start now, but not be disappointed when they don't.

Q: What style of filming did you adopt?

Trevor: What I wanted to do was capture a sense of intimacy and I think that that's one of the great things about spending so much time with Dennis Wanambi and the other fellas at the men's camp. I got to know them very well over that period of time. So going in close with a

camera either to their faces or to their hands or to the details of what they were painting was not in any way intimidating. They got to know me, they got to trust me and I think I got to know them extremely well. So I wanted a sense of intimacy more than anything else that this is something that is very, very special and important to these Yolngu men. So I need to kind of convey that to an audience. So I wanted to go in close, so I wanted to see the sweat literally pouring off Dennis Wanambi's face – it was very hot while we were filming some days – and get that sense of, you know, this isn't an easy task to sit here in the heat and do these very fine detailed strokes. And I think at one stage in the film Dennis says something like, I think I'm going blind from the sweat.

Similarly hanging around, filming here and there gave me a sense of intimacy in terms of their conversations with each other. There's another conversation which I think is an absolute gem where one old man is complaining about how some other people in his clan are not helping out with the ceremony and he complains to one of the painters – I think it's Dennis – at the time. He says something like, oh that old man he should be helping us but he's too busy chasing a lot of women. And those kind of comments I think are built, they come from spending time with them, hanging out, being there at the right time when they're said obviously, but also there's a sense of trust and intimacy that's been built so people can feel to sort of say what they like. And you know, I'm not saying the camera's not there, the camera is very definitely there, but they accept it and they accept that it's part of the process of actually staging the ceremony.

Q: Were there any other approaches to filming that you used?

Trevor: There's a tendency I think to turn Indigenous people into noble savages. That is the ceremony is very precious, it's very religious, it's very sacred. All of that is true and I think that we have captured that on our video, on our documentary very well. But what I became more and more interested in was observing the process of actually making the ceremony, staging the ceremony. Because it's people that are actually doing that.

Okay they're Indigenous people, it's an Indigenous ceremony [but] I tended to sort of more and more see that the dilemmas that they were facing in trying to get this ceremony together were the same sort of dilemmas that everybody has. People don't turn up on time, people don't turn up when they're expected, there's not enough help at a certain time. It puts the people who are the main participants under more pressure: how can we get this finished, how can we get it moving, how can we get our general community or clan involved? So I became very interested in those kind of issues and what seemed to me to be the drama of those issues. Of people not coming to the ceremony and not participating as they were expected to be. Now I think possibly at times you can see that and you see it in the film that I myself as the filmmaker am actually becoming anxious and Wanyubi at one stage says to me in the making of the film where I ask where is everyone he tells me to calm down and not become quite so anxious. They'll come, which of course they did in the end.

At one stage when we were translating this material with Dennis Wanambi we got to translate all the conversations that were going on when people weren't actually turning up to ceremony as expected. And in those translations there were revealed the actual tension that people were feeling and experiencing about why people weren't turning up. So this kind of hope and expectation that the ceremony would happen and it not happening became a very big part of what I decided to follow and it became a very big part of the story and it became a very big part of the drama of the film that we made. Another thing that I was perhaps more interested in doing than say the work with Ian Dunlop or other anthropological filmmakers was I wanted to focus on characters. So Dennis and Wanyubi became very essential people in the story of this ceremony of the Djungguwan ceremony. And it's a bit like they lead you through the ceremony/ceremonial process but they're also giving you an insight into what it means to run that type of ceremony and the kind of dilemmas and dramas that they were facing within the staging of the ceremony. So it's a kind of observational film, it's a kind of an anthropological record, but it's also something that's character driven because that's the sort of issues that, and style I guess of films that, I'm interested in making.

Q: And did any dramas occur while you were filming?

Trevor: Yeah, well I don't know whether it has much conclusion, so. There was one stage in the filming where people weren't turning up and even Dennis, Dennis Wanambi, one of the key characters was not turning up and we could never get to the actual basis of why he had stopped coming. But it just reached a certain point, we'd finished painting the poles and he wasn't coming to the singing, the preparation of the Djungguwan and indeed the very first three or four days of the actual ceremony itself. And we suspected that something had gone wrong in the relationship of his clan to the Rirratjingu clan. And that perhaps the actual making of the ceremony had not been fostered in the right kind of way. Now this is pure suspicion on my part or what's the right word? It's pure speculation on my part about this. But it was curious to me that Dennis dropped out and, you know, one of the key characters in the film dropped out as well so it was a cause of concern for me also. But then at the very end of the ceremony, on the very last day, Dennis turns up and becomes again a key figure in the singing of the Wawilak story, the Wawilak Sisters' story in the song cycle.

Q: Can you talk about any interesting moments that came up?

Trevor: Well I think that perhaps the most interesting moment that happened, and it's part of the drama of trying to get people to come to the ceremony, is on about the second or third day of the actual ceremony, singing and dancing part of the ceremony itself, not enough people had turned up. And the singing has to be and the dancing has to be completed by sunset. So as the sun is sinking, sinking, sinking, still people are not coming. There's a core group of people there. There's always a core group of people there, but the extended families and the extended clans are expected to come and participate. They didn't at this part of the ceremony. So Wanyubi in his frustration pulled out a megaphone and I think there's an extraordinary scene where Wanyubi literally paces around the exterior of the ceremony ground, the gundimolk, with a megaphone. And he's imploring people to come to the next day of the ceremony because for him and his clan this is a very, very important ceremony and he'd staged the ceremony to impart honour on both his father Milirrpum Marika and his uncle Roy Dadaynga.

And so the ceremony also had these very close family special purposes. So he was imploring people to come and honour these two very great men in the clan and you just got a sense through that that the drama of what was happening as to what this really meant to Wanyubi and his family and why they wanted to stage the ceremony. And the frustration I think he was feeling. But fortunately on the last day, as he said possibly as a result of being on the megaphone, everyone turned up and you know, it was an amazing final day of the ceremony to see so many people involved. Not necessarily that it is a ceremony that needs a lot of people but so many people came to actually honour the ceremony, the Wawilak Sisters and the two old men whose poles had been painted who were being honoured in the ceremony. And it was a very moving experience to actually at the end of the ceremony, at the end of the film to see all those elderly women crying, sitting down on the ground in front of the poles crying, wailing in an extraordinary fashion as part of that ceremony, the song cycle and the two old men, Roy and Milirrpum.

Q: Can you talk about how the new digital technology allowed you a lot more freedom say than in the days of Ian Dunlop?

Trevor: The Djungguwan that I filmed was shot on videotape, on digital videotape. And a tape is approximately about 40 minutes long. So we didn't have the same sort of problems that say Ian Dunlop experienced back in 1976 where you're filming with a roll of film that's ten minutes long. So it gave us a lot more flexibility and freedom to actually obviously film for longer in an uninterrupted manner. But I still think that we kept an eye on what we were actually filming because we didn't take an approach where we were just going to film everything. So decisions about what to film were made in consultation with Wanyubi a lot of the time and with Dennis a lot of the time. Wanyubi would quite often instruct me and say you've got to record this song that we're about to sing now because it's very important, a very important part of the ceremony song cycle. So I would take instruction from Wanyubi and I would also I guess kind of intuitively feel my way around what needed to be filmed. Now on the final day of the ceremony we managed to get together two film crews and they were each given instructions as to what to cover. Ian Redfearn was working with me down at the men's camp. That was still a no-go area for Jenni Meaney, the DOP, being a woman. So Ian and I worked down

where the poles were revealed to the boys for the very first time and Jenny was working with the women with Rose [Hesp] who was working on sound. And so there came a point in the ceremony where the men and women came together, when the poles were revealed and that's where the two crews fully merged and it's probably a bit of a schmozzle on the day I have to say. Because so much was going on and it's one of those instances where your best-laid plans in effect have to get abandoned because you're making these plans in theory. You're not really making them with any, you know, high degree of knowledge. And even though we'd seen the same dances and the same songs and more or less the same procedures being performed on the days leading up to the final day, on that last day there was so many people there and it just seemed like all chaos sort of broke loose even though it didn't. And in fact in the minds of the Yolngu it was very ordered, but to us it seemed very chaotic. So filming on the last day was inherently frustrating, I think, because there was just so many people there, so much going on and as I said we didn't really have a good grasp of what was really happening, if you could have anyway.

Q: The secret men's camp has been restricted in other films prior to the Djungguwan film that you made in 2002. How did that come about?

Trevor: One of the most interesting things for me was when Wanyubi said, come down to film what we do at the men's camp, we want all of that covered. But then he also said you can put that into your finished film, we want that to be seen. Wanyubi and the others are very concerned about the future. I think it's a consistent theme that happens from Ian Dunlop's film to my film in that there is a generation of leaders at each time for each film who are expressing their concerns about the future. They are concerned, because there are issues in the community to do with alcohol, to do with the influence of other drugs as well. There are issues to do with the maintenance of culture and that's one of the reasons why Wanyubi wanted to stage the Djungguwan ceremony. But he was also keen for everything that went on at the men's camp to be seen because he wanted the documenting, the painting of the logs to be something that became public. Because he wants this tradition to continue and so he wants his children and children in the future to be excited and to be involved about the prospect of them doing their ceremony sometime, you know, ten, 20 years in the future.

So there are many scenes in the film where Wanyubi and the other men speak directly to the camera. They literally address the camera as though the camera is the children of the future, in ten or 20 years time watching them now and they speak in that kind of manner, 'You children in the future when you see this blah, blah, blah, you'll know what to do'. And so I became really fascinated by that as well that the use of the film that we are making, the use of the camera as a kind of form of oratory to the future. It's a very...I don't know, I can't explain it any more than that. But it's just a really fascinating kind of use of modern technology to ensure or try to ensure a kind of cultural preservation. And I think if you look back to Ian Dunlop's films that there are similar scenes. When Wanyubi takes the megaphone and is imploring his community and clan to come and join the ceremony and participate you see a similar scene from Ian Dunlop's film in 1976 where Wanyubi's uncle Roy Marika gets up and he almost abuses people for not participating correctly in the ceremony, for being lazy, for losing their culture, for being like white people. And it's almost like you've got this cross-generational concern about the maintenance of culture and what they see as a future without culture. So they're very special documents, I think, the two Film Australia films because they have the leaders of 1976 who are the fathers of the leaders in 2002, and that's what I mean by this cross-generational, they're cross-generational stories. And if you put the two films together what you've actually got is a kind of, documents which are like witnessing history and witnessing the generational struggle or need or ability to maintain culture in some kind of documented film/video form.

Q: And the people you worked with are also in Ian Dunlop's film.

Trevor: Yes. And the other interesting thing of course is that the people that I worked most intimately with, Dennis Wanambi and Wanyubi Marika, are in Ian Dunlop's film in 1976. But Wanyubi, whose English name is Daniel, is only a wee boy and he's being initiated into the ceremony for the first time. So if you look at the two films together it's like the wheel has turned full circle. The young boy initiated into the ceremony is now leading the ceremony and initiating his children into the ceremony. So you know, the wheel has turned.



Q: Can you talk about the editing and the decisions that were made about what to put in and what to leave out?

Trevor: Denise Haslem was the editor. We decided that what we wanted to make a film about principally the ceremony and I guess the kind of issue of trying to put on the ceremony and the drama of that, and, as I said, the characters involved in trying to put the ceremony on and the characters involved in actually staging the ceremony. We decided to make a film that we thought would be more accessible to a more broad audience. Okay, obviously it's got a lot of anthropological value. But for us a broad audience is what is important. So the idea of making a four-hour film for instance like Ian Dunlop did from the 1976 Djungguwan was not something that I was particularly interested in doing because that has a more limited audience. So we decided to go for something for a story that was 90 minutes in length or thereabouts. And we'd have those key filmic, I guess, cinematic characters, drama, story, alongside of the anthropological record. We filmed about 20 hours of material and have brought that down to a 90-minute film with, I guess, just enough of what I probably flippantly call the 'back story' of the Wawilak Sisters. Just enough of that information to give you an understanding of what's at stake for the characters and why the Wawilak and the Djungguwan is important to those people.

So it's quite a different approach to making this film and also Ian Dunlop has done a very good version of doing that, you know. The four-hour film that he made is very, very rich and dense with anthropological meaning and I didn't feel like I needed to replicate that. I felt like there were other things that were worthy of social observation, if you like.

Q: Can you talk about the editing process and the translation?

Trevor: One of the great values of staying in Yirrkala for almost a year was the fact that Denise Haslem, the editor, and I set up an editing room, a cutting facility in the main office of the Yirrkala community. And that was a fantastic thing to do because it meant in many ways we were in the centre of things, there are always people coming into the office to do all sorts of business. So they'd pop their head into the cutting room and they'd see themselves doing this or see themselves doing that, singing or dancing or whatever. And it also meant that we could do all of our translations and that includes the songs, the conversations. Everything in the film could be translated whilst we were still in the community. So we had like a team of about six translators that we were working with, and that gave us a lot more sense of connection to the place, the people. It also gave them that connection to us and the filmmaking process. So it became very much a two-way kind of thing where we felt completely at home amongst family so to speak and I think all the Yolngu that we were working with similarly felt the same towards us. So it became this quite close kind of bonding experience which was, you know, great – great to experience in these sort of days of reconciliation.

Q: Can you talk about how you fitted into the community in terms of family and kinship?

Trevor: One of the things that's very important for a ngapaki person, that's a white fella, to do when they go to a place like Yirrkala is that you have to find your place within the kinship system. You can't really do very much without having some form of relationship, some form of family relationship with the community. So I was quite early on in the piece adopted into Dennis Wanambi's family and my wife Rose was adopted into Dennis's wife's family. And so we therefore found our proper place within the Yolngu social organisation and everybody would relate to us in that way. I was really no longer Trevor Graham and Rose was no longer Rose Hesp. We were both called our relationship names. So Dennis would call me wawa which meant brother and Rose would be yapa which is sister, and all the other terms, relationship terms like uncle or aunty, were applied to Rose and myself. And I mean that was fantastic for us because it meant that we had our family. It was fantastic for the family too because that meant that they had access to things that we have. And there was a kind of sharing of many of those things. So we would eat together, we would dine together a lot, we would socialise together a lot. But when it came down to actually filming the ceremony, it meant that everybody knew who I was, what my relationship was to the ceremony because I was adopted into the Marrakulu clan. What my relationship was to Dennis Wanambi, who was one of the leaders of the Djungguwan ceremony. And so it gave me more of a relationship to

the ceremony than just being the filmmaker, just being the director of this film. So it had a lot of great personal significance which is still ongoing.

Q: You used to watch Ian Dunlop's films with your Yolngu family, didn't you?

Trevor: I think what I can say is that one of the truly memorable times that I've had up at Yirrkala was being with my Yolngu family, with Dennis and his wife and children, and sitting down to watch the Djungguwan film Ian Dunlop made in 1976. And it's through watching that film with them that I think I gained a real understanding of the value of Ian's films to the Yolngu today. Because for them it's like watching a big family album of moving footage. So they'd sit there and say, oh that was my aunty and/or that was my uncle, he's no longer alive. Oh look and there's me, I've got that yellow T-shirt on. You know, so Ian's films have a great sense of value in terms of they are very important records of Yolngu ceremony and life. But you can also look at them in terms of them being these very personal records and the family connections that people have to each of his film titles, and I think that's fantastic. There is also another thing that perhaps happens in that people, the current generation, perhaps look back to those films to see what their fathers were doing in ceremony at that time. So they form a record that perhaps there is that kind of fossilising that goes on in treating the films that way as the record and that we need to do the same thing. And I'm not quite sure whether that's true or not but the times I felt like they were looking at the films to see what was actually done because that knowledge was no longer with them.

## 5.6 PROFESSOR HOWARD MORPHY

Professor Howard Morphy is an anthropologist who worked with Ian Dunlop on the 1976 film *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy* and wrote the book *Journey to the Crocodile's Nest* to accompany the film *Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy*, both part of the 22-part series *The Yirrkala Film Project*. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Sydney in November 2004. (See also **Biography** Section 6.7.)

Q: How and why did you get involved in making *Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy*?

Howard: Frances Morphy and I were in the middle of our fieldwork in Yirrkala – she working on Yolngu language as a linguist and me researching Yolngu art. And I worked very closely with Narritjin Maymuru, the great artist whose biography I'm writing at the moment. And I met Ian Dunlop in the mission hostel that we were both sharing and he was waiting first of all to go and film at the outstations as part of his *Yirrkala Film Project*, monitoring the mine at Nhulunbuy. The following year Ian had arranged with Dundiwy to film a Djungguwan ceremony. Dundiwy was moving back to Gurka'wuy, his Marrakulu homeland, as part of the outstation movement and in order to celebrate in some ways the return of the clan to Gurka'wuy, they decided to hold a Djungguwan ceremony.

So I had no intention of going to Gurka'wuy. The following year I was still doing fieldwork. Ian had been back to Sydney for a year and then come back again and when he returned we thought it might be quite nice to go with Ian there just to visit the place on our way to the Manggalili homeland at Djarrakpi, which is a hundred kilometres to the south, and Dundiwy suggested I think to me why didn't we come along and see the Djungguwan ceremony too and we then decided all right we may as well as long as Narritjin is happy. And Narritjin, who was going to be returning to Djarrakpi, said, well okay I don't really want to go to this ceremony but if you're going to go we'll all go together. So that's how we ended up at Gurka'wuy, really to I suppose be a help to Ian in the filming, partly to give anthropological advice but it turned out really to become a dogsbody. Someone who went to collect water when everybody else was too busy or someone who held the sun guns up when everybody else's arms were tired and those kind of things.

Q: Did you give any anthropological advice?

Howard: Oh no. I gave anthropological advice, you know, early in the mornings over breakfast and things like that.

Q: Were you a good dogsbody?

Howard: I think Ian thought I was a good unpaid production assistant, yeah I hope so.

Q: Why was the Djungguwan chosen for Gurka'wuy as a ritual opening of the homeland?

Howard: Why was it appropriate to hold a Djungguwan ceremony at Gurka'wuy soon after the outstation was opened? It's a difficult question to answer because in fact there are so many answers. One is that the Djungguwan ceremony is one of the most important ceremonies of the Dhuwa moiety. It's also one that connects past generations with present generations and into the future. So in part the Djungguwan ceremony is a memorial ceremony, a memorial of clan members who died over the previous six or seven years and it connects it to the new generation of men and women who are going to be the clan, you know, members of the future. So in that sense it's very appropriate as a way of connecting the past with the present. When you're moving back, when you're relocating in place and you're establishing this continuity over time.

The other reason of course is that Gurka'wuy itself is closely associated with some of the important mythological events of the Marrakulu version of the Djungguwan ceremony. Gurka'wuy is the place where a great log of stringybark ended up on the beach having been cut down inland by sugar-bag hunters, ancestral sugar-bag hunters. And on the beach it crashed into the shore, splintered. There were two ancestral goannas who circled around the log as it went through the waters and they were transformed into two rocky bars going into the shore. And then you see the wood itself transformed into trees along the shore. There's one very famous, to me very famous, episode in the film [*Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy*] where Dundiwuy is pointing out a mangrove tree that's by these rocks and at the time he said, 'See this stringybark tree. It may look like a mangrove tree to you but it's a stringybark tree'. It had the spirit of the stringybark tree inside it even though obviously in its location it didn't take that particular form. So there are a lot of reasons why it was important and the ceremony was connected with the land that people were moving back to and it was connected to all of the previous generation of Marrakulu who had lived in that country.

Q: Why do you think the Yolngu were so keen to document their ceremonial and social life at that time?

Howard: I think Yolngu have been involved in a process of documentation of their life and other peoples' lives from time immemorial. I think you can go back to their encounters with the Macassans. Yolngu are obviously immensely interested in the Macassans and the Macassan way of life so you find a whole series of ceremonies that Yolngu perform, paintings that they perform that actually record the life of the Macassans. So one of the best ethnographic, well ethno-historical, accounts of the Macassans actually comes from Yolngu ceremonies where they sing about the processes of trepang, they sing about the voyages, they sing about the ceremonies that were performed and so on. So I think Yolngu have a history of, if you like, recording in one form or another events in the world. So when Europeans came along they actually used their ceremonial law as a way of showing Europeans aspects of their way of life and the things of value to them and in their culture.

So you have a whole series of famous events that Yolngu participated in, the paintings in the Yirrkala church, the church panels which were painted in 1962 which represent the paintings all the way along the coast and on the inland. Then the bark petition that was sent to parliament. So Yolngu are very conscious that their ritual life actually was in some ways part of their history as well as part of their religious practice. So I think it then became quite natural when Yolngu learnt about film. Actually when they learnt about writing and photography that they would see these as medium whereby their culture could be shown to outsiders in order to get their way of life recognised and respected. Then when their life became threatened by the mining town I think they saw other uses for film and the documentation that outsiders had made of their culture. They saw it as one of the means whereby future generations of Yolngu were going to be able to use film, tape-recordings, photographs, songs to ensure the survival of this rich cultural material into the future. I mean they see it almost simply as, you know, another recording technique that's an adjunct to memory. I don't think it's too problematic to Yolngu, I think most Yolngu seized that as an obvious opportunity. And Yolngu tape-record their own ceremonies. They love, you know, cameras and video-recorders and things like that

and it's often useful that outsiders do these recordings. Because outsiders then preserve them in archives so that when in 20 years time people want to re-access them they can. Whereas very often the films and recordings that Yolngu will make themselves, rather like anybody's sort of local videos, are likely to deteriorate rather rapidly over time or get lost and everybody uses them, someone borrows them.

Q: Ian went up there to specifically record the Yolngu at a time when the mine was about to open. Did that have a great deal of influence on the Yolngu leaders at the time deciding that they should work with Ian?

Howard: I think that the mine was an added factor. I think Yolngu obviously worked with outsiders recording their culture well before that. I mean [CP] Mountford made films there, [RM] Berndt made huge collections. So I think that they were attuned to the idea of film as a recording technique. But they felt immensely threatened by the building of the mine. Yolngu elders had gone to Darwin, had gone to other areas of Australia and they were aware that intensive European colonisation had affected the transmission of culture in other parts of Australia. They were very conscious of that and they saw a threat to their young people and they continually said, you know, what is gonna happen to the next generation. And so there was an added impetus to working with Ian in recording things. I mean indeed Ian, I believe, went there to record actually the mine, the bulldozers, people talking about it, people working in the mine and so on, and Yolngu were the ones who insisted, well okay it's all right you can film that but we also want you to film ceremonies, the songs and so on. So it was definitely their agenda that Ian was able to carry out in some ways.

Q: Filming the ceremony was described as a visionary thing to do up in Yirrkala. Do you think that's true?

Howard: I think Yolngu elders had a vision in really two senses. One, quite extraordinarily I think, they saw the potential that film would have at some future time for their children and grandchildren to use it and incorporate it in their way of life. And secondly, they did fear enormously the impact that alcohol was going to have and there was a sort of nightmare vision. And that nightmare vision became in many respects a reality very fast indeed. So while Ian was doing his filming you move from a situation where there was virtually no alcohol to a situation in which alcohol was beginning to have a devastating effect on the community, people were dying, there were regular fights, it was something that attracted people away, it caused tremendous divisions within the family between generations.

So it happened very, very fast. I think this is what people don't realise is the speed with which the introduction of something like alcohol to a community that has never had access to it before is going to have a really dramatic effect on the society. Yolngu elders realised, you know, they hadn't maintained sort of totally isolated lives. They had a history of engagement with the Macassans, in which people talked about the impact of alcohol there on relations. I remember the great Yolngu elder Mungurrawuy Yunupingu, Galarrwuy and Mandawuy's father, bringing me a collection of Macassan potshards and I said, where did these come from? And they said, they came from the fights that uh...you know, my father used to have when they drunk lots and lots of arak, and then they started throwing all the pots at each other. So the idea of alcohol and chaos was, I think, something that everybody knew very well and this was one of the reasons why the elders wanted to resist having a licensed premises on their doorstep. They failed, you know, the licence was considered something that was you know, part of the freedom of all Australians to have access to alcohol and yeah the consequences were very difficult. But you're right, I mean I think this set of elders were fairly visionary and it's also a testimony I think to the Yolngu system of education that you actually had Yolngu elders who saw as well as anybody what the consequences of alcohol, what the consequences of the mining town would be. And who devised strategies to try to come to terms with it and accommodate it. Very few people listened to what they said. But I think they've been proved right in many respects.

Q: Can you talk about the nature of the Djungguwan ceremony and why it is important?

Howard: Yolngu have a whole series of different ceremonies. Yolngu society is divided into two moieties and the ceremonial law of those moieties is relatively separate in that different

ancestral beings created the land, the songs, the sacred objects. The paintings of those moieties are very different but the structure of ceremonies is actually quite similar in some ways. Everybody has to be buried so, you know, both moieties will have burial ceremonies, and in northeast Arnhem Land everybody has to be circumcised, in the case of boys, and so both moieties have circumcision ceremonies. Those circumcision ceremonies draw more from the ancestral law of their particular clans and moieties. But nonetheless there are many things in common with them. There are another set of ceremonies that are more moiety focused and those would be ceremonies that are ritual ceremonies in which elements of restricted law are performed in which certain objects will be made and presented.

They're if you like in sort of old-fashioned terminology people would sort of call them higher-level initiation ceremonies or something like that. And the Djungguwan ceremony is one of those ceremonies. It belongs to the Dhuwa moiety so it contains Dhuwa moiety mythology and the main actors, if you like, in that ceremony, the boys who will be circumcised in the Djungguwan, if it's used as a circumcision ceremony which it can be, will be of the Dhuwa moiety. The opposite moiety participates as workers, as dancers. They will help form the ceremonial ground. They will do some of the paintings, but the paintings themselves will belong to the Dhuwa moiety. The Djungguwan then is one of the sort of main kind of regional ceremonies that is performed in northeast Arnhem Land. The other ceremonies of this kind are called Nara ceremonies. They are associated with...there is a Yirritja moiety version of that and Dhuwa moiety versions of that.

So although you have a ceremonial structure that relates, if you like, to lifecycles and life crisis, you have ceremonies associated with circumcision, you have ceremonies associated with death. Yolngu, and I think this applies really to Aboriginal society in general, are really concerned with processes of continuity, with the transmission of knowledge, of authority, from one generation to the next. And circumcision ceremonies have elements of commemoration about it and memorial ceremonies can be used as a context for circumcision. So the Djungguwan ceremony itself is a large regional ceremony that can perform all sorts of different purposes. The Djungguwan ceremony that Ian filmed [*Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy*] wasn't actually used as a circumcision ceremony but it could have been. And you'll see in it boys were painted up who were going to be circumcised the following year. At the same time the Djuwan posts that were put up represented Marrakulu and Rirratjingu people who had died in the previous two to five years. So there was this very strong memorial component. There's almost a literal association in the ceremony between some of the boys and particular posts that belonged to their relatives.

Q: Why is the Wawalik Sisters story so important to the ceremony?

Howard: Now the Djungguwan ceremony is a ceremony that occurs throughout northeast Arnhem Land. So Lloyd Warner, who was the first anthropologist to work among the Yolngu, worked at Milingimbi a long way away. And at Milingimbi he documented a Djungguwan ceremony. Now these regional ceremonies they are connected to the landscape in the particular place and context. So the mythology associated with them differs from place to place. In the case of Gurka'wuy, it's connected very closely to a mythology that stretches from Gurka'wuy right the way into Blue Mud Bay and in particular to a place called Manybalala. The ceremony at Milingimbi as Warner wrote about it is associated very much with two women who get known in the literature as the Wawilak Sisters. These were two women who travelled from the inland. They're called Wawilak Sisters because they came from Wawilak country. Wawilak country is to the west of Blue Mud Bay. When they arrived at Milingimbi all sorts of great events all near Milingimbi took place eventually resulting in them being swallowed by a great ancestral snake. Now this happened at one place. It's a story that is of enormous power. You actually find elements of that story occurring again, very widespread in Australia. The idea of ancestral women being swallowed by great serpents and later on regurgitated by them is a really fairly general element of ancestral law, of mythology in Australia. And you can see why it's a powerful image apart from it being terrifying – you're being swallowed by a giant serpent. The process of regurgitation is a process of rebirth.

So it's a hugely attractive ceremonial idea. It's not really the central theme of the Djungguwan ceremony at Gurka'wuy, though people know of what happened at the end of the journey. It's a central theme because in fact Gurka'wuy from the Yolngu point of view is close to the

beginning of the journey of those Wawilak Sisters. The Wawilak Sisters in the mythology of that part of Arnhem Land actually moved from the region of north of Blue Mud Bay over to Wawilak country.

They then if you like became the Wawilak Sisters and then they moved on to Mirrambeena where the snake swallowed them. It's very interesting. I worked with an old man called Wuyulwik Wanambi who came from the country in the north of Blue Mud Bay and he one day was talking about his paintings of the Wawilak Sisters. And his paintings were to do with these early periods of their journey. They were hunting kangaroos, they were putting them in the fire and the kangaroos then ran away, came back to life again. It's a major theme of the early part of their journey is catching prey and then somehow it escapes again and he said to me, he said it was interesting, one day I was sitting down in a camp and people told me what happened at the end of their journey, I didn't know that until then. So this really shows, I think, the structure of Aboriginal ceremony and ritual on a regional basis often consists of a whole series of parts that belong to place. And when people come together to perform ceremonies they're able to learn from each other and construct the ceremonies according to regional relations.

And if you think about it – I mean Australia is rather a large continent – Aboriginal people have been coming together to perform in ceremonies right the way along its length. They would have been aware of journeys that connected them to distant places. But the actual details of those journeys would be, if you like, in people's almost imaginations and then when they come together to perform ceremonies they can make things more concrete at that moment. But at another moment they may make them together in a slightly, you know, different way.

Q: Can you make cross-cultural observations about the Djungguwan ceremony to other cultures?

Howard: I was just really talking about the power of the central symbolism of the mythology associated with the Wawilak Sisters and there are a whole series of elements in the myth of the Wawilak Sisters that are exciting, interesting, transforming, powerful, frightening in some ways. Great myths like the journey of the Wawilak Sisters are often quite complicated. They'll have very strong central ideas to them and, in the case of the Wawilak Sisters, one of the central ideas is that ultimately they encountered a snake. For some unknown reason the snake is angered, in this case perhaps by the afterbirth blood of a child. The snake is then aroused, the snake swallows the women and then there's a sort of further resolution to the story when the snake regurgitates the women. There are lots of equally interesting events that happen on the journeys up to that point, intriguing things that happened afterwards. But here you have an incredibly powerful image. Nearly all religious systems have powerful images incorporated within them that are connected to, you know, longer stories and in Christianity the image of the cross of Christ, being crucified at the end of a journey that Christ has gone on in his life where you can then start connecting to a whole series of little events. But a journey that then goes, when the cross is carried to Calvary and the torment, the torture, the ridicule, all the things that happen on that particular journey. But at the centre of it there's a very powerful core symbol.

Now you go back into the Old Testament and clearly you see the power of snakes in human psyche in the Adam and Eve story and the dramatic impact that a snake can have on human life and human existence. So these great powerful images are associated with, I think, all world religions but they're integrated when you actually look at them in a whole series of complex, you know, theology, mythology, accounts of extraordinary mystical events and so on.

Q: Can you make a cross-cultural comparison from the Djungguwan to the Catholic mass that helps us understand the significance of it?

Howard: I mean this really is unproblematic. I mean when I am talking to students about Yolngu art, for example, I'll be talking about paintings which people will see as, you know, slides projected flat on a wall. Those paintings in reality occur in the context of rituals painted on people's bodies, accompanied by singing. The boys will then be taken and put on people's

shoulders, danced towards a ceremonial ground. The whole event of a Yolngu ceremony is really an operatic experience and it's an extraordinary combination of, you know, stage sets, the ceremonial grounds that are constructed, the huts in which people and bodies will be contained, the painting of the body, the dramatic ritual action and the magnificent singing that goes on. I mean I suppose the difference between a Yolngu ceremony and grand opera – though perhaps not in the case of something like Wagner's Ring Cycle – is it's very, very long and it also goes through periods of quiet reflection when people build up energy so they'll just sit down and they'll sing. So they'll be some maybe four or five nights when there is just nothing but singing. People will probably be preparing things at the same time making feather strings, making armbands. There's no dramatic ritual events but then on the days of the final performance the action builds up to extraordinary sequences of events that seem to cascade following one after the other.

Q: Is the Djungguwan ceremony related to Yolngu land ownership?

Howard: Yes, yes, yes. All Yolngu ceremonies are connected to land – the songs, the paintings, the dances are all connected to particular places and the events that happened in those places. And in turn being connected to land, they're connected to the ownership of the land. You can't separate in the Yolngu case the ownership of land from the ownership of song to the ownership of painting from the ownership of dance from the ownership of sacred objects. All of those things are interrelated and Yolngu in some ways will see the ownership of songs and paintings, the songs and paintings themselves as almost being title deeds to land. People have as strong rights to protect those as they do to protect the land itself. So indeed a ceremony like the Djungguwan ceremony can only be put on by the people who hold the right to those songs and dances and the people who hold the right to those songs and dances will be also the right holders to the land associated with those. So there's an intimate relationship between land ownership and ceremony. In the case of the Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy that Ian filmed it's really a journey through Marrakulu country. It's a journey that connects you to Manybalala which is another Marrakulu place and Gurka'wuy and the great sort of bees that are represented in the malka, the feather string that connects the Djuwan posts, flew from Manybalala in Marrakulu country to Gurka'wuy in Marrakulu country. And so that string represents a journey to Marrakulu places.

Q: Is there a connection between the ceremony and the system of Yolngu kinship?

Howard: Again from a Yolngu viewpoint you can almost say everything is gurrutu and gurrutu means kin relationship. So all rights stem from kinship. That means that your feeling of being in the world stems from your kinship connection to other people. But because the kinship itself is seen to stem from the land, people will talk about country as being mother and child, country as being mother's, mother's brother's sister's daughter's child, you know, granny and grandchild. So the land itself is seen to be embedded in kinship. So as a ceremony is performing in a way the ancestral dimension of landscape, it at the same time is performing kin relations. So when people look at a ceremony they'll be able to say, oh that's my mother's ceremony or that's my ceremony. And different people have rights then to both different ceremonies and different components of those ceremonies. If you break down a ceremony into its songs, its paintings, its dances then what you'll find is that when someone dies, when there's a burial ceremony then different relatives will come together to perform that person's spiritual journey. And they will be performing their kinship to that person and they'll be singing songs as a grandchild to that person or as a father to that person, or as a son. They'll be singing songs that actually enact kinship relationships.

When Ian was at Gurka'wuy to film the Djungguwan, a child died belonging to a quite different clan to the Marrakulu, to the Madarrpa, and Ian made a film there called *Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy* and I wrote a book called *Journey to the Crocodile's Nest* and it's interesting to contrast the participants of those two ceremonies. Because in the Madarrpa ceremony is a Yirritja moiety ceremony then Yirritja moiety clans took the leading role in the Djungguwan ceremony. Largely it was Dhuwa moiety people. The people of the opposite moiety who participated in those two ceremonies did so on the basis of kinship. So the leading Yirritja moiety people in the Djungguwan ceremony were peoples whose mothers came from the Marrakulu clan and the Rirratjingu clan and so on. In the funeral of the Madarrpa child, Yirritja child, then the leading members of the opposite moiety, there were the children of women of

that particular clan. You've got completely different sets of people coming to perform in those two ceremonies. They followed each other but many of the people who came for the child's funeral upped and left when the Djungguwan started because they didn't have the same kinship relationship to that ceremony. There were some overlaps but there were also very, you know, different people performing.

Q: How did the organisation of the 1976 Djungguwan evolve?

Howard: I mean in the case of the Djungguwan ceremony that Ian filmed I wasn't in at the beginning of all of the negotiations that Yolngu had to put it on. Ian will be able to tell you the meetings that preceded the ceremony. I was there largely at the beginning of the performance of that ceremony and so I can really only talk about the people who were there then and how they related to each other.

In the case of these major regional ceremonies, the waku, the sisters' sons – today sometimes called the djunggayar – have a very important role in the ceremony. It's not their ceremony, it's their mother's ceremony but the ceremony couldn't be put on without their agreement and their participation. They're the people who, if you like, hold in some senses their mothers' ceremonies in their hands. They look after it and you can see that they play very important roles in the ceremony. They will sometimes lead the dancing, they will be the people who set the form of the ceremonial ground itself. They may mark it out. They will be people who will say whether the designs are correct or not very often, and they will often paint the designs.

So the Djuwan posts themselves, the designs, some of them were set by children of women of the clan by these waku. Now Yolngu society is very biased towards the senior offspring, so the senior waku are the people who are the first born of the first-born women of the clan and at that particular ceremony the lead was taken by a man called Bokarra. He's a member of the Manggalili clan but his mother was a very senior Marrakulu woman. The other waku who were there included a man called Gunbinirr. At the time when Ian was doing that film, Gunbinirr was a relatively young man. His mother was less senior than Bokarra's mother but he still played an important role in the ceremony. He did some of the paintings that were done on the Djuwan posts. So he played an important role there. So you have these people whose mothers come from the clan who play very important roles. Then you have the clan leaders themselves and the leaders in a particular ceremony will be those from the clans whose main dances, songs, sacred objects are being performed and being produced. So at Gurka'wuy it was really an alliance between two Dhuwa moiety clans, Rirratjingu and Marrakulu. And you found that the leaders of those two clans were all there. Dundiwuy, who had if you like been there organising, the genius behind the whole thing. It was his idea, it was his ceremony, it was something to celebrate the creation of Gurka'wuy. Mithili, who was the eldest Marrakulu man, and then from the Rirratjingu side you had all the Rirratjingu elders there participating, Roy Marika, Milirrpum, Wandjuk. So they really took on the main role in the singing and so on. So you had this real division in a sense between the owning clans and the senior sons of women of those clans.

Q: Why is the Djungguwan a Rirratjingu and Marrakulu ceremony?

Howard: Well, the Djungguwan isn't really the ceremony of the Rirratjingu and the Marrakulu. The Djungguwan is a ceremony associated with Dhuwa moiety clans who are connected by sugar-bag and by the Wawilak Sisters and by the ancestral snake or python. And in the Yirrkala area the clans that are most closely connected with those are the Marrakulu and the Rirratjingu. When you go over the west then you find a whole series of other clans that are associated with that. Another clan that is in a minority at Yirrkala closely connected to that is the Galpu clan and indeed the Galpu snake is one of those snakes that in the mythology associated with the Wawilak Sisters stands up straight and talks. Yolngu snakes of both moieties stand up high and talk to each other across great distances. So when you're talking about the Djungguwan ceremony as the clans connected, all of those clans then in a sense are connected through the snake and through sugar-bag. The other ancestral being that closely connects the Rirratjingu with the Marrakulu is Wuyal, the sugar-bag hunter. This is a person who is a bit of a trickster, who's slightly wild, who's sexually quite active, who runs around all over the place greedily eating sugar-bag, chopping down trees, throwing down



spears wildly left, right and centre. And he's quite an important complementary figure in the Djungguwan mythology and a very important one associated with the Rirratjingu and Marrakulu clans.

Q: What do you think of the value of the Djungguwan film of 1976 as an historical record anthropologically and for the Yolngu?

Howard: If I'd be reflecting on the Djungguwan ceremonies that have been filmed and their importance I guess that there's a selfish perspective on that in that there's no way that I could have written the kind of things that I've written about Yolngu ritual without Ian Dunlop's films. If you imagine the complexity of these ritual performances and the fact that they contain hundreds of songs in a language that I have only a minimal grasp of, even if I was fluent, the song words are very often obscure. So actually to get a grasp of the richness of the language you need to preserve it in film. And I think Yolngu themselves realised that. The power of film as a recording medium is really unsurpassed. And the other dimension of the films though is really for the Yolngu themselves and how important they are for them and I think the Yolngu elders were extraordinarily visionary as I said before in that they couldn't have imagined the digital revolution. It wasn't there really in 1973. But the digital revolution has made this material accessible widely and cheaply within the culture itself. So Ian Dunlop's films in a sense were the first way in which the material came back to the community. He was there really part of the video revolution.

When Ian started making these films, videos were very expensive and nobody had a video-recorder at Yirrkala and nobody had a television, you know, in 1972, '73, '74. By the time he'd finished making the films then video was a possibility and Film Australia then were able to return these very cheap videos to Yirrkala to the arts centre and they just became one of the most popular films that people watched. So you know, it was a reality that people couldn't have realised at the time that actually by making these films you could return them to the community. And the very fact that there are not just one Djungguwan but there's two Djungguwan and now three Djungguwan films means that people can see the diversity of the Djungguwan ceremony. They can see different people performing it. They can look at different song styles because Yolngu is an extraordinarily musical culture. Someone like Roy Marika is almost like, you know, a great trained tenor or something like that and he will sing in a slightly different style from Milirrpum, he will sing in a different style from Wandjuk. People can experience these different singers at different points in their lives. And in that sense they add to the richness of their experience of their own culture and will contribute to the way that it's passed on in the future.

Q: You said the filming of ritual provides a very difficult challenge for the filmmaker. What do you mean by this?

Howard: Filming ritual is enormously difficult for so many different reasons. Partly because rituals are performances that are scripted as they evolve and as they develop, certainly in the case of Yolngu ritual. I mean you can imagine that one could film a coronation or a memorial service in Westminster Abbey or something like that because it's been meticulously planned and scripted in advance. One coronation may be different from the next but at least in each one there's a script. In the case of a ceremony like the Djungguwan ceremony there are certain parts that you know are going to happen. But there's a degree of flexibility about exactly when they will happen and the order in which they will happen. There's a whole series of sort of serendipitous features that are involved. You don't have somebody who says, well the person who is dancing hunting the kangaroo will come from, you know, the left and move such and such, and you can't get someone to even say, you know, do please tell us when this person is going to start because people themselves haven't quite worked it out. They've got to wait until the right number of people are there for the dance to begin and who can assess the right number of people. So there are all those kind of things.

So the filmmaker has actually got to be prepared for action when an event is about to occur without actually knowing when that event is. So it's really very difficult. The other thing is that you've got to somehow compromise between, in a sense, making a record of the event where ideally you'd have this sort of distant camera that included what everybody was doing at any particular point of time, and actually capturing the emotion of the event and being able to

record the details, the brilliance of individual dances, and to create the effect of the performance for people who are there because people who are there and present are not standing back 20 yards and taking the thing on as a whole. They're often people who are there crowding around a body in a burial ceremony, moving with the dancers. So you've got to convey that particular event because in filming a ritual one of the things you're trying to do is convey the sense of the performance of the people that are actually there. Because that's one of the great things about film is that it can convey the emotions of the moment far, far better than almost any other media can. So in a sense you've got to be true to that particular thing but at the same time you've got to be conscious if you are trying to record a documentary record for the future in which people will want to know, well how did they do it, where did those answers come from, you can't just all the time be focusing on, you know, a close-up of something because it looks incredibly dramatic.

The difference between a filmmaker like Ian Dunlop and the way that people would be filming certain actions if they were filming it for a pop video is that, in the case of the pop video, you may just actually see 20 per cent of people's feet, 20 per cent of people's hands, 20 per cent of their eyes and almost you might come to the end and say, oh how many people were there in that group, I have no idea. So you need to have the context but at the same time you've got to have those really intimate and detailed representations.

Q: Do you think the 1976 and 2002 versions of the Djungguwan show cross-generational concerns on the part of the leaders?

Howard: There's a great temptation when you see a particular ritual and you see it for the first time to sometimes misinterpret certain events that might happen. Now Yolngu rituals are actually punctuated very often with apparent moments of dissension. Sometimes real moments of dissension, sometimes moments where really everything seems to be falling flat, moments when people will suddenly stand up and urge people to dance more strongly, dance with more commitment. 'You're doing this wrong!' Now this doesn't fit in with European conceptions of performance because we have an idea of a performance as being something that happens on the day and it has to be right on the day. We separate off rehearsal from performance. Yolngu don't do that. The fact that these ceremonies go on for several days actually means that you incorporate rehearsal within performance and you actually carry on rehearsing if you like until you rehearse so well that it is the performance and then people will stop.

So you can sometimes find that people do four or five times a repetition of a particular dance and it may start off in a desultory fashion. In a way it's supposed to start off in a desultory fashion. That's how you get everybody to get up and start taking part. So when you see someone like Roy Marika or Wanyubi berating people, saying you're not participating, getting the megaphone, shouting come on where are you all?, you say oh well this is a sign of the times, you know, people aren't participating in ceremonies. I'm sure if you went to Yolngu to a Djungguwan 100 years ago you'd find someone standing up yelling, declaring, complaining, urging.

It's in the nature of that ceremonial performance and the relationship that people are establishing with other people. A ceremonial leader is someone in that context who is supposed to take charge, is supposed to berate people and it's like old women, you'll find them getting up and angrily shouting, you're not putting enough energy into this, do this! Again that's a role that some old women will take and you'll find that the same old women will do it ceremony after ceremony after ceremony. So you can't read too much into those kinds of things.

Q: Do you worry that documenting on film will fossilise ceremonies for future generations?

Howard: No, no not at all. I mean people often criticise ethnographic filmmakers for, if you like, creating authorised versions of a particular ritual and a particular performance. I mean in some ways I guess it's like almost criticising people who are filming a football match for making an authorised version of a football match. Yolngu ritual performance is always different. Yolngu know it's always different. It depends who has died in the case of a burial ceremony, which clan the person being circumcised belongs to, who is coming along to take

part, which songs and song cycles people at the moment are attracted by, who the good singers are. All of these variables are part of Yolngu ritual. So when you film them, Yolngu themselves know that you've filmed a version of it. Someone may have got something wrong in it or you say someone got something wrong in it, that doesn't mean that you have to follow it because someone got it wrong.

So I think that it's quite an extraordinary misunderstanding of the nature of ritual performance to see films of rituals as fossilising and creating authorised versions. While the culture is, you know, strong, while the songs are being passed on, people are not going to suddenly look at the film and say, oh he sung that note slightly wrong or something. It's not like that. They can see in the films the diversity of ritual performance. The other thing you have to think about is in the context of, you know, Christian ritual performance. Has it changed over the last 40 or 50 years? Were there guitars in churches, you know, 20 years ago? Well, they were 20 years ago, whether they were there 50 years ago? Does the fact that we have all this recorded organ music mean that it's fossilised contemporary religious performance? Not at all, of course it hasn't. If you stopped people who are now living in a film age from having access to films of their ritual life, they can have access to films of, you know, the coronation, films of, you know, songs of praise on Sunday or something, but they can't have access to films of their own ritual, what would you be doing? You'd be actually cutting them off from the contemporary world, separating their ritual life from the present.

And Yolngu don't want this separation and they've been so actively involved in this process. It's not something that's come from outside. You can't get people to perform ceremonies for you again and again and again, you know. If you're somehow or if they don't want to do it – and you yourself having filmed a Djungguwan ceremony must know that Yolngu in many areas are taking charge of that particular process, will tell you what they want, what they want to be seen, by whom. And they'll even go back to films that have been filmed in the past and make them part of their contemporary present.

## 5.7 PROFESSOR NICOLAS PETERSON

Professor Nicolas Peterson is an anthropologist who, with director Roger Sandall, filmed *The Djunguan of Yirrkala* in 1966. He was interviewed by Trevor Graham for *Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* in Sydney in November 2004.

Q: How and why did you become involved in filming the Djungguwan in 1966?

Nicolas: There was this program initiated by the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, as it then was, to record ceremonial films in the Northern Territory, particularly before they disappeared. There was a feeling that change was so rapid that most of these ceremonies wouldn't be held much longer. The program had actually not been initiated by the institute. They'd been approached by Cecil Holmes, who is a well-known filmmaker of that period and who'd filmed several films for the institute, on contract, of ceremonies in parts of Arnhem Land. And the institute was really so pleased with these that they decided that a much better way to do this would be to have their own film unit and film director. And so in 1965 they appointed a film director of their own, Roger Sandall. But although he had a degree in anthropology they needed an anthropologist to document the films, to find out where the ceremonies were happening, and I happened to be around. I just saw this advertisement in the newspaper and, you know, my career wasn't sort of particularly focused. And of course I'd mistakenly thought making films was glamorous. Like anybody who gets into it knows, it's not really half as glamorous as it appears to be to outsiders.

So I applied for the job and I became the institute's research officer in the Northern Territory and my main job was to locate ceremonies and arrange with the Aboriginal people for their filming. And we only wanted to film ceremonies that were actually being held. We didn't want people to stage them specifically for us. So I was appointed, I think it was late in 1965, early in 1966. I was looking around for ceremonies for us to film. And I was in the Northern Territory and it was well known that at some stage there would be a Djungguwan, a major ceremony, at Yirrkala and through a network of people I had I was able to establish when this ceremony was going to be held. And I believe that Cecil Holmes had actually intended to make that as the next film that he contracted to make for the institute and his nose was a bit put out when

we sort of latched onto the same ceremony and he was sort of cut out of the picture. It was a bit unfortunate.

Q: What was the idea and intent of the institute?

Nicolas: I think many people who've been privileged particularly to see restricted ceremonies have whenever they've seen them always felt that they were about to be overwhelmed by events. And so in 1896 [Baldwin] Spencer, who was professor of biology in Melbourne, was in central Australia, saw a wonderful religious festival which became the basis of his book, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, written with Frank Gillen, and he says at the beginning, you know, I'm terribly lucky to see these ceremonies because they're all going to disappear. And it's true the people in Alice Springs don't hold those ceremonies anymore. But you can go to anywhere around about and you see just the same ceremonies. Well, it was the same general feeling in the '60s, especially with the assimilation policy being so much government policy, because of all the changes that were taking place, because of Aboriginal people getting formal citizenship rights, all these sorts of things. It was felt that most of these ceremonies were likely to disappear very soon and the person who ran the institute, the principal, was Fred McCarthy and he was very much a museum person. So he was very much in the preservation mode and very much in the mode of getting the authentic and the traditional and the how it was before whites came. I mean this is a fantasy of course, you know, this idea that that was his objective and he was very supportive of the film program and pushed it quite strongly.

Q: What were the motivations?

Nicolas: I'm not sure whether you can question the motivations because in fact many of these ceremonies have stopped being held or they've transformed quite dramatically. I think that the films that the institute's film unit made will become very important heritage items in the future and one can foresee in 50 years or more that they'll become, films that are restricted at the moment because of the nature of the ceremonies will probably become quite widely seen and publicly available. So yes I don't think it was mistaken. The other thing I should say that these films were primarily made as record films. They're not made for commercial release and in fact that was a source of tension between the institute and Roger Sandall, a film director. Because they didn't realise that film directors like to make films, they don't just like to make records. And so what happened was that when we filmed a ceremony we would make a record film, which was all of the footage that wasn't blurred or in some way technically deficient was made into an archive version, just a record of the event for future research and is documented. And then we used to make a short version, which was a film in the sort of general sense which was a more structured and finished thing which was meant for teaching primarily.

Q: Did it have a quasi-scientific objective as well?

Nicolas: Oh, it was thoroughly scientific in the sense of anthropologically objective. Yes, it and the style was very much observational and I mean I'm very supportive of Roger's views about that myself. So what does that entail? It entailed amongst other things most of the shooting being in medium or wide angles so that you get to see the composition of the group. Not particularly interested in close-ups because they don't carry much information from a sociological and anthropological point of view. And also Roger had been a film editor too before he came to Australia and he was very sensitive to shooting the films and editing them around the soundtrack and, because these were ceremonies, most of the ceremonies had film songs in them, and so he is much more sensitive than any people prior to him, would film ceremonies to the musical structure of the soundtrack.

Q: Can you describe the nature of the Djungguwan ceremony and why it's so important to Yolngu?

Nicolas: The Djungguwan ceremony's one of four ceremonies which relate Aboriginal people relate back to a story about two sisters, ancestral sisters who travelled from southern Arnhem Land towards the coast, and one of them was pregnant and had a child beside a waterhole, and in this waterhole there was an ancestral snake and following the birth of the child the

ancestral snake rose out of the water and caused the sky to go very dark and clearly was creating a storm. And the Two Sisters were frightened that the snake would swallow them and in order to stave off being swallowed they sang through the song cycles associated with these four ceremonies, one of which was the Djungguwan. But they were actually unsuccessful in staving off the ancestral snake swallowing them and eventually they were swallowed. But it was the songs that they sang in trying to stave off the snake that are the songs which people sing today in these four ceremonies.

Now the Djungguwan is used primarily for...It doesn't have a single function. It has several functions. It's used to circumcise young boys, to make them into men. And at the same time as that happens, boys who have previously been circumcised at that ceremony come to see more of the ritual and so move up a notch in the age grading system. It can be also used as a memorial rite for somebody who's died and to commemorate them, the holding of it can commemorate their life. In the one that we filmed it was associated with circumcising the son of a man who'd been killed just a year or so before and throughout various parts of the ceremony elements of the man's possessions were burnt as part of the Djungguwan.

Q: Can you find a cross-cultural point of reference that gives the Djungguwan its place for the Yolngu?

Nicolas: Well, I think the first thing to say is that there's a big difference between rites and plays or theatrical events, and a ritual sets people's symbols in motion and it's not about being rational about things. It's about feeling and certainty and truth and those kind of things. Whereas a play is really a narrative which [is] trying to persuade you of something or the consequences of something. And so it's much more didactic. It does of course affect your emotions and then draw you in but it draws you in a quite different way. One is trying to convince you in a play in a sort of rational sort of way, whereas in a way rituals are to do with emotions and the irrational. They're about belief as opposed to logical thinking and deduction.

So I think the analogy with the Catholic mass is a good one. You wouldn't say to somebody, oh, could you just stage a Catholic mass so we can film it. If you wanted to film a mass you'd want to find a mass that was going on because people hold masses for particular reasons. There are things that have to be done, people that have to be there, and it's for events about which people care. And it sets symbols in motion and wafers and wine and all sorts of other things get involved which have a symbolic load with, if you like, it marshals people's emotions and sets them in motion.

Q: Do you think there is a comparison with opera? An opera about this land?

Nicolas: I think there are limitations to that kind of analogy right because again ultimately opera is art for art's sake and it's about virtuoso performance and it's at the theatrical end rather than the ritualised end. It might be more ritualised than the play if you like, more formalised. But people hold ceremonies for reasons, you know, just like one holds a birthday party because it's somebody's birthday and you want to do the right thing and you feel happy for them and you want to make them feel special and all of those things are associated with emotions amongst those people who are close to them like the parents and the siblings and the relatives who all want to express that emotion in some way. So with an Aboriginal ceremony they only are effected and have meaning because people have real emotions. They're upset about the person who's died, they want to commemorate the close relative, they care about that person, they want to replace them socially by turning their young son into a young man who will grow up and then eventually replace the father. They want to do right by the dead person's relatives or people who are a bit more distant to show they care too and they're supportive.

So there has to be a very strong emotional and psychological commitment in a way. It's not recreational, even though people get pleasure out of doing these things in the way that participating in an opera is. And I think the thing about singing is that singing is extremely important in Aboriginal religion because it's through singing that people brought the world into existence and that through singing that the ancestral beings created place, named animals, named features of the landscape and so brought the world into being. If there are no names, if nothing's got a name then in a way it doesn't exist. But by naming the animals, naming the

place, naming the trees and laying down how to behave in a proper way they lay the foundations of the world. And this is really all encoded in the songs that people sing which trace the journeys that these ancestral beings made and the songs that they sang that brought the animals and the rest into being by naming them.

Q: What is the importance of the Wawilak Sisters to the ceremony?

Nicolas: The Wawilak story is a foundation myth which provides the rationale for holding the ceremony and is the source of its sacred origins, is what makes it sacred because it was performed by the sisters in trying to stave off being swallowed by the snake. And so it's from that gift to the people in the ancestral past that it gets its significance.

Q: Is it a creation story?

Nicolas: That's a very complicated question...The reason why it's very complicated is because there is no one single story about the creation of the universe. There are a lot of different ones and they all coexist and they have different importance for different people and so you could go there and ask some people about origins and they might refer to the Wawilak story. They're much more likely to refer in that part of Arnhem Land to the Djungguwan story or some other story than the Wawilak story. But they were ancestral beings who were living in the area before humans appeared and when they left the face of the earth and sank back into the ancestral spirit world, humans as we know them today sort of came into existence and replaced them.

Q: Can you talk about the organisation of the Djungguwan ceremony in 1966?

Nicolas: There'd been a death in 1965 and one of the brothers of the dead man had approached his maternal uncle, who was a senior ritual figure, to ask him if he would put on this ceremony, which he was the holder of on behalf of the dead man, and in particular to circumcise his son as a sort of social beginning of a social replacement of the dead man. And he said yes. This man, the man who held the ceremony, was called Mawalan and his grandfather had obtained rights to perform this ceremony from people in the Milingimbi area or south of Milingimbi, which is several hundred kilometres to the west of Yirrkala. And it was because of that, that Mawalan invited the senior person from the Milingimbi area who was associated with the Djungguwan there to come across and to participate in the holding of the ceremony at Yirrkala. And basically the whole ceremony was organised and controlled by Mawalan. Of course he had the assistance of many other people but he was the person who knew all the songs, knew how things should be done, the layout of the ground, the sequence of events and all that sort of thing.

Q: Is there a part of the ceremony that included teaching and instruction to pass on knowledge about how to dance etc?

Nicolas: Yolngu people don't go in for a lot of didactic teaching in the way that we go in for. They do it much more on the basis of allowing people to observe and participate. So it's very much showing people something and making them, bringing them to be present and occasionally giving them an odd word or two to sort of say, well this does represent such-and-such an animal from such-and-such a place. But there's no extended didactic teaching. People just pick that up slowly themselves by putting bits of information together, by using what they see in the dances and on the ground and putting it together with what they hear people talking about, older men, and what sense they can make of the songs that they hear. So yes the young boys were shown the ground and they were told a few things about it. But very, very sketchy really. There was only one series of dances which were actually sort of didactic – a dog dance – and I don't really know why that was. So the boys being circumcised were quite young. I think they were six or eight and then a year or two later if the ceremony's held again when they're ten or 12 you see they see it again and they're allowed to see more of it and so they start to cumulatively build up their knowledge of the ceremony. And over in the past before we disrupted things it would be sort of six or eight times somebody would have had to participate in the ceremony before they became really knowledgeable. And then by the time they're in their 40s then they would play a leading role in helping organise and stage it and would be one of the group of people who memorised the songs and, you know,

keep them alive. Because many of these ceremonies have as many as three or four hundred verses associated with them and it's all done by memory. And again there's no formal teaching in the sense that people sit down and say, all right we're going to learn verses one to five, because it's not really a sort of formulaic as that. It's only by continuously participating and singing them that people remember the verses.

Q: Can you explain social replacement?

Nicolas: Well, if you lose an adult man in the prime of life that leaves a big gap and it's important that, if his family is going to continue, his clan group's going to continue, young boys have to be made into men. Young boys don't grow into adulthood. They can age into adulthood but they don't become men naturally. They have to be made men by being circumcised and going through initiation rite. And so sometimes you can see men in their 40s who've come from somewhere else and are not circumcised being referred to as a boy in the context of ceremonial things. So this ceremony was initiating that replacement by setting the son of the man on the path to becoming like his father over the next 30 years.

Q: Can you talk about the filming of the ceremony and over what period of time?

Nicolas: Again, the initial problem was exactly that: to find out when the ceremony was going to be held and to be there on time. Because, as you well know, you can't get a film crew – and our film crew was three people: it was myself, a soundperson and the film director who was also the cameraman – you can't get them to somewhere like Yirrkala at the drop of a hat and also you can't really keep them there for months and months waiting. Now most of these Aboriginal ceremonies go on for a very long period and this Djungguwan started in September–October 1965 and we weren't actually there filming till the beginning of May 1966 and we were really just filming the climax to the ceremony and prior to our coming people met on the ground and sang for an hour or two several times a week and in that period they also created the ceremonial ground, which stretches over probably five or six hundred metres.

There's sort of the bit in the camp and then there's a path which leads off to a thicket and then the other side of the thicket outside of the view of the general public was the sacred ground. So all of the elements of the public domain and the path which was shaped in particular ways to represent the journey and places visited by the Two Sisters when they walked north towards the Arnhem Land coast. And the shade on the men's ground, the hut on the men's ground and various other things, all had to be built and so those were the sorts of things that were going on in the six or seven months before we arrived.

Now there were two people at the mission who were very helpful to us. One was a research linguist who I was in touch with and who was in touch with the Aboriginal people every day. So he was able to let me know what they were thinking and when they were thinking about holding the final parts of the ceremony, and there also happened to be a patrol officer there who had been a TV cameraman in his first life and he had a caravan and his job was fairly diffuse at that stage, you know. It was to get to know people, find out what they were interested in doing and build up relationships with people in that area. And so he had a lot of free time to assist us and he also had a four-wheel drive truck so it meant that we didn't have to get one of those out by barge and those sorts of things. So we were quite flexible and between the patrol officer, Bill Gray and the research student we were quite well informed and they liaised with Mawalan about when he intended to finalise the ceremony, and I was able to manipulate. There's a bit even before he got there because he was very keen to get the leader from Milingimbi there and so I'd said I'd pay for it, for the airfare, and in those days people had very little money, they wouldn't have found it easy to get the airfare, and I sort of delayed that by a couple of weeks until it suited us to get that.

But apart from that, I checked through my notes the other day, I think we only sort of 'staged', if you like, four sequences. The first was the very initial one when we started filming which wasn't so much staged but Mawalan, for the benefit of the film, is renewing leaves on the shade, the men's shade. And he for our benefit really addresses the camera and says, we're now reaching the final stages of the ceremony. That was one thing. We did actually stage what happened on many days and that was the three boys, or the three main boys who were going to be circumcised, walking from the camp down into the men's ground. Because we

wanted to get all the features that were relevant to the film so we asked them to do that outside the ceremony or after one of the day ceremonies, holding part of the ceremony. And the very final event was staged for us, which was placing the sacred object in its hiding place. But apart from that, no, we just tagged along and it was my job to try and find out what was going on and people get a bit irritated by saying, well what's going to happen next and what is going on. So sometimes we were a little bit behind.

But after a while we got the sort of pattern of what was going to happen. We didn't always know exactly what was going to happen despite my best efforts and so we were nearly always in the right place. There were very few things [we missed]. One of the few things we missed which would have been good to get was when men exchanged firesticks with their mothers-in-law. Normally people avoid their mothers-in-law, they don't look at them or come very close to them, but in this, the mothers-in-law and the sons-in-law dance up to each other back to back and the mothers-in-law hand a firestick to their son-in-law which symbolises the daughter which they've given to the son-in-law.

Q: What did the Yolngu think about what you were doing?

Nicolas: I can only speculate about that because I don't know and I didn't ask just like that. But I don't think they... They certainly weren't surprised in our interest because Europeans have always been interested in their ceremonies and in their paintings and in their songs. And they're very embracing of outsiders really, Aboriginal people. They're very people-oriented people and they're quite happy to have you along really. So they were very happy. I think in some ways filming it may have magnified the event a bit for them too. But I don't really know what the full range of motivations were for allowing us to film.

Q: Can you talk about why you were against staged filming for the ceremony?

Nicolas: Yes, well it goes back to we were filming this not to make a film but as anthropologists making a record film of a ceremony. And so we wanted to get the action as it would occur as if we weren't there. Well, of course I mean our very presence did affect things to some extent. But we wanted to minimally interfere and for that reason we didn't stage things and if we missed something that was just tough, that was part of it. I took notes about it but we didn't... By asking people to stage things again then you start to interfere in the whole thing and you break the emotional and psychological spell.

There was one way we did interfere in the whole thing, which is absurd and I think in retrospect and I actually wasn't very keen on it at the time and got less and less keen as Roger and I worked together more and more. The institute gave us instructions that we were to make the ceremony as traditional as possible. We were to film the ceremony in as traditional way as possible and to encourage Aboriginal people to hold it in as traditional way as possible. Well, of course, before Europeans came, which was about 40 years before we arrived there, before we made the film, everybody went naked. Of course, they have all been wearing clothes for the 40 years since Europeans arrived. But it had been very much a tradition at that time for people to wear a kind of loincloth and the institute had asked us if we'd get everybody to wear red loincloths. And as you have noticed they mainly are in red loincloths right and I think this was really when you come down to it largely an aesthetic decision. It was seen as a decision to encourage people to be more traditional. That is, loincloths were more traditional than shorts, although less traditional than it was 40 years beforehand when they were naked. But it's really absurd because it was an unnecessary interference and in a sense in some way distorted the event unnecessarily. But of course I think people feel happier about seeing them in loincloths than shorts.

Q: Can you talk about what you left in and out of the final cut of the film?

Nicolas: Well after the film had been processed I wrote a detailed shot list for every shot and wrote notes for Roger the cameraman and director to work with and the editor as well. And of course as I mentioned before he, Roger Sandall, has a degree in anthropology as well, so he was peculiarly well suited for this kind of thing. And in the archive version we just really put in everything that was useable and informative and things. So it was basically everything. In the short version that was really largely Roger made the decisions. I don't think it was particularly



difficult about what to put in and what to leave out. I mean obviously there were decisions about editing and how it was going to flow. But in terms of the key events and things that had to be in there, it was really very straightforward...I wrote the notes for the narration and then Roger rewrote them for the person who made it. So I actually had rather little to do with the final form of the film. In fact I was off in the field finding other ceremonies to film and doing other anthropological work.

Q: Why was the film restricted and what do you think about that?

Nicolas: The film's restricted because Aboriginal people wanted it restricted and they wanted it restricted because restricted knowledge is very important in Aboriginal ceremonies and is central to their system of age grading. So in fact in some ways knowledge is the main property that Aboriginal people have and they're guarded very carefully. So parts of the ceremony are held in public and parts are held in private and even those bits – and they're only for males the private bits – but even the bits that are private are graduated by age and by the number of times people have seen the ceremonies. So that the young boys who are aged six or eight who are being circumcised just were brought down and saw the ground, the men's ground, and then were taken away. They didn't see any of the major men's dances, they didn't see any of the things that were made, they didn't see where the men sat or any of those things and in order to preserve this secrecy one has to restrict the distribution of the film. If the film were freely available on television or as a documentary that can be circulated around it could be shown in the community and cause great upset.

And that has happened from time to time that films that were shot in the '60s, for instance, particularly in central Australia but also in Oenpelli area showing a lot of secret, restricted dancing and activity, were circulated inadvertently by the National Library. And each of these communities used to have a Friday or Saturday night film showing and the films came from the National Library which were put together, generally a B-grade feature film and a cowboys-and-Indians or something like that and a couple of short documentaries. And then these would travel from one remote community to a next and be passed on and each Friday or Saturday evening the whole community would gather to see these films. Well, obviously the people in the National Library at that time were much less knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture and sensitivities than they are now and they obviously thought it would be interesting for Aboriginals to see themselves on film. So they put some of the films made by David Attenborough were some of the culprits which caused enormous trouble into the package. And they were shown and, you know, people put their hands in front of the lenses and the whole when these restricted elements came on the screen and there was complete uproar.

So when I negotiated on behalf of the institute with the Aboriginal people about making the film, the Yolngu people they were quite well aware about anthropology. They'd worked with a number of anthropologists. They knew they were interested in ceremonies and symbolism, and the understanding was that the films would only be used in universities for teaching and they wouldn't be shown in cinemas or on television. And there was no difficulty about that in the '60s, and in the '60s Northern Australia was miles away from the rest of us in settled Australia and Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land very rarely ever came down to Sydney or Melbourne and what was circulating in Sydney and Melbourne was really of absolutely no concern to them. But in the late '60s with the rise of Indigenous rights and black power and things like that, the issue of showing these restricted films which had restricted components in them became a political issue taken up by urban Aboriginal people on behalf of the Aboriginal people in the north. And it was as a result of that by the mid 1970s all of the films of ceremonies that had been made by the institute of restricted men's ceremonies came to be completely restricted and not shown at all.

Prior to that between about '67 and '73 they'd been used in many university departments for teaching. But now they're not used in any and if anybody wants to see them they have to go to the communities where the film was made. They have copies of them and they can negotiate with them. And I should just say about the secrets, it's not that anything outrageous is going on in the secret side. It's just the nature of secrecy creates insiders and outsiders and by having restricted knowledge you make those who are outside interested in being insiders and it provides a structure of motivation and a power relationship between those people who have the knowledge and see their status as enhanced by having that knowledge and those

people who would like to have their status enhanced by coming to share that knowledge. So it creates power structure, that's really what secrecy is about, one of the key things.

Q: My experience of the secret stuff is a bit like the boys' club.

Nicolas: Yeah it is. I think that's the nature of secrecy everywhere, you know, that it creates these two classes of people and motivations and power relations.

Q: Did you take the film back to Yirrkala to show them and if so what was the Yolngu response?

Nicolas: No, I never did take the film back to Yirrkala. All I know about it is that I did witness some people from Yirrkala seeing it in Sydney, I think it was, a couple. But I know that subsequently, several years later, Ian Dunlop took it back to Yirrkala where most people hadn't seen it and it had enormous impact. And I know he was struck by the impact that it had and reported that back to us.

Q: Can you talk about the value of the film as a historical record for anthropology and for Yolngu?

Nicolas: I think the value of films generally for anthropologists, films of ceremonies, is that they provide a much more richly textured record of what are enormously complex events. Much more richly textured than the normal way that anthropologists record them which is with a few photographs and notes and sometimes a tape-recording. But with the film it integrates song, dance, situation, people's distribution of space, all of those things that are integrated into a complete coherent performance. And that contributes enormously to the texture of the event and adds a whole range of information that tends to drop out of the kind of records that anthropologists make. That is the spacing and proxemic behaviour, the kinaesthetic behaviour, the kind of way people dance, the particular movements they do, the linguistic and paralinguistic features like tones of voice and when things are loud and when they're quiet and when people are whispering and when they're shouting and those sorts of things. All of those things get integrated and greatly enhance and enrich what's going on. And of course because film captures everything that's in front of the lens they're very dense in information at one level. But of course it's always information that needs interpretation and it doesn't just speak for itself, which is obvious to anybody who looks at the film and knows nothing about Yolngu culture that you need exegesis to explain what's going on. So I think they're marvellous and because they're ceremonies that were being held at the time and because they're quite well documented and because so much is known about Yolngu culture, they're amazingly important documents because they enrich our understanding and provide a depth to it.

Specifically about the 1966 Djungguwan, and I mean it's like any historical record as time goes by it sort of gains an enhanced value because it's got a lot of people who are no longer alive. And of course the people who we were filming, the older people, were all people who'd grown up beyond the frontier really, who'd grown up in a completely independent existence where they'd been fighting each other and killing each other and going about their business really completely independent of the state.

Because they didn't settle down really till the Second World War and the outside world only started to impinge on them in a really major way in the 1930s when some of the people from this region killed five Japanese and three Europeans. And that was going to lead to a punitive expedition. It didn't but instead they sent two expeditions, a missionary expedition went through there to try and find out who did it and in fact take the people who did some of the killings to Darwin. And then an anthropologist, Donald Thomson, who came along with a brief to find out why there'd been conflict and to tell people not to kill Japanese and other people. Ironically of course, Donald Thomson, the anthropologist, was sent back in 1942 to tell them it was open season on Japanese again after they'd been told in 1935 that they weren't to kill them. And he set up a coastwatching force in northeast Arnhem Land and base on Caledon Bay to which Aboriginal people who were just living in the bush were to hotfoot it from wherever they were to Caledon Bay where there was a radio post if they saw Japanese landing in order to inform the forces around Katherine so that they could deal with it.

Q: Do you think the 1966 film has enhanced historical value?

Nicolas: Not necessarily. I mean I think maybe for those older people, maybe the ceremony had more meaning for them in the sense that it was more directly continuous with their own unencumbered world. But even for the people who were associated with the Djungguwan that Ian Dunlop filmed in 1976, I mean there's a history of holding the Djungguwans and in the settlement in the mission context, and so for them that's always how it's been you know, and it's the world they know. So I think if they privilege it at all, and I don't know that they do, it would be because there was some very old people there and people who are regarded as great ceremonial leaders like Mawalan and people like that. But again it would be an empirical matter to ask and find out what they felt about it and I haven't done that.

Q: Is there a problem with the film documents in that they are fossilising the ceremony?

Nicolas: I don't agree with that actually because firstly for a ceremony to be effective it's got to do real work, you know. It's got to be fired up by real emotions, grief, the desire to make your boy into a man, the desire to further the religious education of some, of your son by putting him through the age grades, all of those sorts of things. And if it's fired up by these real emotions it also has to be organised in the real world with people that you're friendly and people who you're not so friendly with and you've got shortage of resource and/or you've got problems of organisation. So each ceremony is different. The general format is known, but the actual way any particular ceremony works out – just like say if one's holding a birthday party that there are some people who can't come who would very much like to come because they've got whooping cough, or the shop where you went to buy sparklers has run out of them so you can't have sparklers, whatever it is – and it's exactly the same with the ceremony – that the contingencies of staging it are always different.

So I don't think there's anything [to that proposition]. And the other kind of thing we mustn't be deceived by film as such. These ceremonies many of them go on for five, six, seven months, you know. Not continuously 24 hours a day but people may meet two or three times a week to sing, to prepare artefacts, to make the ground, and what you see in the film is an hour and a half, right. It might be ten of 400 songs. It might be again ten of 50 dances. It's just tiny moments and just the tricks of editing and continuity even sometimes in a way deceive Aboriginal people now who weren't film literate. I think probably when they first saw films of ceremonies they were appalled, you know. As soon as they got one verse they were expecting all the other verses to follow and lo and behold there's a cut and something completely discontinuous appears only chronologically subsequent but not continuous in the real thing. So there's a misplaced belief that films can help people reconstitute ceremonies and again that's a complete misunderstanding of the nature of film and the nature of ceremony. They might stimulate people to think about it and a ceremony and to draw on their cultural resources to hold it again if there was the emotional energy and reasons for doing it.

But I don't think it fossilises them, no, and I think it's really only a very impoverished record of events which are hugely complex and an enormous amount of what the ritual does takes place outside any ritual arena, you know. It takes place at night when people are talking at home or when people are negotiating away from the ritual ground and all the sorts of things that go on in the penumbra of the ceremony are just as important as those that are going on in the ceremony itself.

## SECTION 6 – BIOGRAPHIES

This section provides biographies of some of the key people involved in the making of *Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land*.

### 6.1 TREVOR GRAHAM

Writer/Director

Trevor Graham has worked as a writer, producer and director of documentary in the Australian industry for more than 20 years. He is the co-founder of Yarra Bank Films Pty Ltd, a Sydney-based production company established in 1983.

Trevor's documentaries have been screened and broadcast nationally and internationally. He has made co-productions and commissioned works for Channel 4 and the BBC (Britain), WGBH (America), ARTE (France/Germany), AVRO (Netherlands), SBS and ABC TV (Australia).

He has won two Australian Film Institute (AFI) Awards for Best Documentary and numerous other national and international film and television awards. In 1997, *Mabo—Life of an Island Man* won the AFI Award, was nominated for a Logie and won both the prestigious NSW Premier's History Award and the NSW Premier's Award for Best Screenplay.

In 1997 he ventured into writing and directing new media. From 1997 to 2000 he co-wrote and directed the encyclopedic documentary *Mabo—The Native Title Revolution* CD-Rom, which was nominated for a British Academy Award (BAFTA) in 2001.

In 2002 he produced, co-directed, co-wrote and shot one of Australia's first online documentaries for ABC online, *Homeless—Six Cities, Six Stories, Six Lives* ([www.abc.net.au/homeless](http://www.abc.net.au/homeless)), financed by the Australian Film Commission. *Homeless* was nominated for a Webby Award, an 'online Oscar' by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences.

Trevor Graham was the inaugural Head of Documentary at the Australian Film Television and Radio School in Sydney from 1997 to 2002. He has lectured and presented screenings on documentary throughout Asia, Canada, the USA and Australia.

Throughout 2002 and 2003, he directed and shot *Lonely Boy Richard* for Film Australia and ABC-TV. The project was nominated for an AFI Best Documentary Award in 2004. For ten months he lived and worked with the Yolngu, the Indigenous people of northeast Arnhem Land. Trevor has made many major documentary productions with indigenous people and communities and has a long-standing interest in Pacific Island history, culture and society. In 2004 he wrote and directed *Hula Girls—Imaging Paradise*, a co-production for SBS-TV and two European broadcasters, filmed in Hawaii, Tahiti, the USA and Europe.

Among his other documentary credits are: *Red Matildas*, *Painting the Town* (AFI Best Documentary Award 1987), *Land Bilong Islanders*, *Dancing in the Moonlight*, *Paper Trail*, *Sugar Slaves*, *Aeroplane Dance*, *Mystique of the Pearl*, *Tosca—A Tale of Love and Torture*, *From Little Things Big Things Grow*, *Small Island Big Fight*, *The Pilot's Funeral*, *Keen As Mustard* and *Before Death Us Do Part*.

### 6.2 DENISE HASLEM

Producer/Editor

Denise Haslem ASE is a producer and editor with over 25 years experience in the film and television industry. She produced and edited the award-winning *Mabo—Life of an Island Man*, produced *Doc—A Portrait of Herbert Vere Evatt* and *A Calcutta Christmas* and co-produced *Risky Business* and *Steel City*.

In 2002 she spent eight months in Yirrkala, northeast Arnhem Land, producing and editing

*Lonely Boy Richard*. In 2004 she produced and edited the second documentary shot during that time in Arnhem Land, *The Pilot's Funeral*. *Ceremony–The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* is the third project, a DVD set that includes a new feature-length documentary *Djungguwan–Speaking to the Future* and six mini-documentaries.

Her editing credits include many award-winning programs including *Custody*, *My Life Without Steve*, *Canto a la Vida*, *The Night Belongs to the Novelist*, *Six Pack*, *Admission Impossible*, *Australia Daze*, *For All the World to See*, *The Opposite Sex*, *Aeroplane Dance*, *Mystique of the Pearl*, *Our Park*, *Hatred*, *Tosca–A Tale of Love and Torture*, *Minymaku Way* and *Hula Girls*.

In 2002 she produced, directed and edited *Film Australia's Outback* DVD and in 2005 she produced and edited Lee Whitmore's animation *The Safe House*, also for Film Australia.

In 1998–99 she was the President of Australian Screen Editors (ASE), the guild devoted to protecting, promoting and improving the role of the editor, and in 2002 she was a recipient of an inaugural ASE accreditation.

### 6.3 WANYUBI MARIKA

Consultant

Dhuwa moiety

My father Milirrpum was, in my lifetime, the 'third' elder or clan leader of the Rirratjingu mala, after Mawalan #1 and Mathaman. After the deaths of Mawalan, the original plaintiff in the country's first land rights case and of Mathaman it was my father who represented his people in Darwin's Supreme Court, *Milirrpum v Nabalco*. His spiritual birthplace was in Rarrkala, up near the Wessell Island group with the Bararrlu clan Millurr (birthplace). Milirrpum was a strong law man of his people, a wise man, a very good turtle hunter and fisherman who fed a lot of people in the old Mission days and a good father to immediate family and to the community. Milirrpum died in 1983, my mother the Rev Liyapadiny Marika (née Gumana – Gawirrin's sister) dying in 1998.

I left Nhulunbuy High School in 1983 completing fourth year. I continued tertiary studies in '84–'85 and worked in community areas of housing and roads. Part of 1985 was spent at my mother's homeland of Gangan as a training teacher at primary level. In 1988 I spent six months down south performing traditional dance around schools in different states with Ralph Nicholls, son of Sir Douglas who was an urban Yolngu who was using a lot of Arnhem Land boys and their talent in bringing them down and performing for many years. So I happen to be one of them. In 1989 I found work as a plant operator with YBE (Yolngu Business Enterprises), driving bulldozers, graders and trucks etc. In 1990 I moved into the environmental section to do rehab work, planting seed and growing trees at the mine site, cutting lawn in the town area for the big bosses in Nabalco, and driving the garbage truck around the mining town Nhulunbuy.

In 1991 I did some general accounting and clerical work at the YBE office which included paperwork re contracts given to YBE by Nabalco. I also took readings at the mining plant for caustic leaks and temperature. I have studied through TAFE and attained an Associate Diploma of Community Management. 1995 saw me elected as a community high-level leader as Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association Council Chairman for the following three years. In 1998 I moved to the homeland side to establish a new homeland with my mother at Yinimala 17 km west of Banyala and 200 km south of Yirrkala. Currently I am a councillor for Laynhapuy Homelands Council.

My fathers taught me how and what I can paint. It was for Buku-Larrnggay Mulka's Saltwater bark painting project that first had me painting publicly on a serious level. Living much of my time today at Baniyala (my wife's country whose father is Wakuthi). I paint amongst the Madarrpa clan artists as well as my own when living at Yirrkala. I am the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Artist Committee Chairperson.

## Exhibitions

1999–2001	Saltwater–Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country, A national tour: Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra ACT; John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth, WA; National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, NSW; Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, Vic; Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT; Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Qld
2000	State of My Country–A Survey of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney NSW
2001	New From Old–Gawirrin, Yanggarriny, Dula, Wanyubi, Wukun, Annandale Galleries, Annandale, Sydney, NSW
2002	Sydney Opera House Larrakitj installation
2003	Buwayak, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, NSW
2003	Wukidi installation, Supreme Court, Darwin, NT
2003	<abstractions>, Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, ACT
2004	Wanyubi Marika first solo show, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, NSW
2005	Telstra NATSIAA
2005	Yakumirri Raft Artspace (exhibition purchased by the Holmes a Court collection)

## Collections Held

National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW  
 Artbank, Sydney, NSW  
 Sydney Opera House, Sydney, NSW  
 Kerry Stokes Collection  
 Supreme Court NT  
 Holmes a Court Collection  
 Kerry Packer Collection

## Bibliography

*Saltwater–Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre in association with Jennifer Isaacs Publishing, Neutral Bay, NSW, 1999.

### 6.4 WUKUN DENNIS WANAMBI

Consultant

Dhuwa moiety

Father is Mithili who died before he was able to learn from him to any great degree. Began painting as a result of the Saltwater project. His arm of the Marrakulu clan is responsible for saltwater imagery which had not been painted intensively since his father's death. His caretakers or djunggay (principally Yanggarriny Wunungmurra decd – winner First Prize 1997) transferred their knowledge of these designs so that the title to saltwater could be asserted. (Some of these designs were outside even his father's repertoire.) His first bark for this project won the Best Bark at the 1998 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards – NATSIAA.

He is an active community member in recreation and health projects and supports a large family.

After winning Best Bark Prize (1998) and being Highly Commended in 3D category (2003) in the Telstra Award he has been included in prestigious collections and had his first solo show in 2004. The success of that show led to him being invited to exhibit with Bill Nuttall's prestigious Niagara Gallery in Melbourne. Wukun has been involved heavily in all the major communal projects of the 2000s such as the Sydney Opera House commission, National Museum opening, Wukidi ceremony and the films *Lonely Boy Richard*, *The Pilot's Funeral* and *Dhakiyarr vs the King*.

## Exhibitions

1998	15th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA)
1998–2001	Saltwater–Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country, A national tour: Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra ACT; John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth, WA; National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, NSW; Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, Vic; Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT; Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Qld
2001	18th NATSIAA, Museum and Art Galleries of the NT, Darwin (MAGNT)
2001	New From Old–Gawirrin, Yanggarriny, Dula, Wanyubi, Wukun, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, NSW
2002	19th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards, Museum and Art Galleries of the NT, Darwin
2003	Brighton International Art Festival, UK
2003	Larrakitj, Rebecca Hossack Gallery, UK
2003	20th NATSIAA MAGNT
2004	Wukun Wanambi (first solo show), Raft 2 Darwin
2005	Wukun Wanambi, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
2005	Yakumirri Raft Artspace (exhibition purchased by the Holmes a Court collection)
2005	22nd NATSIAA MAGNT

## Collections Held

Museum and Art Galleries of the NT, Darwin  
 Australian National Maritime Museum  
 Sydney Opera House, NSW  
 Harland Collection  
 Kerry Stokes Collection  
 NT Supreme Court  
 South Australian Art Gallery  
 National Gallery of Australia  
 Art Gallery of NSW  
 Holmes a Court Collection  
 Artbank

## Awards

Best Bark, NATSIAA 1998  
 Highly Commended (3D Work), NATSIAA 2003

## Bibliography

*Saltwater–Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre in association with Jennifer Isaacs Publishing, Neutral Bay, NSW, 1999.

Artbank brochure, Australian Government Department of Communications, IT and the Arts, 2005.

## 6.5 PHILIPPA DEVESON

Writer/Consultant

Philippa Deveson is currently working as a media project officer with the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University. She has recently finished a multi-media biography on CD-ROM of the renowned Yolngu artist, Narritjin Maymuru.

From 1981 to 1984, she worked with Ian Dunlop on *The Yirrkala Film Project*, focusing on the Yolngu Aboriginal community of northeast Arnhem Land. From 1994 to 1996, she was editor/writer for an extension of the project, funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Film Australia. She and Ian Dunlop shared the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Prize in 1996 for the film *Conversations with Dundiway Wanambi*. She received an AIATSIS Research Grant in 1997 to produce background notes and documentation for the Yirrkala films.

In 1998, she was appointed as a project coordinator, preparing exhibition proposals for the National Museum of Australia and in 1999 Philippa and Howard Morphy co-curated Yingapungapu, one of the opening exhibitions at the National Museum of Australia.

## 6.6 IAN DUNLOP

Writer/Director/Consultant

Ian was born in London, United Kingdom, in 1927 and settled in Australia in 1948.

He joined the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit (now Film Australia) in 1956, working on general documentaries in Australia and Papua New Guinea until 1965. Since 1965 he has specialised in ethnographic filmmaking. Ian left the staff of Film Australia in 1987 but continued to work there in a freelance capacity completing unfinished projects. He is now working with other filmmakers on new projects associated with his work.

In 1965 Ian proposed and undertook an ethnographic film project on the daily life and technology of an Aboriginal family still living a traditional hunter-gatherer life in the Western Desert (Gibson Desert) of Australia. From this and a similar project in 1967 he made a series of 19 films under the general title *People of the Australian Western Desert* and the more general film *Desert People*.

In 1967 he compiled and presented a 'Retrospective Review of Australian Ethnographic Film 1901–1967' at the Festival dei Popoli, Florence. This was followed by a tour of Europe with the retrospective and in 1968 of North America.

In 1969 he collaborated with French anthropologist Dr Maurice Godelier to film the complex initiation ceremonies of the Baruya of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea from which was made a seven-and-a-half hour record, divided into nine films, under the title *Towards Baruya Manhood*.

In 1979 Ian was invited by the Baruya to return, with Maurice Godelier, to film further ceremonies. In 1992 he completed a 13-and-a-half-hour record film *Baruya Muka Archival*, together with several volumes of accompanying documentation and translation.

In 1970 Ian began a long-term film project with the Yolngu of Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land, at the top end of Australia's Northern Territory. Filming continued until 1982 and editing finished in 1996. Twenty-two films have been produced under the general title, *The Yirrkala Film Project*. These films deal with traditional Aboriginal communities in change, their strong spiritual life and their relationship to the land.

Retrospectives of Ian's work have been held in Tokyo (1982), the Festival dei Popoli, Florence (1983) and the Beeld voor Beeld Festival of Visual Anthropology, Amsterdam (2001). He has given many guest screenings of films in Australia, Europe, USA and Asia and his films have received many awards. Personal awards include the Australian Film Institute's Raymond Longford Award (1968); Festival dei Popoli's Giampaolo Paoli Award (1983) and the Medal of the Order of Australia (1986). He was elected an Honourary Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute (UK) in 1991.

## 6.7 PROFESSOR HOWARD MORPHY

Consultant/Writer

Professor Howard Morphy BSc, MPhil London, PhD ANU, FASSA FAHA is Director of the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University. He was previously Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University and before that Professor of Anthropology at University College London. He was a convener of the 1996–67 Linacre Lectures on the Environment. He has conducted fieldwork in Arnhem Land, Northern Australia, and in the Roper Valley. He is at present researching the life and art of Narritjin Maymuru.



He has collaborated on many films of Arnhem Land ceremonial performance with Ian Dunlop of Film Australia. He has published widely in the anthropology of art, aesthetics, performance, museum anthropology, visual anthropology and religion. As Curator of Anthropology at the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford he organised a number of exhibitions including: *Australia in Oxford*, *Basketmakers–Form and Meaning in Native American Basketry* and *In Place Out of Time* (with David Elliot) (MOMA, Oxford). He was the curator, with Philippa Deveson, of the exhibition *Yingapungapu* for the opening of the Museum of Australia in Canberra. He was editorial advisor for the Aboriginal section of *The Dictionary of Art*.

He was the Malinowski lecturer in 1993, Beatrice Blackwood lecturer in 1996, the inaugural Forge lecturer, 1998 and the 1999 Fagg lecture at the British Museum. He was awarded the JG Crawford medal of the Australian National University, the JB Donne prize for the anthropology of art (1988), and has twice been awarded the Stanner Prize of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (1985, 1992). His books include *Ancestral Connections–Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge* (1991), University of Chicago Press; *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (with Marcus Banks, 1997), Yale University Press; and *Aboriginal Art* (1998), Phaidon. His most recent publication is a CD-ROM *The Art of Narritjin Maymuru*, ANU E-Press (with Pip Deveson and Katie Hayne).

### Selected Publications

*Journey to the Crocodile's Nest–An Accompanying Monograph to the Film Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1984.

'The Anthropology of Art' in Tim Ingold (ed), *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp 648–685.

'The Interpretation of Ritual–Reflections From Film on Anthropological Method' in *Man*, Vol 29 No 1, 1994, pp 117–146 [text of Malinowski Memorial Lecture].

'Landscape and the Reproduction of Yolngu Society' in E Hirsch & M O'Hanlon (eds), *The Anthropology of Landscape–Between Place and Space*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, pp 184–209.

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Edited with Marcus Banks, *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997.

*Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998.

Edited with Margo Smith Boles, *Art from the Land*, University of Virginia Museum of Modern Art, Charlottesville, 1999.

Edited with Kate Flint, *Culture, Landscape and the Environment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

Edited with Max Charlesworth & Françoise Dussart, *Aboriginal Religions in Australia–An Anthology of Recent Readings*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005.

Edited with Morgan Perkins, *Anthropology of Art–A Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2005.

'Seeing Indigenous Australian Art' in Mariet Westerman (ed), *Anthropologies of Art*, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 2005.

## SECTION 7 – REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

### 7.1 BOOKS

#### Culture

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RM Berndt, *Kunapipi*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951.

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, *Saltwater–Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre/Jennifer Isaacs Publishing, Neutral Bay, 1999.

W Caruana & N Lendon (eds), *The Painters of the Wagilag Sisters Story 1937–1997*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1997.

WH Edwards, *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies*, Social Science Press, Australia, 1989.

S Harris, *Culture and Learning–Tradition and Education in North-East Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986.

Gillian Hutcherson, *Djalkiri Wanga, The Land is My Foundation–50 Years of Aboriginal Art from Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land*, University of Western Australia, Berndt Museum of Anthropology, Occasional Paper No 4, 1995.

Jennifer Isaacs, *Wandjuk Marika–Life Story*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1995.

I Keen, 'Yolngu Sand Sculptures in Context' in PJ Ucko (ed), *Form in Indigenous Art*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977.

Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998.

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Howard Morphy, *Journey to the Crocodile's Nest–An Accompanying Monograph to the Film Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1984.

Janice Reid, *Sorcerers and Healing Spirits–Continuity and Change in an Aboriginal Medical System*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1983.

WL Warner, *A Black Civilization–A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, Peter Smith, Gloucester, 1969.

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#### Land, Politics and History

Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails–Recreating Song Lines–The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Communities*, Spinifex, North Melbourne, 2002.

Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, *Social Impact of Uranium Mining on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory*, Report to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, AGPS, Canberra, 1980.

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M Dewar, *The 'Black War' in Arnhem Land—Missionaries and the Yolngu 1908–1940*, Australian National University North Australia Research Unit, Darwin, 1995.

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*Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia*, (Gove Land Rights Case), 1971, 17 Federal Law Reports, 141.

Rosemary Neill, *White Out—How Politics is Killing Black Australia*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 2002.

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Nancy M Williams, 'Local Autonomy and the Viability of Community Justice Mechanisms' in Kayleen M. Hazlehurst (ed), *Ivory Scales*, New South Wales University Press in association with the Australian Institute of Criminology, Kensington, 1987, pp 227–240.

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C Watson, J Fleming & K Alexander, *A Survey of Drug Use Patterns in Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities 1986–1987*, Darwin, NT Department of Health and Community Services, 1988.

### Cinematic Record

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Ian Bryson, *Bringing to Light—A History of Ethnographic Filmmaking at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2002.

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### Documentaries

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Ian Dunlop (director), *The Yirrkala Film Project*, Film Australia, Sydney, 1970–1996.

Trevor Graham (director), *Aeroplane Dance*, Film Australia, Sydney, 1994.

Trevor Graham (director), *Lonely Boy Richard*, Film Australia, Sydney, 2003.  
Classification: M (adult themes, low-level coarse language)

Rose Hesp (director), *The Pilot's Funeral [Bundurr Mangalili Yolngu Dhupundji]*, Film Australia, Sydney, 2004.

Ned Lander (director), *Jardiwarra—A Warlpiri Fire Ceremony*, part of the series *Blood Brothers*, City Pictures in association with SBS Indigenous Unit, Sydney, 1993.

John Moore (director), *Thomson of Arnhem Land*, Film Australia, Sydney, 2000.

Tom Murray & Allan Collins (directors), *Dhakiyarr vs the King*, Film Australia, Sydney, 2004.

Rob Wellington & Trevor Graham (directors), *Mabo—The Native Title Revolution* CD-Rom, Film Australia, Sydney, 2000.

### Drama

Available through the Australian Children's Television Foundation

Stephen Johnson (director), *Yolngu Boy*, Palace Films, Sydney, 2000.

## 7.3 WEBSITES

### Film Australia

[www.filmaust.com.au](http://www.filmaust.com.au)

The educational [learning@filmaustralia](mailto:learning@filmaustralia) site  
(which links to the *Ceremony* website)  
[www.filmaust.com.au/learning](http://www.filmaust.com.au/learning)

For links to other film industry related sites  
[www.filmaust.com.au/production](http://www.filmaust.com.au/production)

To find out about other Film Australia Indigenous programs  
[www.filmaust.com.au/programs](http://www.filmaust.com.au/programs)

## Community

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Arts Centre in Yirrkala  
[www.aboriginalart.org/buku](http://www.aboriginalart.org/buku)

Nambara Arts  
[www.nambara.com.au](http://www.nambara.com.au)

Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association  
[www.yirrkaladhanbul.nt.gov.au](http://www.yirrkaladhanbul.nt.gov.au)

The Yothu Yindi Foundation  
[www.yyf.telstra.com](http://www.yyf.telstra.com)

## Education and Resources

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies  
[www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au)

Australian National University Centre for Cross-Cultural Research  
[www.anu.edu.au/culture/research](http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/research)

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education  
[www.batchelor.edu.au](http://www.batchelor.edu.au)

Charles Darwin University – Yolngu studies  
[www.ntu.edu.au/yolngustudies](http://www.ntu.edu.au/yolngustudies)

Education Network Australia  
[www.edna.au](http://www.edna.au)

enhanceTV  
[www.enhancetv.com.au](http://www.enhancetv.com.au)

Indigenous Australia  
[www.indigenoustralia.frogandtoad.com.au/index.html](http://www.indigenoustralia.frogandtoad.com.au/index.html)

Indigenous Studies Australia  
[www.dreamtime.net.au/teachers/links.cfm](http://www.dreamtime.net.au/teachers/links.cfm)

## Education and Training

Artists in Schools  
[www.deet.nt.gov.au/education](http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education)

Australian Children's Television Foundation  
[www.actf.com.au](http://www.actf.com.au)

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)  
[www.aftrs.edu.au](http://www.aftrs.edu.au)

Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) and *Metro* magazine  
[www.metromagazine.com.au/metro](http://www.metromagazine.com.au/metro)

Centralian College  
[www.centralian.nt.edu.au](http://www.centralian.nt.edu.au)

CHARTTES – The NT Cultural and Recreational Industry Training Advisory Board.  
[www.charttes.com.au](http://www.charttes.com.au)

Northern Territory University  
[www.cdu.edu.au](http://www.cdu.edu.au)

## Arts and Media

Aboriginal Art Online Pty Ltd  
[www.aboriginalartonline.com](http://www.aboriginalartonline.com)

Aboriginal Memorial in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
(an installation of 200 hollow log coffins from central Arnhem Land)  
[www.nga.gov.au/memorial/index.html](http://www.nga.gov.au/memorial/index.html)

Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA)  
[www.ankaaa.org.au](http://www.ankaaa.org.au)

Australia Council for the Arts – Indigenous Resource Booklet  
[www.ozco.gov.au](http://www.ozco.gov.au)

Australia's Cultural Network  
[www.acn.net.au](http://www.acn.net.au)

Australian Government's Culture and Recreation Portal  
[www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au](http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au)

The Black Book Guide to Indigenous Arts and Media in Australia  
[www.blackbook.afc.gov.au](http://www.blackbook.afc.gov.au)

Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)  
[www.caama.com.au](http://www.caama.com.au)

National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association  
[www.naisda.com.au/id2htm](http://www.naisda.com.au/id2htm)

National Aboriginal Dance Council Australia  
[www.koori.usyd.edu.au/nadca/](http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/nadca/)

Visual Cultures – Indigenous Protocol Guide  
[www.ozco.gov.au/arts\\_resources/publications/visual\\_cultures](http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/visual_cultures)

Yirrkala Pole Artwork  
[www.r-h-g.co.uk](http://www.r-h-g.co.uk)

*Yolngu Boy*  
[www.yolnguboy.com/](http://www.yolnguboy.com/)

## Australian Museums

Australian Museum  
[www.amonline.net.au](http://www.amonline.net.au)

Australian Museums Online  
[www.amol.org.au](http://www.amol.org.au)

Ingarnendi – Material Culture of Aboriginal Australia  
[www.ingarnendi.samuseum.sa.gov.au](http://www.ingarnendi.samuseum.sa.gov.au)

Museums Australia  
[www.museumsaustralia.org.au](http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au)

Museum Victoria  
[www.museum.vic.gov.au](http://www.museum.vic.gov.au)

National Museum of Australia  
[www.nma.gov.au](http://www.nma.gov.au)

Powerhouse Museum  
[www.phm.gov.au](http://www.phm.gov.au)

South Australia Museum Online  
[www.samuseum.sa.gov.au](http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au)

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery  
[www.tmag.tas.gov.au](http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au)

Western Australian Museum  
[www.museum.wa.gov.au](http://www.museum.wa.gov.au)

### **International Museums**

Anthropology Museums on the Web  
[www.nmnh.si.edu/cma/antmus](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/cma/antmus)

British Museum  
[www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

International Council of Museums  
[icom.museum](http://icom.museum)

Museums Around the World  
[icom.museums/vlmp/world](http://icom.museums/vlmp/world)

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (UK)  
[www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)

New Zealand Museums  
[www.nz museums.co.nz](http://www.nz museums.co.nz)

Smithsonian  
[www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)

Art Atlas  
 (address and contact information for more than 4500 international art galleries)  
[www.artatlas.com](http://www.artatlas.com)

### **Copyright and Law**

Arts Law Centre of Australia  
[www.artslaw.com.au](http://www.artslaw.com.au)

Australian Copyright Council  
[www.copyright.org.au](http://www.copyright.org.au)

Australasian Performing Rights Association  
[www.apra.com.au](http://www.apra.com.au)

Communications Law Centre (CLC)  
[www.comslaw.org.au](http://www.comslaw.org.au)

Screenrights – The Audio Visual Copyright Society  
[www.screen.org](http://www.screen.org)



### **Northern Territory Government Arts**

Film and Television Association of the Northern Territory  
[www.fatant.net.au/](http://www.fatant.net.au/)

Northern Territory Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Development  
– Arts and Museums  
[www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/pages/ArtsLinks](http://www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/pages/ArtsLinks)

Northern Territory Film Office  
[www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/pages/ntfo](http://www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/pages/ntfo)

### **History, Law and Politics**

Austlii – Indigenous Law Resources – Timeline: Legal Developments Affecting Indigenous People  
[www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/timeline/1968.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/timeline/1968.html)

Australian Institute of Criminology – Mandatory Sentencing Timeline  
[www.aic.gov.au/library/cinch/subjects/ms-timeline.html](http://www.aic.gov.au/library/cinch/subjects/ms-timeline.html)

Australian Museum Online – Indigenous Australia – Timeline – Contact 1970–2000  
[www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenous/timeline4.cfm](http://www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenous/timeline4.cfm)

Northern Territory Government – Department of Justice  
[www.nt.gov.au/justice](http://www.nt.gov.au/justice)

NSW Alcohol Summit 03 – Indigenous Issues  
[www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/links/Indigenous\\_Issues](http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/links/Indigenous_Issues)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND ORIGINAL SOURCES

### Writings on the Djungguwan

#### Origins of the Djungguwan

With permission of Professor Nicolas Peterson and Wanyubi Marika.

#### The Myth

With permission of Professor Nicolas Peterson and Wanyubi Marika.

#### Wawilak Narratives (A Text by Ian Dunlop)

With permission of Ian Dunlop.

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### Extracts from Journey to the Crocodile's Nest

With permission of Professor Howard Morphy.

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### Manikay (Song Cycle) of the Djungguwan 2002

With permission of Wanyubi Marika, Raymattja Marika, Djuwalpi Marika, Lak Lak Yunupingu Marika.

### Yirrkala Political History

Originally published in *Mabo—The Native Title Revolution* CD-Rom, Film Australia, 2000.

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#### The Yirrkala Bark Petition

With permission of Tim Rowse, Trevor Graham and Film Australia.

#### Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd

With permission of Garth Nettheim and Film Australia.

#### Public Reaction to the Gove Decision

With permission of *The Age* and Film Australia.

## CEREMONY— THE DJUNGGUWAN OF NORTHEAST ARNHEM LAND

Director: Trevor Graham

Writers: Trevor Graham, Philippa Deveson, Professor Howard Morphy and Ian Dunlop

Yolngu Consultants: Wanyubi Marika and Wukun Dennis Wanambi

Producer: Denise Haslem

Executive Producer: Chris Warner

Duration: 360 minutes

Year: 2006

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