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Time & Tide
in the
Crocodile Islands:

Children of the Crocodile Islands

Plate 1 Dham-dham Bay, Milingimbi Island (M 61) Circa Late 1920s

Change and Continuity in Yan-nhaŋu
Marine Identity
Plate 2 Tides of the Crocodile Islands and Arafura Sea
Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the

School of Archaeology and Anthropology
The Australian National University
Canberra Australia
2009

Except where cited in the text, this work is the result of research carried out by the author

Bentley James

M.A Linguistics, Grad Dip Education, Grad Cert Anthroplogy, B.A Media Studies, Cert Horticulture.
Dedication

For my brother

Glenn James

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
e.e cummings
Abstract

*Time and Tide in the Crocodile Islands: Change and Continuity in Yan-nhaŋu Marine Identity.*

This is the first broad ranging ethnography of the Yan-nhaŋu people of the Crocodile Islands and Arafura Sea of Australia’s northeast Arnhem Land. The Yan-nhaŋu are a previously unexamined sociolinguistic group of the Yolŋu people. This thesis depicts Yan-nhaŋu links to their sea country through evidence and anecdote gathered by participation in the everyday practices of island life. The ocean is focal, both as a physical space and as a mental map inscribed with cosmic meaning. In its currents, colours and sounds are the manifestation of ancestral powers at work beneath its surface. A site of engagement and a place of memories, it is fundamental to Yan-nhaŋu identity. Here presented are the social, mythological, ecological and linguistic relations of the Yan-nhaŋu set in the historical and contemporary contexts of the region.

In revealing the enduring features of Yan-nhaŋu distinctiveness within the broader context of Yolŋu culture four themes provide a framework for discussion: similarity and difference, spiritual connection to place, physical connection to place, and the ongoing significance of change and continuity. I explore the topics of Yan-nhaŋu history, cosmology (mythology), social organisation, language, ecological relations and economy of turtle resource exchange. A shared Yolŋu cosmology supports a superordinate mythic and ideational framework articulating the conflicts and competitions of social practice. Distinctive metaphors, rhetoric and ancestral emblems lend coherence to relations of connection and differentiation in the perspectives of Yolŋu kin and groups. For the Yan-nhaŋu the ancestral bequest of the sea is implicated in their every day experience, in relations with kin, and in the historical and contemporary expressions of their identity, in life on their islands – relations that are increasingly played out in the light of the powerfully transformative influences of the colonial settler State. Through a specific focus on the Yan-nhaŋu, this thesis draws attention to the lacuna in Australian research into marine based indigenous societies and their struggle to govern their resources. For the Yan-nhaŋu change and continuities in this struggle can only be understood in relation to the broader history of the Yolŋu, and more recent engagements shaped and constrained by the State.
Acknowledgements

I wish to recognise here the patience and sagacity of those helping me to understand a world which, oft revealed only with guidance, was far more beautiful than before, especially Baymarrwaŋa, Djarrga, Ganyitiŋu, Nyambal, Djaŋ'kawu, Kuwalkmuwyu, Barratawuy, Garramba, Milinditj, Marrayurriny, Mulwanany, Wuluy-wuluy, Marradhupal, Ombu, Yirrinimba, Badambuwa, Dikarr, Djuwarra, Boyman, Matjun, Bunghatuwa, Dayŋatja, Gatja, Garrambaka, Daymirriju, Gatjawula, Bandipandi, Gandawuy and Bordiyalil.

I acknowledge the great intellectual debt I owe to my supervisors Dr Ian Keen, Professor Nicolas Peterson, and Professor Howard Morphy.

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‘Nhala rraku biriyanaararu murrungab, gurrka djulŋi mardaptharraŋu

Mary Djarrga
Yan-nhaŋu orthography

The orthography for Yan-nhaŋu used here follows that applied to Yolŋu languages throughout northeast Arnhem Land established by Beulah Lowe (1957, nd); and Galpagalpa et al (1984: 10).

Table 1 Yan-nhaŋu orthography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>Labial</th>
<th>Apico-dental</th>
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Spelling Rules:

Long vowels (a:, e, o) only occur in the first syllable of a word. This rule includes the second word in a compound word, for example, dja:gaway (caret/guardian), but not in a reduplication as in the construction yolŋu'-yulŋu (people). The sounds b, d, dj, dh, dj, g are always used at the beginning of a word, and after m, n, η, nh, ny, η (nasals), and also after a hyphen, whereas the sounds p, t, tj, th, tj, k are at all times used at the end of a syllable or in the middle of a word and after a' (glottal stop), as described by Galpagalpa et al (1984:10-11). More extensive notes on Yan-nhaŋu constructions can be found in Zorc (1986), James et al (2003), and Bowern (2005)
Time & Tide
in the
Crocodile Islands

Map 1 Crocodile Islands of northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory Australia

Change and Continuity in Yan-nhaŋu Marine Identity
# Table of Contents:

Dedication ........................................................................ IV

**Time and Tide in the Crocodile Islands: Change and Continuity in Yan-nhaŋu Marine Identity.**

Acknowledgements ................................................................ VI
Yan-nhaŋu orthography .................................................. VII

**Table of Contents:** ................................................................ IX
List of Tables .................................................................. XI
List of Maps ................................................................... XII
List of Plates .................................................................. XIII
List of Figures ................................................................ XIII

**Chapter One.**

The Tides and Times of the Yan-nhaŋu ............................................ 1

- People of the Crocodile Islands .............................................. 1
- Yan-nhaŋu: language of the Crocodile Islands ................. 7
- Themes in Yan-nhaŋu ethnography .................................. 10
- Customary marine relations ........................................... 16
- Maritime identity ............................................................... 20
- Methods and analytical perspectives ............................... 26
- Summary of thesis organisation .................................... 28

**Chapter Two.**

History of the Yan-nhaŋu: kin and conflict .................................. 32

- Review of literature on Yan-nhaŋu history ....................... 36
- Timeline ........................................................................ 40
- Brokering the Yolŋu domain, misrecognition and the politics of succession ........................................ 51
- The Milingimbi period ................................................... 55
- The Galiwin'ku period .................................................... 60
- The ALRA period ............................................................ 65
- Conclusion .................................................................... 75

**Chapter Three.**

Yan-nhaŋu social organisation .................................................. 78

- Review of literature on Yolŋu social organisation .......... 80
- Yan-nhaŋu distinctiveness in Yolŋu society ................... 89
- Contrasting Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu kinship organisation and terminology ........................................ 92
- Similarity and difference between Yan-nhaŋu groups ..... 100
- Sociolinguistic variation in Yan-nhaŋu groups .......... 105
- Transformations in Yan-nhaŋu connubial arrangements .... 109
- Conclusion .................................................................... 116

**Chapter Four.**

Yan-nhaŋu religious and ceremonial life ..................................... 118

- Review of literature on Aboriginal religion ................. 122
- The key concepts of Yan-nhaŋu ancestral law ............... 124
- Djaŋ kawu mythology and the Dhuwa Ngarr .................................................. 128
- Two Yan-nhaŋu myths of the Djaŋ kawu .................... 133
- Broad ranging similarity and difference in ancestral beliefs .................................................. 137
- Types of Yan-nhaŋu sorcery ........................................ 146
- Conclusion .................................................................... 156
Chapter Five:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu language identity: transformation and continuity</th>
<th>159</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of literature on Yan-nhaŋu linguistics</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing Yan-nhaŋu within Yolŋu languages</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformations in Yan-nhaŋu languages</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of a mission lingua franca</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity in songs, sites and names</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestral connections, spirit and personal names</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Six:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu knowledge of the marine environment</th>
<th>198</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local knowledge defined</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influences of seasonal cycles on island life</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The seasons of inter-island travel</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories and seasonal availability of marine resources</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customary ecological categories</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time, tides and fish trap technology</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Seven:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The marine turtle economy</th>
<th>242</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements of the marine turtle economy</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harpooning of turtles at sea</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and material relations of turtle hunting</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location and deployment of turtle ovens</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of turtle distribution and exchange</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine turtle egg harvest at Murrunga Island</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Eight:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The contemporary context of Yan-nhaŋu identity</th>
<th>278</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change and continuity in Yan-nhaŋu marine identity</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols and practices linked to the sea</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A marine ecology and identity</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix One:</th>
<th>291</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of a Malarra Gunbirritji Djaj'kawu Story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Two:</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of a Gurryindi Djaj'kawu Story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Three:</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous maps of northeast Arnhem Land and the Crocodile Islands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Four:</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method and results of archaeological examinations at Murrunga Island 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Five:</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method and analysis of the marine turtle economy 2000 - 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Six:</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu sites in the Crocodile Islands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Seven:</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of sites referred to in the text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Eight:</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of Yan-nhaŋu Terms</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1 Yan-nhanu orthography .............................................. VII
Table 2 Yan-nhanu groups, patri-moieties and language .................. 9
Table 3 Yan-nhanu and eastern Yolnu groups and languages .............. 55
Table 4 Comparison of rights in ma’dayan at Dambalanga (Gal 14) ........ 69
Table 5 Contrasting eastern Yolnu and Yan-nhanu kin term .............. 96
Table 6 Criteria similarity and difference of three Dhuwa Yan-nhanu groups ... 102
Table 7 Dhuwa Yan-nhanu Marrija ba:purru songs ......................... 104
Table 8 Kin relations of the principal groups in Yan-nhanu marriage exchange ........ 111
Table 9 Comparison of Malarrua and Gurryindi Djayka ancestral endowments .......... 136
Table 10 Murrunga shellfish species and categories pre/post 1932 .......... 155
Table 11 Yan-nhanu language group affiliation .......................... 162
Table 12 Yolnu proximal demonstratives and ba:purru groups ............ 171
Table 13 Comparison of Yan-nhanu and Yolnu ba:purru classifications ........ 174
Table 14 Yan-nhanu groups and linguistic affiliations ................. 176
Table 15 Yan-nhanu names with special meanings for dogs ................ 194
Table 16 Six Yan-nhanu seasons ........................................... 204
Table 17 Resource types and numbered seasonal availability ............ 209
Table 18 Division of labour for subsistence resources at Murrunga .......... 212
Table 19 Vegetable resources and seasonal availability .................. 214
Table 20 Murrunga seasonal resources, ecological zones and availability ...... 216
Table 21 Marine ecological zones and resources ........................ 220
Table 22 Ecological categories relating to marine and estuarine zones .......... 223
Table 23 Nine ecological categories of shellfish .......................... 224
Table 24 Island time and the celestial bodies ............................. 227
Table 25 Fish classes by ecological zone ................................ 238
Table 26 Comparison of the characteristics of the turtle harvest ........... 246
Table 27 An example of crew composition and ba:purru affiliation ........ 256
Table 28 The four roles of turtle hunters ................................ 260
Table 29 The role related distribution of turtle meat cuts .................. 261
Table 30 Example of primary and secondary distribution 25/5/01 ......... 263
Table 31 Marine turtle egg development categories (GGWW) ............. 272
Table 32 Shellfish species present in archaeological sites on Murrunga Island 1998 ...... 305
Table 33 Shellfish species present in archaeological sites on Murrunga Island 1998 cont ...... 306
Table 34 Shellfish species and ecological zones at Murrunga Island 1998 ....... 307
Table 35 Shellfish species and ecological zones at Murrunga Island 1998 cont ....... 308
Table 36 Estuarine Species Extinct on Murrunga Island After (1932) ........ 309
Table 37 Walamanu Sites Crocodile Islands ................................ 315
Table 38 Malarrua/Gurryindi sites Crocodile Islands ....................... 317
Table 39 Gamalanga sites Crocodile Islands .............................. 319
Table 40 Gurryindi sites Crocodile Islands ............................... 321
List of Maps

Map 1 Crocodile Islands of northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory Australia ................................................. VIII
Map 2 Study area .................................................................................................................................................. 4
Map 3 Pre/post mission transformation of the pattern of Yan-nhaŋu MM's group bestowal .............................. 113
Map 4 Comparison of Birratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr Djay'kawu journeys .......................................................... 132
Map 5 Comparison of Gurirriŋu and Malarra Djay'kawu myths ........................................................................... 134
Map 6 Murrunga shell scatters pre- and post 1932 ............................................................................................. 154
Map 7 Warner's 1937 map showing (Yaernungo) Yan-nhaŋu ............................................................................. 164
Map 8 Malarra songs and associated sites in the Crocodile Islands .................................................................... 186
Map 9 Sites, waŋarr and bUndhurr in Maramba song ........................................................................................ 190
Map 10 Murrunga stone fish traps ....................................................................................................................... 232
Map 11 Yan-nhaŋu turtle waŋarr tracks in the sea .............................................................................................. 249
Map 12 Harvest locations and marine turtle ancestor journeys ........................................................................ 253
Map 13 Cooking sites frequented by turtle hunters 2000-4 .............................................................................. 258
Map 14 Egg harvest on Murrunga Island 2000-4 ............................................................................................... 270
Map 15 Egg harvest frequency and location by island 2000-4 ........................................................................ 273
Map 16 Turtle egg cooking events 2000-4 ........................................................................................................... 274
Map 17 Webb (1932) .......................................................................................................................................... 296
Map 18 Warner (1937) ...................................................................................................................................... 297
Map 19 Berndt (1952) .......................................................................................................................................... 298
Map 20 White (1963) .......................................................................................................................................... 299
Map 21 Shapiro (1981) ...................................................................................................................................... 300
Map 22 Rudder (1993) ...................................................................................................................................... 301
Map 23 Wilkinson (1991) .................................................................................................................................. 302
Map 24 Recent archaeological site types at Murrunga ......................................................................................... 303
Map 25 Walaranju sites ....................................................................................................................................... 314
Map 26 Malarra/Gugibirriṯji sites ......................................................................................................................... 316
Map 27 Gamalanga sites ..................................................................................................................................... 318
Map 28 Gurirriŋu sites ....................................................................................................................................... 320
Map 29 Locations of sites referred to in the text ................................................................................................. 322
Map 30 Locations mapped on Gurriba Is ........................................................................................................... 323
Map 31 Locations mapped on Milingimbi Is ......................................................................................................... 324
Map 32 Locations mapped on Rapuma Is ........................................................................................................... 325
Map 33 Locations mapped on Garuma Is ............................................................................................................ 326
Map 34 Locations mapped on Murrunga Is ......................................................................................................... 327
Map 35 Locations mapped on Galuwin'ku Is ....................................................................................................... 328
Map 36 English and Yan-nhaŋu site names in the Crocodile Islands in A3 format ........................................ 329
List of Plates

Plate 1 Dham-dham Bay, Milingimbi Island (M 61) Circa Late 1920s.................................1
Plate 2 Tides of the Crocodile Islands and Arafura Sea ..............................................II
Plate 3 Yan-nhaŋu Woman at Murrugga Is ......................................................1
Plate 4 Gurrwua (M 59)* ..................................................................................32
Plate 5 Narawandhu (M 3)* ..................................................................................78
Plate 6 Rulkuru (M 61)* .....................................................................................118
Plate 7 Malnadharra (M 5)* ..............................................................................159
Plate 8 Gurrwua (M 59)* ..................................................................................198
Plate 9 Gurrwua (M 59)* ..................................................................................230
Plate 10 Gurrwua (M 59)* ...............................................................................231
Plate 11 Gaŋatha (Mu 45)# ..............................................................................234
Plate 12 Gaŋatha (Mu 45)# ..............................................................................235
Plate 13 Ma: lua Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36) fish trap 1999 .................................236
Plate 14 Dha:rubuŋaŋa (R 35)* ..............................................................242
Plate 15 Garma festival at Gulkula ...................................................................278

List of Figures

Figure 1 Schematic representation of the Yan-nhaŋu kin classification system .................94
Figure 2 Schematic representation of kin in matrilateral relations to ego ............................110
Figure 3 Schematic representation of the basic parameters of Yan-nhaŋu ontology ..............126
Figure 4 Hypothesis of Yan-nhaŋu linguistic diversification ...........................................177
Figure 5 Six seasons of the outer Crocodile Islands .......................................................207
Figure 6 Yan-nhaŋu marine ecological categories ........................................................218
Figure 7 Total monthly turtle harvest over four years 2000-4 ........................................251
Figure 8 Total monthly turtle capture each year from 2000-4 .......................................252
Figure 9 Harvest, distribution, population ratio over four years 2000-4 .......................254
Figure 10 Total primary and secondary distribution over four years 2000-4 ..................264
Figure 11 Harvest frequency by species and month 2000-4 ........................................268

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Yurruwi Arts from the Harold Shepherdson Collection

# Photographs reproduced with the kind permission of Dorita Thomson and the
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Chapter One

The Tides and Times of the Yan-nhaŋu

People of the Crocodile Islands

Plate 3 Yan-nhaŋu Woman at Murrunga Is

One afternoon on Murrunga Island I woke to the sound of singing. I was lying beneath a Casuarina tree overhanging a long white beach, the sea breeze whispering in the leaves. An old woman was singing a story. She often sang stories of when she was a girl on this beach in the 1920s. We spoke together in Djambarrpuyul, one of a number of indigenous languages used across the region, as people of her generation did not often speak in English.¹ Sitting beside her beneath the tree she was born under more than eighty years ago, we drank black tea and ate turtle eggs while we looked out to sea. She liked to tell stories. She told stories of the old people, and of the stories they told, stories that explained the shape of the world and the origin of Yolŋu people.²

¹ Djambarrpuyul is one of a number of Dhuwal languages/dialects comprising a lingua franca now widely spoken by people in daily communication in northeast Arnhem Land.
² Yolŋu is the term in use since the 1970s to describe an (Aboriginal) person throughout many of the northeast Arnhem Land languages called collectively Yolŋu-matha (lit: people’s tongue) and referring to a population of some 6500 people. Earlier anthropological literature has referred to these people as Murngin (Warner 1937), Wulamba (Berndt 1951, 1952, 1962) and Miwuyt (Shapiro 1981).
Chapter One: Children of the sea

told me she wanted me to record some of her stories. She said I will speak Yan-nhaŋu
because, she insisted, it is the language of the islands and therefore the proper one to
use. She said not many people remember the language of the islands now.

First, she sang for a little while – I don’t know exactly what she was singing – and then
she said mila ‘gather’. I started the tape and she spoke in a different way, a different
language, unlike anything else I had heard on the islands before. This was the first time
I heard the language that would change my understanding of the Yolŋu world.

The following is a transcript of the text I recorded that day:

Nyatjili napu yitjiwala ba:ŋu garranha maranilŋa, ga nha-nha napu
ba:ŋu yakarra /bowerjani, gaːdaːla, dhurranyani. Gaːdaːla nhaŋu guyu'ku
butjalama nhaŋkumunu muŋkaju gaːdaːla, dharryana napu ba:ŋu
dharryana wanha nhani guyamitji ba:ŋu dalpamdjinha'ba,
dalipalinha'ba

When we were children we would go down to the sea and play with, and
learn about, all the creatures in the reef pools, the coral, the fish and
shellfish.

Midawarr-yu galiyana djalkirri-yu, galiyana Yurruwi galiyana raŋan
gudhupununha, dhabakthana barwan nhaŋkara bundunha Watjirrbirr
ŋurunha baykumunu walima. Gurriba ŋurunha Gurriba nhaj'ku.

In Midawarr (the season of calm water) we would paddle the canoe from
Milingimbi to Watjirrprr (island off Murruga) on our way to Gurriba
(North west Crocodile Island, 80 km seaward).

Midawarrunha nhankan Murruga rakay bulangitj-nha Ñandathanabal
garanha Ñandathanabal -bal garanha Ñandathanabal garanha. Yalalaba
Marrabirrkula dhula ganiitirri bulangitjînhâ Ña:muŋ-kara gudhumunyu
Gaːdaːla dhula Garaŋ-karaŋa. Midawarru luŋdana Ñandathanabal
djiniku rakaygu, Yo.
Chapter One: Children of the sea

The season when the *Eleocharis* reed corm ripens at Marrabirrkula (Mu 14), the fresh water is good and enters the sea. Our mothers would carry fresh water from the wells at Gađatha (Mu 45) and Garanŋ-karaŋa (Mu 62) to the camp site. This is the time of the north wind, the time for *Eleocharis* bulbs, indeed.

*Ńatjili dananha malgudha mananha bena daŋuniya, malgudha, ganay Gurriba benaŋur yuwapí dulthana bilyana ṇayathana djaplingu, malgudha, dhirrpu, bena mananha malgudha mananha bena daŋuniya nhaŋ'kamu. nhaŋu wirrpala-yirri dhabakthana ngayathana gunharrayana-ba djalpiŋu gunharrayanaba daŋuniya, galun dhabakthana waŋalana nhaŋu nyininha rakay-gu.*

In the past, before we travelled to Gurriba (North west Crocodile Is) we would customarily eat the following bush vegetables (listed). At the change of tide near the end of the season we would leave these forest foods behind and go to Gurriba Island, together we would go to the well called Gininygurra (G 5).

*Liwmiya nyininha dananha dhabakthana rantana, rantana miyapunu duŋupal-riya napurrunha Guŋumba rantana mananha dana dhabakthana gurdaŋjayini dhula gaypumayini nhani garanha mananha garriwa gaku.*

The turtle hunters would go to the reef at Guŋumba (North west Crocodile Reef) to harpoon the green turtle and we would go down to the beach at Gurriba and collect turtle eggs.

I began to appreciate the extent to which the Yan-nhaŋu world view was reflected in their language, as a signifier of belonging, and a rich repository of, and vehicle for their knowledge of the sea. This language in a profound manner expresses the ancestral connections of generations of Yan-nhaŋu people to the sea. Yan-nhaŋu people say, ‘we are kin with the sea’ and continue to coexist with it by dint of its marine resources. So too, it is language that is a key identifier of people and groups in northeast Arnhem Land. The names of places and people, sacred and mundane reflect the connections of language to country and to social identity. It is these connections of language to

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3 All placenames with sites codes appear in Appendix six, all other sites referred to in the Crocodile Islands, and Castlereagh Bay and Arafura Sea appear in Appendix eight.
ancestral sites on the islands and sea country that lend such significance to the linguistic dimension of this ethnographic description.

I was inspired by this first impression of what Yan-nhaŋu might mean and commenced a search of the literature to discover all that I could about the people, their language, and their links to the sea, only to find that they have been passed over. The Yan-nhaŋu had not only been all but omitted from the literature but many anthropologists and linguists had described them as extinct (Thomson fieldnotes 1937: file 10; Berndt 1955, 1976b; Davis 1984; Rudder 1993). There are no detailed examinations or descriptions of the Yan-nhaŋu, or their language. There are no writings on Yan-nhaŋu social organisation and their particular cosmological view, or their special relations with the sea. I felt compelled to explore their claims of cultural specificity and so I began in earnest to investigate their spiritual and physical links to sites in the Crocodile Islands from an ethnographic perspective. I commenced a detailed examination of their historical and contemporary relationship with the broader Yolŋu society, and considered these relationships in light of the transformative influences of local, national, and global factors. I found that a powerful current of cosmological (mythological) belief provides an underlying foundation for the social, ecological, and economic relations of Yan-nhaŋu people with the sea and with their Yolŋu kin in their everyday lives fundamental to their identity;

Map 2 Study area

![Map of Crocodile Islands](image-url)
Chapter One: Children of the sea

People of the Crocodile Islands

W. Lloyd Warner arrived in the Crocodile Islands in 1926 to investigate the people he called the Murungin. He opens his monograph *A Black Civilisation: a Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, with the following description:

The northern shores of Australia are separated in the east from New Guinea by the Torres Strait and the Gulf of Carpentaria and in the west by the shallow Sea of Arafura. The Indian Ocean lies between Australia and the East Indian Island of Timor. Below the Arafura is Arnhem Land, that almost blank space on the map which extends from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Indian Ocean. In the furthestmost northern and eastern parts of this later region are several tribes which may be referred to collectively as the Murungin. Their ancestors lived here many hundreds and probably thousands of years before them (Warner 1937: 3).

Despite thousands of years of habitation in the Crocodile Islands by the ancestors, under Australian law Yan-nhaŋu people were alienated from their island on 1 June 1921 when the State leased Milingimbi to the Methodist Overseas Mission (NTRS 473: 1 ML 12). Similarly, their ancestral title to the Galiwin’ku town site (Elcho Island) was usurped by lessees Naphtha Petroleum from 1921 to 1926. Again Yan-nhaŋu ownership of their island estates was unrecognised by the State. Since this time the State has continued to influence the lives of Yan-nhaŋu people. On 16 April 1931 Yan-nhaŋu and all other Yolŋu were collectively segregated from the rest of Australia by the gazetting of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve (Cole 1979: 165). Secure inalienable Aboriginal land was declared in 1976 under *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth), section 73(1)(d), but this legislation did not protect sea country. Complementary legislation under section 12(1) of the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978* was enacted in the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay in 1981 and later, in 1988, the Howard Island closure of the seas. Notwithstanding the successful recognition of Yolŋu sacred sites, it did not distinguish Yan-nhaŋu ownership of these sacred sites in the sea, and offers such little protection that it has become highly contentious for the Yan-nhaŋu (see Keen 1980, 1985; Peterson 1998).4 Under the *Native Title Act 1993* the people of Blue Mud Bay region of the Arnhem Land coast

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4 Peterson and Rigsby note rights conferred on people achieving a sea closure are minimal since any person with an existing fishing licence is not affected by the closure. As it was mainly fishermen that were causing the problems the closures were not nearly as effective as they might appear (Peterson and Rigsby 1998: 16).
Chapter One: Children of the sea

lodged a claim to rights and interests in the sea. The 2008 Blue Mud Bay decision grants recognition and rights for indigenous interests in the intertidal zone for the whole of the Arnhem Land coast. For Yan-nhaŋu the potential of this decision to protect their rights is overshadowed by the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (2007 NTERR).

Yan-nhaŋu were dispossessed of title to their land in 2007 by the Federal Government as they were in 1921. Powers granted under 2007 NTERR compulsorily acquired the town sites of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku, taking away Yan-nhaŋu rights as landowners. The historical irony of this situation is not lost on the Yan-nhaŋu, increasing as it does tensions with numerous mainland kin residing on their estates. Following the withdrawal of the missions and State construction of an undifferentiated indigenous citizenry is further undermining the significance of Yan-nhaŋu difference and reinforcing their marginalisation. Yan-nhaŋu recently included in negotiations with the State and powerful resident kin groups over leasing arrangements over their estates were disenfranchised by the compulsory acquisition of their land. In this context, historical underinvestment and dysfunctional shire arrangements are increasing pressures from resident kin on Yan-nhaŋu to cede title of their land to the State, in exchange for basic services.

The policies of the Settler State have set the tone for subsequent relations with the European emissaries (biriyanaŋ=r). From a historical perspective mission sedenterisation and associated violence and broakerage of relations by eatern kin was disastrous for the Yan-nhaŋu producing, among other things, notable demographic decline, loss of control over their estates and assets, and diminished opportunities in competition with larger groups. Further historical encumbrances include the cessation of Maccassan trading, increasing exploitation of their sea by Japanese and then increasingly by Europeans. The 1980 sea closures over Yan-nhaŋu sacred sites in the sea proved patently ineffective as a deterrent to their desecration. Today the fishing of Yan-nhaŋu sacred sites by licenced fishermen presents a powerful symbol to the Yan-nhaŋu of continuing disregard for their basic human rights. The legacy of inadequate housing, health and education and increasing competition with terrestrial kin for

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5 Gawirrin Gumana & Ors v Northern Territory (30 July 2008) (the Blue Mud Bay case)
6 The Yan-nhaŋu word biriyanaŋ=r, white person/European as distinct from Yolŋu/Indigenous northeast Arnhem Land person was coined in light of the attribute of- biriya- prayer- as those first Europeans met by Yan-nhaŋu were given to recurrent prayer.
shrinking resources complicates the context of everyday social action on their estates. It is within these parameters that the Yan-nhaŋu are seeking opportunities to represent sovereignty over their ancestral sites and governance over their marine assets.

Preceding these more recent developments I arrived at Galiwin’ku (Elcho Island) in 1993 to work as a teacher in the bilingual school, oblivious to the tensions of this hidden history of the Yan-nhaŋu. With the help of students and parents I soon became familiar with the local Yolŋu language. Some time later I moved west across the Castlereagh Bay to Milingimbi Island, working with the small satellite communities known as the homelands (outstations) (see Appendix eight). 7 Most of these vibrant small communities, eight of which were serviced from Milingimbi, had populations of 20–50 people. I would arrive on Monday morning by boat or plane and stay until Friday before returning to Milingimbi. Visiting every other week I would provide local Yolŋu teachers with lesson plans for the intervening periods. Diminution of government funding closed many of the homelands’ schools until I was working permanently on Murrunga Island only.

The Murrunga Island outstation was an hour from Milingimbi by boat on a good day. The population fluctuated between 10 and 50 people, although sometimes during ceremonies it would swell to over one hundred. People would visit Milingimbi for supplies each week or so. Funerals often kept people away from the island at surrounding communities, on the other islands and the mainland for long periods. At different times of the year, dependent on the seasons, many people travelled to the islands to harvest the abundant fish, shellfish and highly sought turtle eggs deposited on the long white beaches of the outer islands. At the height of the wet season everyone would leave the island for Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku and the other homelands where the major ceremonies are held each year.

Yan-nhaŋu: language of the Crocodile Islands

Listening to songs and stories under the casuarina trees of Murrunga and working with people on the islands I began to learn Yan-nhaŋu. More so, I discovered that the Yan-

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7 Outstation is a pastoral industry term for a remote residential site for a small fragment of the main population customarily made up of one or two related family groups. The meaning of the term has transformed in the Aboriginal context. Slotte (1997) defines homelands as different from communities, recognising community as a place where a number of clans coexist, where they live and work in one place. This she juxtaposes with the differing life on homelands which is more immediately organised around landownership, family, and ancestral connections.
nhañu language was very complex and some varieties of it were still spoken in full by an older generation. They understood themselves to own a distinct cultural identity. Yan-nhañu called themselves and are referred to by other Yolŋu, as people of the sea. Yan-nhañu ownership of their seas and islands and the resources therein continued to be a key aspect of their spiritual and material wellbeing. The sociolinguistic title Yan-nhañu represents this group of Yolŋu people inheriting the estates and the languages endowed by the Yan-nhañu ancestors. YAN-NHAÑU means literally the language of this place. The word YAN denotes tongue or language, and the word NHAÑU is the proximal demonstrative meaning ‘this’ or ‘here’. So the language title Yan-nhañu literally denotes the language of ‘here’, the language of the Crocodile Islands. The ontological significance of this ancestral language link will be come more apparent ahead.

In 1994 together with speakers of Yan-nhañu I began to compile a dictionary. Through this process I progressively became more aware of Yan-nhañu distinctiveness arising from their spiritual and physical relationships with the surrounding seas. The sea provides an arena for daily activity and a place of memories and stories that are an essential part of the Yan-nhañu experience of identity. The practices of everyday are at least as important as ritual and cosmology in the formation of social identity. The sea provides an aspect of difference that Yan-nhañu may choose to emphasise or downplay in the social negotiation of difference and/or similarity with their kin in everyday encounters. For the Yan-nhañu the sea is a physical space and a mental map inscribed with ancestral meaning, a place of rituals and special names; it is the compelling relationships between language, place and ancestors that invigorates and informs their unique identity.

Intimate coexistence with the sea and a lack of terrestrial estates marks an important point of departure from mainland kin. Yan-nhañu people share spiritual links and resources from six separate but contiguous estates covering ten thousand square kilometres of the Crocodile Islands and Arafura sea. The Yan-nhañu language is shared by six named patri-clans or baːpurru groups linked to these estates through ancestral law. Consequently, the Yan-nhañu language is divided into six dialectical varieties named after the groups that own and notionally speak them. The following

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8 I employ the term ‘group’ throughout the thesis, however, where I do use the Yolŋu term baːpurru or baːpurra group these will be where Yolŋu use this designation. Baːpurru or Baːpurra are considered focal, dynamic, multivalent categories with a common identity existing in shared ancestral essence (see also Keen 1994, 1995; Toner 2001).
Table 2 sets out the linguistic and patri-moiety affiliation of these six Yan-nhaŋu groups.

**Table 2 Yan-nhaŋu groups, patri-moiety and language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group name</th>
<th>Patri-moiety</th>
<th>Linguistic affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yirritja</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirritja</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirritja</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yan-nhaŋu language as spoken today is shared by these six named patri-clans or ba:purru groups, and yet each variety is slightly different, reflecting the specific and distinct ancestral provenance of each ba:purru. The overarching idea of patri-moieties divides these Yan-nhaŋu speaking groups and their estates into two parts comprising three Dhuwa moiety groups and three of Yirritja moiety. Therefore Yan-nhaŋu people understand themselves to be the living descendants of the Yan-nhaŋu ancestors and as such have inherited their distinct language, sacred ritual paraphernalia and site complexes constituting their marine and island estates. In addition, each of these moiety-specific groups share bodies of ancestrally defined salt water provide sites for the everyday experience of being island people, a fundamental dimension arising from their inimitable ancestral heritage. Ancestral connections between these saltwater bodies and links to other bodies of salt water (theirs and others not using their language) connect them to widespread local and regional networks of ritual and connubial association discussed further (see Appendix six).

Not surprisingly, many aspects of a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu way of life are not immediately evident, hidden as they often are by having been overwhelmed by the mission and co-residence with dominant mainlanders over the last 80 years. Despite considerable assimilation to mission routines and mainland ways old people continue

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9 *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* are two halves, or semi moieties of an ideational system that divides the world into two categories, fundamentally classifying every aspect of the Yolŋu universe. Everything is either one or the other, so that every aspect of the physical and nomenial world, person or animal is *Dhuwa* or *Yirritja*, and is essentially/spiritually associated with a particular *Dhuwa* or a *Yirritja* group.
to practise some of these specifically Yan-nhaŋu customs and as time progressed I came to realise that young people were also reproducing these behaviours, albeit in a transforming manner. There-in the reproduction of these island ways in the everyday was a continuity linked to the marine environment of great persistence, a continuity entailing a suite of social, linguistic and religious beliefs linked to place.

For the Yan-nhaŋu the sea is focal to their lives and so it provides an arena for daily activity that is filled with memories, stories and names, names that are linked in an essential way to the parts of life that make up a distinct Yan-nhaŋu experience. For Yan-nhaŋu, young and old, the language of the ancestors is a conduit for profound connection with place. Continuing residence on their sea country and on their homelands has played a part in strengthening Yan-nhaŋu identity within the contested space of the growing ex-mission government settlement communities situated on their island estates. Given these conditions the theme of Yan-nhaŋu relations with their kin and sea country is considered in light of the many local, national, and global influences that provide a dynamic backdrop upon which this investigation unfolds. Further it is necessary to unpick the historical, linguistic and mythological threads from which much of what is distinctive about Yan-nhaŋu culture can be revealed. In order to explicate these complex relationships this ethnography is organised around a number of key themes.

Themes in Yan-nhaŋu ethnography

The Yan-nhaŋu are not found in abstraction from the contexts of history, colonisation and wider economy, nor is it possible to isolate them from the workings of Yolŋu society. The complex forms of Yan-nhaŋu identification and society continue to change under the influences of these forces. However, I contend that the enduring characteristics of a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu marine culture can be identified, despite the masking and marginalising influences of local history and wider colonial influences. This Yan-nhaŋu culture can be found in the stories and myths that form the basis of people’s ontological identification with ancestors; estates and religious identity, and are thus necessarily Yan-nhaŋu centric. This ethnographic description of Yan-nhaŋu people is also therefore necessarily Yan-nhaŋu centric as it attempts to depict essential Yan-nhaŋuness. There should be little expectation here of a comparative exegesis of eastern Yolŋu mythology, already comprising the bulk of existing Yolŋu writings. These Yan-nhaŋu characteristics are portrayed through four pervasive themes: the
physical connection to place; the closely linked importance of religious connections to ancestral sites; similarity and difference; and the ongoing significance of change and continuity.

These four themes provide a framework for understanding the essential qualities of Yan-nhaŋu culture in the light of powerful transformative influences of the colonial Settler State. From within such a framework we can more easily appreciate the complex foundations and resilience of Yan-nhaŋu identity and how it may be defined, described, and understood.

**Physical connection to place**

The relationship between Yan-nhaŋu people and their sea country reaches far back into prehistory. The Crocodile Islands harbour an abundance of archaeological evidence illustrating the enduring material links of human ancestors to the special places of the sea and islands (see Appendix 4). Archaeological deposits reveal the antiquity of an intimate coexistence with the marine ecology covering more than two and a half thousand years (Mulvaney 1965). Existence on the islands was enabled by a specialist local knowledge of saltwater ecosystems and the springs of subterranean fresh water on and around the islands. These resources have long been venerated as traces of the *ŋurrungangabo* ('those who have gone before'). Patterns of travel and residence on the islands and the detritus of shellfish scatters distributed throughout show the continuity of local knowledge linked to this marine environment. These patterns of deposition echo the seasonal round of inter-island travel, resource exploitation and diet of a Yan-nhaŋu past. Today the reflections of these patterns are exemplified by the intergenerational transmission of a continuing and transforming ensemble of customary cultural adaptations, expressed in local knowledge and language, and linked inexorably to the times and tides of the Crocodile Islands.

The customary practices of the Yan-nhaŋu include a profound knowledge of the many ecological categories and technological innovations applicable to their island hopping existence. Their understandings of marine and near-shore island resource exploitation are accumulated in, and expressed through the medium of language. A distinctive linguistic register, associated metaphores and rhetorical constructions reflect this life by the sea. Life in the Crocodile Islands is inflected by the spatial, temporal, and material circumstances of coastal habitation. The language of the islands is at once the
Chapter One: Children of the sea

language of ancestral endowment and island knowledge; it is a distinctive reservoir of, and vehicle for, the names of people and sites, and the symbols and practices that exemplify the Yan-nhaŋu place in the Yolŋu social fabric.

Spiritual connection to place

Yolŋu cosmology posits the existence of ancestral/creator/spirits (waŋarr) like gods.\(^\text{10}\) The waŋarr are believed to have created and bestowed the phenomenal and noumenal world, and the laws of cosmic order on their living descendents. This is the origin, or genesis of ancestral law. The name of this law is rom.\(^\text{11}\) These laws are contained in myths recounting the distinctive cosmogonic acts of the waŋarr. And so it is that the laws and myths of the waŋarr are articulated through a locality based and site-specific ontology. This site-specific ontology provides the blueprint for the reproduction of the precepts and practices of society and its distinctive local ritual and cultural content. The law holds that sites created by the ancestors contain traces that form consubstantial links between places and the descendents of the ancestors. An ensemble of site specific connections constitutes the distinctive ancestral inheritance of each discrete and named group, and their individual descendents. These ba:purru-centric ancestral essences link human and spiritual conception through life and in perpetuity with the ba:purru group’s ancestral sites.

The mythology of ancestral creation explains how journeys of the waŋarr ancestor shared by two or more groups create links that form networks of ritual relations across the region. These shared myths between groups, in many cases speaking different languages, provide grounds for connection to places and distinctions in social identities cross cutting linguistic boundaries. Creation stories tell of ritual, connubial and economic relations between the waŋarr that mirror and validate links between groups. These links permit wide ranging connubial relations enabling the reproduction of socio-political identities through time. Simultaneously, cosmic law provides the basis

\(^{10}\) Waŋarr (wangarr) are understood to be the creator/ancestor/spirits beings that created everything. Zorc (1986) defines waŋarr as a noun; totemic ancestors, culture heroes (god-like beings who originally inhabited the earth then changed themselves into animals, birds, monsters, etc.); sacred things. The westerly Burarra groups refer to (an-)waŋarr creator spirit; (Ext) God; (gun-)waŋarra evil spirit, devil. See also maddayin (sacred), Barrulanhayyu, Djaykawu, Goŋ-Banygud, Motj, Wajitalk- Wāwilak, Wuyal (Zorc 1986: 317)( see Chapter four)

\(^{11}\) Rom is defined by Keen (1994: 312) as the proper ‘way’, religious ‘law’ custom, incorporating the main features of Zorc’s earlier definition (1986: 306) including culture, behaviour, law, rule, custom, tradition, habit, way of life or doing things. Syn: dhunwar also denoting path/trail, synonymous with the intransitive verb; rum,rundhun meaning to observe the law, keep tabboos, show common decency etc.
for processes of social boundary maintenance and differentiation between groups linked to place.

*Similarity and difference*

The overarching Yolŋu mythology of ancestral creation also explains how the ancestors shared by Yan-nhaŋu people, and their kin, distinguish them from each other within these networks of connectedness. Yolŋu kin distinguish between certain aspects of 'similarity and difference' in their social lives, conceived of in terms of the abovementioned ancestral foci. Conceptions of similarity and difference serve as 'universal' Yolŋu boundary processes, which differentiate as well as conjoin different kinds of group, forming the basis of Yolŋu sociality. The ego-centric and/or socio-centric position of a person or collectivity within the network of ancestral relations locates a person or group's social identity. For Yan-nhaŋu people the recognition of the relative 'similarity or difference' between respective people and groups in the Yolŋu social world is of tremendous significance, as it is for all Yolŋu.

The location of a person's or group's position within the network of ancestral relations has significant implications for identification. Distinct social groups are identified by means of metaphorical and rhetorical strategies made possible through the shared idioms of ancestral law. Groups may contrast with each other on the basis of language, kin relations or religious emblems (*madayin*) and concomitantly these emblems may signify connection. Social difference and similarity expressed in the rhetoric of kinship and metaphors of connectedness have a latent ambiguity and vagueness, such that individuals and groups may recombine associations of language, place and sacra, and kinship in the contemporary context. At a number of levels these multiple overlapping potential identity markers are played out in the everyday interactions of social space— a context increasingly influenced by the policies of the Settler State.

New forms of articulation in the intercultural, in response to the influence of the settler society produce new contexts, new sites, and strategies for engagement. New grounds for alliance, for the identification of similarity and difference, are created for Yolŋu predisposed by a history of mission involvements. Sedenterisation on missions produced new contexts and strategies for identification and new idioms of similarity and difference between old and new kinds of Yolŋu groups. Powerful Christian

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12 *Madayin* (mardayin/marrayin/mu-dayan), sacred, secret, holy, taboo including objects or species containing consubstantial ancestor essence; syn: *dhuyu, dharrpal, djok.*
ideologies provide new forms of innovative social identification among Yolŋu. Christian groups have become more evident in contexts of competition for access over State-controlled resources. The Christian experience of some eastern groups in ex- mission communities, particularly Galiwin’ku, is quite distinct from the trajectories of Yan-nhaŋu experience, as they were for the most part marginalised from this Christian indoctrination. This is another dimension of Yan-nhaŋu difference in light of the changing social and economic circumstances of Yolŋu society.

Change and continuity

An appreciation of the long history of ethnographic description in northeast Arnhem Land provides an opportunity to explore the structuring of long-term historical process of change and continuity. In particular it permits an attention to transformations of local cultural ‘tradition’ and cosmology in time and in this ecological context, as well as in light of changing State policies. In examining change and continuity in the system of Yolŋu relations and the reinvention of culture I draw on the idea that there is no cultural or traditional baseline from which a one-sided ‘change’ can be seen to result. Rather, in my consideration of the ongoing colonial project I view the historical encounter as generating creative responses, and sites of Yolŋu innovation in the light of these national and global influences. The partial adoption of Christianity by some for example. This approach reflects writing on contemporary conditions and transformation in the re-invention of societies and systems of customary knowledge by international theorists (e.g. Barth 1987; Keesing 1992, Hviding 1996). Hviding (1996) describes the necessary ontological condition of religious and secular ritual between man, country, and mythology as axiomatic to the re/production of the society of ‘the keepers of the Marovo Lagoon’ (Hviding 1996: xiii). This examination of Yan-nhaŋu culture is mindful of a conscious innovation of ‘tradition’ in light of contemporary influences, on the one hand, and on the other, reinventions shaped by the mythological and physical inheritance of the sea as a site of everyday experience.

Proceeding from this I draw on certain recent theorising of Yolŋu continuity and change including, F. Morphy (2008), H. Morphy (2007) and Merlan (1998, 2006). In particular I modify Merlan’s (1998) hypothesis that ‘the contemporary Australian scene ... [ is ] ... not one of autonomy, but of still unequal, intercultural production’ (Merlan 1998: 180-1). I do this with a contrasting Yolŋu perspective exhibiting a relative autonomy of systems of cultural production (Morphy 2007). F. Morphy (2008)
also describes the significance of Yolŋu autonomy in the form and process of socio-cultural re/production through time. She recognises the integral role of intercultural interaction and the reciprocal effects on respective socio-cultural forms, yet, without collapsing ‘relative autonomies’ as they are constructed in Yolŋu discourse (Morphy 2008: 121). Yan-nhaŋtu discourse is replete with their recognition of their reflexive difference and conscious reproduction of this their relative autonomy from a biriyanaraŋtu, (white person/European as distinct from Yolŋu/northeast Armhem Lander) conceived world.

This model accounts for preceding hypotheses of now largley defunct theories of linguistic domain separation (Harris 1980, 1990; Sutton 1990: 59; Trigger 1992; Rowse 1998). This theory capturing the Yolŋu conception of ‘two worlds’ of intercultural and intracultural re/production has been re-examined in regard to Yolŋu discourses (Morphy 2008: 130). The concept current in Yolŋu discourse describes the separation of Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu social worlds (Morphy 2008: 121). Many Yolŋu continue to emphasise this separation despite their recognition of the power of the State and their economic links to it. I argue that Yan-nhaŋtu continue to emphasise this model of cultural difference despite increasingly conflicting economic and exmission pressures to render anodyne difference critical to Yan-nhaŋtu differentiation. More so for the Yan-nhaŋtu it is critical to continue to foreground their perceived autonomies based on their ‘culturally specific’ ancestral inheritance and their socio-religious and physical connection to country as ‘evidence’ of their sovereign land tenure. Yan-nhaŋtu people understand and experience their sovereignty through spiritual and physical connection to place and notions of ancestral inheritance sometimes expressed as coming from the ground (gumimurru). An essential difference for the Yan-nhaŋtu.

The historical legacy of under-investment in health, housing and social infrastructure constrains collaborations and competitions between households, families and groups for State resources. In light of this struggle Yan-nhaŋtu people self reflexively recognise their need to broker their representation to the State for control over their estates. The daily practice of identity formation brings into relief the differences and similarities of people identifying as Yan-nhaŋtu from other Yolŋu people, and their place in the broader fabric of Yolŋu society, as they strive to gain control of their ancestral marine estates and resources in light of contemporary influences. Yan-
nhangu physical and spiritual links to sea country continue to enhance the reproduction of a distinctly Yan-nhaŋu marine identity resolving more clearly this aspect of their collective social identity. The persistence of the circumstances of disadvantage are increasing the need for identification with a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu socio-linguistic identity, their suite of mythological connections, differences in social and group links, marine estates or combination of identifiers as they broker their representation.

In order to provide a broader context in which to situate these interpenetrating themes the international literature on indigenous marine tenure provides a useful point of departure. I begin with a brief review of the global literature on customary marine tenure, hereafter (CMT), before focusing on Australian research. In particular I examine research on the nature of spiritual and physical connection with the sea, and under the influences of global social change, circumstances pertinent to the context of this ethnographic investigation.

**Customary marine relations**

A number of approaches can be taken from the international literature on indigenous marine societies that are applicable to the Crocodile Islands, and which are concerned with change and continuity of Indigenous societies under the influence of globalisation. A comparable body of literature relates to ecological and economic aspects of indigenous maritime societies and their specific relationships to traditional beliefs and identity in changing times. These complementary topics in the literature cluster around a core of fundamental premises that have influenced the broader analysis of indigenous customary maritime relations and issues of tenure both overseas and in Australia. These streams of thought converge over the substance of cosmology and continuities in cultural behaviours linked to the marine ecology.

There is remarkable agreement among international researchers on connections between notions of cosmology and identity in indigenous coastal communities. Research from the near and far Pacific region by Ruddle (1985) and Hviding (1996), at the centre of debates on indigenous marine tenure and ownership of marine resources, concur on fundamental links between place, language and identity. For example, recent international investigations into CMT provide compelling evidence for the widely shared concept of metaphysical connection underlying indigenous notions of cosmology, identity, and language in coastal communities (Johannes 1981; Ruddle
Chapter One: Children of the sea


Recent approaches to the analysis of CMT emphasise mapping of the social relations of coastal people onto their marine environments. Central to this approach are notions of the cosmological dimensions of existence underpinning the articulation of kinship systems, social identity, and ecological relations as described in rich ethnographic detail by Hviding (1996). He considers ‘relationships through the sea’ as a way of coming to understand the fundamental significance of ‘the sea as kin’ in the lives of indigenous Melanesians. People are, he reports, ‘related to the sea’ and ‘through the sea’ (Hviding 1996: 2). The relationships entailed in ‘cultural and practical engagement with the maritime environment’, from which people ‘derive their material and spiritual sustenance’ focus on the reciprocity of kin relations between people and environmental phenomena (Hviding 1996: 2). By extension, people derive their identity by virtue of rights to the sea and maritime resources. Hviding (1996) contends that the Morovo individual is constructed as a social person through their relations with the environment. Similar findings are reported for the islands of Ponam and Yap by Carrier (1983).

Deep-seated economic relations of CMT are the focus of research in the Pacific by Johannes (1981). He examines associated ecological relations with marine ecology. Reciprocal exchange relations between marine resources, people and environments are also described by Hviding (1996) and Aswani (1999), who suggest that indigenous systems show an ethic supporting conservation. Such an ethic, it is proposed, enhances the long-term social and ecological sustainability of such systems. Indigenous marine resource use embodies in a material way the social and religious relations of these societies to place whilst supporting continuities in customary practices. Johannes (1981) and others have illustrated continuity in the intergenerational reproduction of ideational systems and their transformation in the light of encapsulation within States and the influences of globalisation (Johannes 1981; see also Hviding 1989, 1996). These are precisely the transformative pressures that continue to affect coastal Aboriginal people of Australia.

*Paucity of research into Australian Indigenous marine systems*
Despite an enormous literature on terrestrial interests (e.g. Spencer and Gillen 1899; Stanner 1957; Hiatt 1962; Meggitt 1965; Myers 1986), comparatively little has been written about the relationship of the sea and coastal islands on Aboriginal people's lives. The Australian literature contains a mere handful of ethnographies that deal specifically with the relationship of Aboriginal people to the sea (e.g. Chase 1980; Meehan 1982; Smith 1987; Bradley 1997; Rouja 1998; Morphy 2004; Barber 2005). A number of important smaller works have also been written (e.g. Trigger 1987; Palmer 1988; Sharp 1996; Sullivan 1998; Bagshaw 1998; Magowan 2001; Morphy and Morphy 2006). These investigations contribute to a delineation of some specific local and diverse interests in CMT in Australia but by no means reflect the full significance of the sea to indigenous people, particularly those in northern regions.

Existing literature on Aboriginal customary relations with the sea falls into three overlapping and roughly historic groups: from first contact until the early 1970s; research reflecting changing attitudes in Australian society to issues of Aboriginal interest; and more recent literature focusing on management and conservation issues. The literature of a pre-assimilation period displays a general indifference to maritime themes, and tenure in particular, notwithstanding an interest in material culture such as bark and wooden canoes. Nevertheless some exceptions can be found in Curr (1883), Radcliffe Brown (1916) and Haddon (1935). Much early documentation originates from the records of settlers and explorers (see Smith 1987; Green 1988: 21). One of the earliest recorded examples of Australian coastal life comes from 1688 when William Dampier observed Indigenous exploitation stone fish traps for collecting shellfish and fish:

In other places at Low-water they seek for Cockles, Muscles, and Periwinkles: of these shell fish there are fewer still; so their chief dependence is upon what the sea leaves in their wares (Dampier in Masefield 1906: 6).

Captain Cook and Joseph Banks recorded Aboriginal people fishing with spears at Endeavour River (Beaglehole 1968), as did Baudin (Cornell 1965: 1). Two detailed ethnographies of Australian marine systems are to be found in the works of Haddon (1935) and Thomson (1934, 1939, 1946). Haddon (1935) recorded the extensive marine practices of Torres Strait islanders. Donald Thomson collected the most significant ethnographic records of Aboriginal fishing techniques and technologies of marine hunting of mammals and reptiles in both Queensland and the Northern
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Territory (Thomson 1934, 1939, 1946). He was the first anthropologist to visit the outer Crocodile Islands including Murrunga where he photographed people in their daily routines and recorded unique Yan-nhaŋu hunting and ritual practices. (see Chapers four and seven). The value of these extraordinary contributions to Australian marine ethnography is yet to be fully realised, nevertheless neither investigated the details of marine tenure.

Not until sometime after 1970 was a more widespread interest in marine estate ownership developed in the literature, reflecting the energy promoted by the land rights movement. Palmer (1988) speculates that Australian society began to need to understand how Aborigines owned and comprehended the sea (Palmer 1988: 13). Peterson’s ethnographic examination of marine relations at Croker Island affirms, consistent with terrestrial mythology, ‘everywhere there are foundation stories of … forces and beings fashioning the seascapes, creating islands, reefs … and imbuing the places … with great power’ (Peterson et al. 1998: 10). Peterson and Rigsby (1998) also bring attention to the ‘blind spot’ in the literature produced by the absence of marine ethnography in Australia. Writing of this period focused importantly on the implications of shortcomings in the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 and complementary Northern Territory legislation for coastal groups (Morphy 1977; Keen 1977, 1980; Meehan 1977; Chase and Sutton 1981; Davis 1982, 1984). Peterson (2003) suggests some time later that marine tenure may have become more ‘formalized under the impact of the growing prevalence of legal and rights discourse in Aboriginal affairs’ (Peterson 2003: 429). Governmental failure to recognise and protect indigenous marine tenure continues to disadvantage coastal indigenous people.

Aboriginal systems of CMT, according to Palmer (1988), may be fragile, causing them to be difficult to describe. Cawte (1996) writing about Yolŋu from islands east of Galiwin’ku, speculates that:

Aboriginal deep-water sailors evolved a distinctive way of living in the world and of looking at it. Few of us know much about it as it has not been the subject of much study … some consider that way of life unique, some, beautiful; some too dangerous and fragile to survive (Cawte 1996: 73).

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13 Peterson and Rigsby (1998) comment that many of the most important ethnographers of Australian coastal Aboriginal groups worked on tenure issues in Arnhem Land without mention of sea tenure, including Tindale (1925), Hart and Pilling (1960), Rose (1961), Hiatt (1965), Berndt (1976), Meehan (1982) and Williams (1986).
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Despite the reported distinctive and fragile nature of indigenous marine relations, recent efforts to translate CMT for recognition by the Australian State have more realistically been rendered problematic by national imperatives in respect of marine resources. The longstanding legal fiction of terra nullius suggests that the legibility of indigenous marine tenure may not be the only, nor relevant inhibitor to full legal recognition. It remains to be seen what benefits will accrue to indigenous Northern Territory coastal people in the wake of the Blue Mud Bay decision and the 2007 NTER.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, and in spite of the apparent fragility of marine relations, indigenous coastal people continue to rely on resources from the sea for their material, social and spiritual needs - a critical factor prompting this investigation.

Maritime identity

Ecological space and cultural identity

The identification with a particular ecological environment is a characteristic of Australian indigenous self-description. It is widely acknowledged that Aboriginal people identify themselves by their relationship with ecological environments, describing themselves as desert, freshwater or saltwater people. This phrase ‘saltwater people’ vibrantly describes a separation from other kinds of ecological identification. This ecological orientation is a constitutive dimension of social identity. Meehan (1982) describes the Anbarra as talking about themselves as people of the river mouth (see also Hiatt 1965; Jones 1980; McKenzie 1980; Gurrmananana 2002). Bradley (1996) details Yanyuwa people’s recognition of themselves as people of the sea, and argues for a Yanyuwa sense of identity, called Yanyuwangala, which he translates as the awareness of being a saltwater Yanyuwa person (Bradley 1996: 12). Like the Bardi (Rouja 1998), and the Yanyuwa, the Yan-nhaju describe themselves as saltwater people as the following vignette will illustrate.

On the outer Crocodile Islands, old people explain why saltwater people prefer to eat fish and why there are no wallabies (narku) on the islands; they tell the story of the jabiru stork (Ganydji). This story also reveals something previously hidden and more profound about the nature of Yan-nhaju identification with the marine environment:

\textit{Jabiru Story (Ganydji Dhanjuny): an allegory from Murrungga Island}

\textsuperscript{14} The Blue Mud bay judgement applies to the whole Arnhem Land coast as far as the intertidal zone is concerned - granting exclusive right of traditional owners over the inter tidal waters and the marine property within it (Howard Morphy, pers. comm)
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Ganydji bam’ parranhaba Garrangarrangaŋa ga waŋanaba ‘Rulka nhunu gurrku garramabal Murrungaŋali, ɲarku (agile wallaby), ɲamba (honey) dharrpa (king brown snake) ga djanda (varanus goanna), nam ɲaruŋa baka nhnim’ dhu maka nhunu mana wuŋayu binamunu nhan’

Transcription

The Yan-nhaŋu ancestor Jabiru stork, Ganydji (Yirritja Walamaŋu from Gadjatha) (Mu 45) stood on First Island, Garrangarrangaŋa (Ga 1) and declared to the other ancestors, ‘Don’t try and swim to Murrunga Wallaby, Honey, Goanna and Snake, as you will surely drown in the deep water.’(Fieldnotes; Murrunga 9/9/1994).

This myth is told to children by an older generation to account for why these terrestrial creatures are not found on the outer islands; however, it also stands as a political allegory making reference and to, and posting warning to kin from eastern groups fighting with the Yan-nhaŋu at Milingimbi in the early days of the mission. These animals also refer to totemic ancestors, emblems synonymous with groups that were involved in tribal conflicts after the coming of the mission. The story implies the dangers of the open sea and the potential for ensorcelment for those foolhardy enough to approach the outer islands. The wallaby (ɲarku) is synonymous with the ɲamil, Marraŋu; and goanna (djanda) Marakulu, Guyula Djambarrpuyŋu; king brown snake (dharrpa) Dhamarandji, Djambarrpuyŋu and honey (ɲamba) Gaykamaŋu and Liyalanmirr Gupapuyŋu. Knowledge of the seas permitted Yan-nhaŋu to escape the relentless conflict with powerful terrestrial groups and withdraw behind a veil of sorcery to the safety of the outer islands.

Yan-nhaŋu history and social identity are linked in intimate ways to the specifics of their marine ecology. These connections are fundamental to the reproduction of distinct cultural ways. As for all coastal Aboriginal people, the ontological, sociological, and economic rudiments of their society are embedded in their environments. In this way the everyday practices of engagement with the marine environment, expressed in behaviour, knowledge and symbols, are emblematic of a group’s social identity. Chase (1980) details examples of exchanges of marine knowledge, ritual and materials between kin, characterising these exchanges as central to the continuity of traditions and the reproduction of marine identities (Chase 1980: 45). Yolŋu shared beliefs about waŋarr ancestors and ancestral law underwrite exchange relations between individuals and groups and their rights of access to marine resources, given their location and seasonal availability (see also Berndt 1952, 1962;
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Keen 1978, 1994; Morphy 1984; Williams 1986, 1999; Magowan 2001; Tamisari 2003). The exchange of such marine resources maintain social, ritual and connubial relations implicated in the reproduction and demographic change of sociopolitical groups, and in particular continuities in identity and estate ownership over generations (Morphy and Morphy 2006).

Economic exchange relations, operating at the nexus between the reproduction of marine identities and the provision of means of survival, bestow a great sociocultural significance on the hunting of charismatic species such as dugong and turtle. The cultural significances attributed these key stone species provide a compelling insight into coastal societies. The Sandbeach people (Smith 1987), Yanyuwa (Bradley 1996), Bardi (Rouna 1998) and Yolnu (Barber 2005) all continue to hunt marine turtles in ways that exemplify the socioeconomic and cultural importance of these high-status marine reptiles. Bradley (1996) demonstrates how coastal people’s lives are linked to the life cycles of these marine animals. In the Torres Straits, Nietschmann (1984) writes that turtle hunting gives ‘meaning to existence’, and confers a ‘cultural and perceptual affirmation of being an Islander’ (Nietschmann 1984: 647)

Conscious of the symbolic importance of dugong and turtle hunting to coastal Aboriginal constructions of ‘self identity’, Bradley (1996) and others have paid close attention to the social meaning of hunting of high-status marine animals. The hunting and exchange of these valuable marine resources not only fulfil social obligations, but imbue exchange and feasting with status translatable in ritual and connubial exchange. These ethnographers all report rigorous cultural protocols associated with the dissection and apportionment of these key marine resources, but few enumerate in detail the social and material relations of turtle distribution. This research addresses these omissions by providing data detailing specific aspects of the spiritual, economic, and social relations of the exchange of marine turtle products. In particular I analyse the social relations of turtle hunters and their distributory roles, mapping the sites of harpooning, cooking, exchange relations and consumption of turtle in the Crocodile Islands over four years. This analysis of the exchange of marine turtle products demonstrates concretely Yolnu aknowledgement of the fundamental facts of Yan-nhaŋu marine estate ownership and thier physical and spiritual links to their sea (see Chapter seven).

A brief history of settler relations
The arrival of the Methodist Overseas Mission at Milingimbi in 1922 profoundly changed the social relations of the people of the Crocodile Islands. The Yan-nhaŋu shared the islands, including the south of Elcho Island (Galiwin’ku), with small numbers of people from surrounding groups. Historically the small population of Yan-nhaŋu speakers and others from surrounding areas occupied and exploited the resources of the seas, paddling to the islands in an array of crafts on a seasonal basis. These journeys recorded in foundational myths and personal histories. During the ceremonial season large numbers of kin would congregate on Milingimbi Island (Yurruwi) to share in the abundant shellfish and ritual cycad bread (Cycas media) resources while practising the Na:rra ceremonies (Warner 1937).\(^{15}\) The places and phenomena of the seas and Crocodile Islands across to Galiwin’ku are named in Yan-nhaŋu. Yan-nhaŋu language and names denote the physical space and social identity of the people and places bequeathed by the ancestors. This sea space increasingly traversed by strangers.

Establishment of the mission on the Yan-nhaŋu island of Milingimbi attracted many kin from the mainland, especially from east of Yan-nhaŋu country, moving to settle there. The magnetic lure of tobacco, flour, protection and curiosity seem to have been among the inducements to settle at the mission. Over time the mainlanders eclipsed local Yan-nhaŋu so much so that Lloyd Warner’s 1920’s ethnography at Milingimbi barely mentions them. However, he and the missionary Webb (1933) both remark on the warlike demeanour of eastern Yolŋu and Thomson records their ‘intense and bitter rivalry’ (Thomson 1949: 5). Yan-nhaŋu land owners were denied any significant part in the new mission polity at Milingimbi. In 1942 the mission was expanded to Galiwin’ku Island, the population seeded by eastern kin transporting their mainland ideologies to the new mission. Here alliances of Yirritja male leaders of eastern groups espousing Christian ideology vie for mission resources and control over the discourse of a growing public Yolŋu domain. The public domain, lying as it were over pre-existing local networks of ritual and political alliance with Yan-nhaŋu, is influenced by new social and economic imperatives further contributing to Yan-nhaŋu marginalisation. Marginalisation in part increasing the self reflexive resolution of a Yan-nhaŋu sense of social collectivity.

\(^{15}\)The Na:rra ritual is the pre- eminent local ceremony focusing on the interdependence of ba:purruru groups of the same moiety by re-enacting their creation by the wararr and emphasising the necessary links between mother (yintu) and child (yoŋku) and grandparent (nurri) and grandchild (gutarra) groups necessary for their spiritual and physical re/production.
Chapter One: Children of the sea

In the 1970s the mission administration handed over governance arrangements for the settlements and their inhabitants to the State. Today at Milingimbi (on the largest of the inner Crocodile Islands) approximately 700 people live in what is a modern Northern Territory remote Aboriginal community. Galiwin’ku is even larger, with approx 2500 Yolŋu. Most Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu people now live in Milingimbi and Yirritja people at Maningrida, with some at Galiwin’ku and others still living on homelands scattered throughout the Crocodile Islands. Largely artefacts of mission and assimilation policy, the communities of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku are situated on Yan-nhaŋu land, and are growing in significance as sites for the reproduction of Yolŋu life worlds. Significantly for the majority of Yan-nhaŋu people everyday social action takes place on their land. Increasingly European time, money and work, employment infrastructure and housing are the powerful influences imposing on ‘traditional’ values within the mixed Yolŋu community.

Progressively more responsibilities on Yan-nhaŋu land owners build up as communities increasingly become the focus of spiritual connection for the many resident kin of eastern Yolŋu groups. Through an ideology of spiritual conception children are born with links to the Yan-nhaŋu estate connecting them essentially to Yan-nhaŋu sites. Consequently these places are contexts for conflicting discourses over individual, familial and group alliances, rights and obligations, and increasingly overshadowed and amplified by closer relations of control and surveillance by the State. The historical legacy of under-investment in health, housing and social infrastructure constrain collaborations and competitions between households, families and groups for State resources. To a large degree people are sustained by the free but not unbound exchange of resources, some of which come from the surrounding seas. Exchanges of all kinds are as yet not tethered to the growing spectre of commodity dependency. The system of kinship continues to underwrite exchange relations among Indigenous residents, and people come to understand the decontextualised artefacts of engagement with Christian ideas and the Settler State through a grid of Yolŋu concepts. Here the metaphor of ‘two worlds’, or ways of encounter in Yolŋu processes of intercultural and intracultural re/production is apposite (see also Morphy 2008: 130). The conscious appropriation of modern technologies and concepts for indigenous ends is more pronounced on the homelands.
Chapter One: Children of the sea

In the terms of remote Australia a city/country divide exists between townships and homelands. Large population movements are evident between them. In the contemporary context homeland life contrasts in many ways with busy settlements like Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku. There are many dozens of homelands around these communities. The island of Murrunga is not the only homeland outstation on the Yan-nhaŋu estate, but it is now the most frequently inhabited. Other semi-permanently inhabited Yan-nhaŋu homeland outstations are scattered throughout the islands; Bodiya (M 25), Galinguli (R 9), Dharrugarra (R 38) and Girrkinyuwa (R 4) (see Appendix seven). These homelands provide a city/country dichotomy between township and outstations life. Homelands function as staging points for foraging and hunting expeditions and places from which custodial care over saltwater estates is practised. Embedded in practices of fishing and collecting shellfish and turtle eggs is a reaffirmation of an orientation that looks back towards kin on the mainland. Yan-nhaŋu people distinguish themselves from terrestrial kin by virtue of this maritime orientation. However it is increasingly difficult for people to remain on their land. Intense State pressure is being applied on Yan-nhaŋu people to cede their title and move off their homelands.

Rationalisation and corporatisation of relations between the State and its Aboriginal citizens promotes in a settler imaginary an increasingly undifferentiated Aboriginal citizenry denied full recognition of their difference and desire to live on country. A number of State policies focus on moving people into ‘growth towns’ and away from homelands. Policies such as this are formulated in denial of demographic realities and in support of ideological ends (Morphy 2005; Altman et al 2007). Policies deconstructing Indigenous difference are hostile to Yolŋu political action and obstruct the reproduction of sociopolitical identities like the Yan-nhaŋu. This kind of hostile engagement forms the context in which Yan-nhaŋu compete with other Yolŋu groups for official recognition and market-based resources, whilst simultaneously dependent on these Yolŋu kin for ritual, connubial and economic support. It is within this precarious and marginal soci-political environment in the Yolŋu sphere that Yan-nhaŋu groups attempt to survive, whilst struggling for equitable governance rights over their marine estates with the State. These conditions are urging stronger ontological

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16 Depending on how they are enumerated I have counted more than sixty outstations in the close vicinity of these two communities. In 2009 Marthakal (Galiwin’ku) has responsibility for 29 outstations and Milingimbi Outstations Progress Association (MOPRA) has 12 but has links to many others (Gerrard (Bluey) McGregor pers. comm.; see also Morphy F 2007a, 2007d).
Chapter One: Children of the sea

identification with sea country and language as foci of social identity in contemporary conditions.

To depict the complex interrelations of Yan-haŋu with kin I focus on mechanisms of social differentiation signified by language type, ownership of estates and maŋayin. Ancestral endowments also provide shared grounds for the assertion and identification of similarities. From the Yan-haŋu perspective, religious and material connections to place are signified in symbols and practices related to the sea, lived out on their estates and in the everyday experience of their country. Diet, residence, technologies, a distinctive lexicon, and ritual complexes referred to in snatches of song are the everyday signs of Yan-haŋu identity, of a special and distinctive place in the Yolŋu firmament. In the practices of contemporary everyday Yolŋu sociality Yan-haŋu people may identify with this socio-linguistic identity, based on cosmology, mythological connections, on difference in social organisation, family or group links, language or links to marine estates or lifestyle or a combination of diverse elements. To begin to illustrate these striking and hitherto undescribed characteristics of Yan-haŋu specificity I describe the methods and approaches of this encounter and portrayal.

Methods and analytical perspectives

This research has relied heavily on participant observation and informal methods of interviewing in collecting the main body of information from 1993 to 2007. Most interviews were carried out in the Dhuwal/Dhuwala lingua franca or Yan-haŋu language. In light of a post modern death of grand theory this exploration self consciously avoids the project of an over-arching theoretical perspective, rather grounding its analytical standpoint in recent work on the nature of Yolŋu intercultural engagement (Morphy 2008: 121). Yolŋu society is a locality based culture, of clan centric stories and site based ontologies, consequently it requires a deep ethnography reminiscent of anthropological engagements of an earlier period in this area (Warner 1937; Thompson 1949; Hiatt 1965). This is the most effective and appropriate tool to examine the intricate detail of Yan-haŋu culture. Material from songs, ceremonies and oral histories was recorded over a fourteen-year period. In pursuing central questions relating to the transmission of Yan-haŋu cultural identity, I gathered and analysed many Yan-haŋu oral histories. Of particular importance in providing a Yan-haŋu historical perspective were relationships I formed with senior people, especially
those who had lived in the islands for around eighty years or so, and in a time that preceded the establishment of the Milingimbi Mission.

I collected data on Yan-nhaŋu ritual and religious beliefs through attending the larger ceremonial gatherings. Such experiences on my part provided invaluable understanding of secret/sacred ceremonial life. Nevertheless, no secret or restricted information is presented in this thesis. It must be stressed that considerable caution must be exercised in commenting to Yolŋu people on matters closely related to the sacred and restricted secret realm. None of the following information can be communicated to Yolŋu people without prior consultation with senior Yan-nhaŋu people or myself.

Also studied were the smaller, less public domestic rituals linked to the everyday activities of cooking, fishing, turtle hunting and egg collecting. Such activities had important symbolic meanings for the Yan-nhaŋu, reaffirming beliefs in coexistent spiritual and mundane environments that accompanied their lives on the outstations. I recorded interviews on the internal motivations of actors in the various roles of the turtle hunt, the timings and locations of harpooning and the site of capture, cooking, distribution and social relations of exchange and consumption of turtle products, as described in detail in Appendix five.

Although participant observation and interviews were the main avenues of investigation, other supplementary sources were used. Data from the field of linguistics, archaeology, geography, and general documentary sources were relevant, as was a review of the anthropological literature. Archaeological material was collected to provide a picture of the web of ecological interaction over time and add additional historical depth and validity to oral accounts of past practices in the oral history. These data included the mapping of hundreds of shell middens, fish traps and associated freshwater wells, and permanent and semi-permanent camp sites providing evidence of inter-island travel and access to remote marine resources.

The linguistic analysis focuses on the links between language, society, and identity. The methodological stance taken is that language itself structures social relations through a multiplicity of intersubjective discourses assuming that language has a constitutive role in sociality (Lackoff and Johnson 1980; Pinker 1994, 2008; Keen 2008). I argue that notions of language are fundamental to Yan-nhaŋu, and wider
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Yolŋu constructions of social identity. The Yan-nhaŋu language as a Pama Nyungan Yolŋu matha language variety is typical of the Yolŋu linguistic block, but Yan-nhaŋu is distinctive in its classification by proximal demonstrative, the word for ‘this’ or ‘here’. This word (nhaŋu) makes it an important diacritic of the larger Nhaŋu -linguistic group. But as I will show, in regard to the westernmost varieties of nhaŋu speakers belonging to the Yan-nhaŋu people, it is considered the language of the Crocodile Islands.

Towards the end of my fieldwork events were increasingly occurring in a somewhat precarious political context with increasing conflict over State intervention, police presence, income management, the closure of work programs and the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal townships under the 2007 NTER. For the Yan-nhaŋu these legal arrangements have a historical precedent. From a Yan-nhaŋu perspective the State has once more usurped their title over their ancestral estates, and without fair compensation or recognition. To elucidate something of the complexity these circumstances lend to the context in which this ethnography is set I provide a summary of the thesis organisation.

Summary of thesis organisation

Chapter two describes the historical events surrounding the arrival of the Methodist mission to Milingimbi and later Galiwin’ku. In particular it brings attention to circumstances fostering translation practices deployed by eastern leaders with Europeans pivotal to the passing over of the Yan-nhaŋu and omission of their interests. The chapter analyses how key factors of domain separation, succession politics, assertion of extinction and misrepresentation converge to eclipse Yan-nhaŋu interests. These factors, and the historical context of mission sedenterisation and demographic change, continue to transform the contexts of local political struggle for resources in the growing community polity. Control by powerful Yirritja leaders over practices of representation, ritual ideologies, connubial exchanges and mission links at Milingimbi were later transported to Galiwin’ku.

At Galiwin’ku three arenas converge: in ongoing Christian themes linked to the mission, a growing sphere of secular and State engagements, and a public Yolŋu domain. This public Yolŋu domain and its public discourse contrast with the underlying sacred/restricted dimension of religious orthodoxy, and collide with
Chapter One: Children of the sea

Christian themes culminating in what R. M. Berndt (1962) has described as the ‘Adjustment Movement’ (Berndt 1962: 41; McIntosh 1994, 2000, 2004). More recently growing State and secular involvements through *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (ALRA), land use agreements (LUAs) and the 2007 NTER have again changed the context of alliance and differentiation between Yolŋu groups. The recognition of Yan-nhaŋu primary spiritual responsibility for their estates and subsequent compulsory acquisition of townships on their land form a dynamic background upon which this exploration of the Yan-nhaŋu people can be understood.

Chapter three focuses on Yan-nhaŋu social organisation. It examines the articulations and distinctions of kinship systems and connubial arrangements, demonstrating themes of change and continuity in the re/production of Yan-nhaŋu sociopolitical groups and identities. It presents a description of networks of relatedness linked to ontological identifications in everyday social relations distinguishing and conjoining Yan-nhaŋu and Yolŋu social identities. The analysis attends to Yolŋu understandings of the fundamental role of ancestral (mythological) stories, religious paraphernalia (*maayin*) and metaphorical and rhetorical constructs both to differentiate and fasten together groups in Yolŋu sociality. The discussion underlines persistent characteristics in patterns of kinship and marriage, estate ownership, and daily practice that resolve a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu marine identity.

Chapter four examines the theme of similarity and difference in light of a shared Yolŋu cosmological view, entailed in Yan-nhaŋu religious beliefs, and bestowing the foundation for the spiritual, social and cosmic order. This chapter reveals the basic parameters of Yan-nhaŋu ontology and site specific local perspectives structuring people’s ancestral links to country. It describes in detail aspects of Yan-nhaŋu variation from, and correspondence with, the shared body of wider Yolŋu religious.

The contrast of these similarities and differences underline the distinctive qualities of group-centric Yan-nhaŋu religious doctrines linked to this site-based ontogeny. Examples of these distinctive ritual dimensions including site based rituals, named Yan-nhaŋu ritual types and kinds of sorcery, are indicative of a vibrant Yan-nhaŋu religious identity lived out in their daily lives on their marine estates.

Chapter five explores the theme of change and continuity in Yan-nhaŋu language evolution by examining factors shaping thier transformations, in particular the compression of Yan-nhaŋu clan patrilects and the development of a lingua franca at
Chapter One: Children of the sea

the Milingimbi and Galiwinku Missions. Languages are a crucial signifier of similarity and difference in Yolŋu sociality. I analyse the disjunction between the notional language variety and the actual language spoken, to clarify the relationship between language as a tool for communication and as a device structuring individual and group definition. This relationship of language ideology and language use signals important continuities and profound transformations in Yan-nhaŋu languages, resonating with the themes of the thesis.

Chapter six explores the theme of physical links to place by exploring Yan-nhaŋu relations with their marine ecology. Couched in terms of the antiquity and intimacy of Yan-nhaŋu customary relationship to the Crocodile Islands, the chapter explores the ecological and economic relations to place. Through a discussion of patterns of residence, mobility, and diet it reveals unique Yan-nhaŋu material culture produced in response to habitation of this island world. It presents data on local knowledge, categories of classification, the deployment of site-specific technologies, and their ritual entailments regulated by timing of the seasons and tides. In this way it is argued that Yan-nhaŋu inter-island voyaging proves much more than a mere extension of the seasonal subsistence round, typical of the Australian savannah as described by Jones (1980: 111). As such it gives attention to an aspect of Australian and Yolŋu engagement with the sea so far overdue.

Chapter seven extends the analysis of Yan-nhaŋu physical and underlying spiritual connection to country, by examining the ecological and economic relations of turtle hunting, turtle eggs and the exchange of turtle products. Acknowledgement of Yan-nhaŋu marine resource ownership in exchanges by Yolŋu kin demonstrate the fundamentally metaphysical relationship of people to their sea country. The turtle economy entails social relations of control and ownership with respect to the use of the marine environment based on these underlying themes of spiritual and physical links to the sea. As a significant activity for men outside the ceremonial sphere turtle harpooning provides a window on important social relations on a number of levels. Data are revealed exemplifying the material, social and ritual relations entailed in the capture, cooking, distribution and consumption of turtle meat and eggs over four years. These exchanges reveal a matrix of ongoing links to the sea, and to kin that continue to support a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu island way of life.
Chapter One: Children of the sea

The concluding Chapter eight considers the coalescence of the material into the aforementioned themes of Yan-nhaŋu ethnography, and in the light of the foregoing chapters, it presents a framework for appreciating the fundamental elements of a Yan-nhaŋu world view. I discuss changes and continuities shaped by a shared Yolŋu history and the transformative influences of the State. Far from extinct, a vibrant Yan-nhaŋu culture has persisted in the absence of recognition; in the negative spaces of writings about the Yolŋu. The development of a public Yolŋu political domain at missions produces the conditions initiating Yan-nhaŋu struggles for State recognition and in so doing resolves more clearly this aspect of their collective social identity in contemporary Yolŋu discourse. Historical marginalisation from the developing mission polity necessitated Yan-nhaŋu acknowledgment of the need for a legal recognition of their rights as owners of their sea estates. The persistence of increasing need for identification with a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu socio-linguistic identity, suite of mythological connections, differences in social and group links, marine estates or combination of identifiers are enhanced and complicated by increasing State intervention. The specific historical circumstances of this struggle will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Two

History of the Yan-nhanu: kin and conflict

Conflict resolution ceremony (makarrata)

Milingimbi circa 1930s

Plate 4 Gurruwa (M 59)*

From the early days it was a primitive place, yo (yes) still fighting Yolngu between tribe and tribe from some reasons, other reasons, tribal fight, and mission came in and trying to stop the tribal war between (them). They brought the gospel, good news. Yo (yes), most fighting was stopped, but some still fighting (Gurrwangu, Grandson of Djawa, cited in Slotte 1997: 47).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

The significance of personal stories in the unrecorded history of the Yan-nhaŋu has not as yet been fully realised. Particularly in regard to the deeper understanding it lends to the broader trajectories of Yolŋu history. It is the tiny details that lend intensity to the wide sweep of history, and as such a detail, like a little light that presages the dawn, and light of day, may illuminate that which in darkness lay hid. One such detail came to light while I was asking about the bombing of Milingimbi. What I thought was to be a war story exploded the history of the missions as I had so often heard it. I recount the story here and have taken care to record the group name and then language name of the actors, because of the significance these Yolŋu leaders have in northeast Arnhem Land history and how they re-surface in it’s re-telling:

A: After the Japanese bombed Gurriba (North west Crocodile Island) and Milingimbi some people went with Sheppy (Reverend Harold Shepherdson) to hide in the bush at Wuralŋur. In 1942 Djawa (Gupapyynugu, Dhuwala), Burrumarrra/ŋuruwuynya (Warramiri, Djaŋu), Gunŋalpuma (Gulumala, Dhaŋu), and Makarrwala (Wangurri, Dhaŋu) sent Walilipa (Golumala, Dhaŋu), and Makarrwala’s brother Badanga (Wangurri, Dhaŋu) out with Sheppy to re-start the mission at Galiwin’ku. Mulupu (Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) and Munukarri (Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) were at Dayirri Ck (Gal 48 Appendix seven Map 35) where our grandfather (FF) Rirritjli (Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) is buried.\(^\text{17}\) Golwa (Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) our father agreed to let Sheppy start a mission there.

BJ: Ah yes! Mulupu and Munukarri, the last of the Gunbirritji!

A: What! Who says?

BJ: The two old ladies that died in the 1960s, they were the last of the Gunbirritji?

A: Who told you that rubbish?

BJ: Gubberman (Government) story? Thomson? Berndt?\(^\text{18}\)

A: They are my sisters!

BJ: That means you are Gunbirritji?

\(^{17}\) The paired Malarra/Gunbirritji name reflects recent usage by Malarra/Gunbirritji people in response to claims that they are extinct. They say both are their names, one referring to the sea, Malarra (maramba) and the saltwater aspects of their estate, and two, Gunbirritji referring to the dry land (mukka, daŋ-dal) aspects of their ancestral estate (see Keen 1995: 518).

\(^{18}\) Donald Thomson records the following entry about the ownership of the Galiwin’ku estate: “The old station site at Elcho Island belongs to du’ a kunbirriyi matta [Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yanaŋu] (like Yanang [Yan-nhaŋu] and some like Tjamaba:rapoing) [Djambarrupuyngu] Bapuro Murungun: all dead except two old women now at Mooroonga [Murrunga]” (Thomson fieldnotes 1937: August).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

A: Yoyu---yo!!! ... Can’t you listen? Before the war ... my father Golwa (actual brother of my paternal father Burrinytiŋu dec) (Malarra / Gumbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) and his wife Laylayun Guburrur (Yapalunga, Djinaŋ), not my mother, adopted Muŋkarri and Muŋpu my classificatory sisters from the Batjimurrungs group. Muŋpu and Muŋkarri lived at Gulaŋbaŋ (M 15 Appendix seven Map 23), at Milingimbi where Batju (Garrawitja, Birrkili Gupapuyŋu, Dhuvala) married the two sisters ... secretly (gumurr dutji - intra-moiety marriage). Golwa and Laylayun had to take Muŋpu and Muŋkarri away to Dayirri Creek, Galiwin’ku (Gal 48 Appendix Seven Map 23) (before the war) because of the scandal this intra-moiety caused at the Milingimbi Mission) (Fieldnotes Murrunga 1994).

Clearly this personal history reveals that the Malarra / Gumbirritji are not extinct. It also indicates a persistent eastern disapproval of gumurr dutji (lit: chest friction) same-moiety unions. A point of eastern etiquette, of latter import, but the astonishing question it raises is why have the Yan-nhaŋu have been reported extinct, when they are not. Up until recently Yan-nhaŋu groups like the Gurryindi, Malarra / Gumbirritji and Binjarrar were often reported to be extinct (Thomson fieldnotes 1937: file 10; Berndt 1955, 1976b; Davis 1984; Rudder 1993). In fact I later found that stories of Yan-nhaŋu extinction are unexceptional in the literature and also in the public Yolŋu discourse at Galiwin’ku. That is where I first heard them. But news of their extinction was not known to Yan-nhaŋu people. Those with whom I spoke were outraged and wanted explanation. I resolved to investigate the matter as I too wanted to know why. I started with a search of the Yolŋu literature for all and any signs of the Yan-nhaŋu.

I marvelled at how it could possibly be the case, given the enourmous attention focused on the Yolŋu, that the traditional owners of the estates on which two of the largest communities in northeast Arnhem Land were situated, could go largely unnoticed or, when mentioned at all, be reported extinct? More broadly, how had the Yan-nhaŋu been overlooked by the droves of missionaries, government functionaries, anthropologists and linguists who had worked in the area since the 1920s? As landowners, how had they been disregarded in community affairs to the point of exclusion? Understandably, Yan-nhaŋu people were anxious to put an end to stories of their extinction, but had not been aware of them either. What kinds of processes of information brokerage were at work? And how would they affect the writing of history here?

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19 With notable exceptions in the unpublished work of Thomson (1937); Schebeck (1968); Keen (1978) and more recently in the published work of Keen (1994) and Bagshaw (1998).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

The first place I looked for mention of the Yan-nhaŋų was in the records of the mission and their early description of the Yoŋŋu domain. ²⁰ Given the close relationship between the early missionaries and the Yoŋŋu people I expected to find a clear depiction of land ownership. In fact there was nothing but the most tangential references and general omission of the question. The outcome of this exclusion from mission histories, ethnographic literature and administrative records has been delayed recognition of the Yan-nhaŋų. More interestingly, this lack of a written history is interlinked with the dynamics of eastern Yoŋŋu immigration and the politics of information brokerage to the missionaries by trusted interpreters. More recently, in light of changing social and economic circumstances, the deferred recognition of Yan-nhaŋų ownership of their estates by the State, has further emboldened usurpation of their rights by some kin from eastern groups.

Histories are necessarily selective, and this history is no exception. The central aim of this chapter is to reveal a general timeline reflecting the Yan-nhaŋų perspective on important events and changes that have occurred since the coming of the mission. This analysis entails three histories: the written history of Europeans, a received history common in the Yoŋŋu public discourse, and this, the untold history of the Yan-nhaŋų people. The circumstances that promoted Yan-nhaŋų omission also help explain their contemporary circumstances. The contexts shaping their exclusion from written history have, up until recently, removed them from a Yoŋŋu public political discourse, suppressing their ability to represent their interests and estates. The opening oral history makes clear that a number of significant pieces to the puzzle of Yan-nhaŋų history are missing. It is a Yan-nhaŋų view of history that explains the silences in received histories and the trajectories of their reinventions.

This re-examination of history from a Yan-nhaŋų perspective is structured in three parts. First, after a literature review I present a brief chronological timeline of major events in the Crocodile Islands. Part two reveals key conditions converging to abet the masking of the Yan-nhaŋų; in particular the evolution of a public Yoŋŋu polity and discourse, characteristics of its modes of communication and brokerage, and the changing politics of Yoŋŋu succession, all of which have shaped historical accounts.

²⁰ Harris (1980, 1990) at Galiwin’ku and later Rowe (1992) depict a non-Indigenous sphere or inter-cultural domain separating purely Indigenous concerns from those of the encapsulating State. Morphy shows that this ‘two world’ view remained effectively unchallenged until very recently. (Morphy 2008: 121). I use the domain device to illustrate linguistic separation and information brokerage in transactional processes between domains by Yoŋŋu leaders.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Third, I present a description of Yan-nhaŋu history in three parts; the Milingimbi period, the Galiwin’ku period, and the post-ALRA (Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976) period up until the recent 2007 NTER (Northern Territory Emergency Response). These three distinctive segments of historical encounter between Yolŋu, missions and the State help to clarify the complex circumstances of Yan-nhaŋu omission from the received view of history about this part of northeast Arnhem Land.

Review of literature on Yan-nhaŋu history

The following overview gleaned from the available literature provides a starting point for a discussion of Yan-nhaŋu history. In general early reports of the Yan-nhaŋu are brief, misrepresent their circumstances, and avoid naming them. The unpublished anthropological writings of 1920s to the 1960s provide the best source of material on the Yan-nhaŋu although this is limited in scope and generally neglects their relationships with the sea and islands. Published works between 1930 and 1980 provide fewer references. Interestingly Webb (1930) and Warner (1937) produce two maps which despite little detail correctly outline Yan-nhaŋu sites on Milingimbi and Elcho islands in the 1920s and acknowledge the wide extent of Yan-nhaŋu ocean estates. (see Appendix three Map 17 and 18). After this, however, they recede from view. Among the exceptions are the unpublished fieldnotes of anthropologist Donald Thomson (1937). He also refers to them briefly in published work (Thomson 1949, 1961). Some attention was given them by Schebeck (1968) and Berndt (1976b), who mentions one Yan-nhaŋu group. A more substantial reference of the Yan-nhaŋu is confined to the unpublished anthropological material (see Webb (1933), Thomson (1937) and Keen (1978)).

The very first reference to the Yan-nhaŋu (Yaernungo) is relegated to a footnote in Warner’s Murning Warfare (Warner 1930: 457). Webb (1933) writes that the ‘Yarmangu’ comprise three hordes and ‘though widely separated, speak the same dialect and so are called by the same name’ (Webb 1933: 410). Webb misattributes the Djinaŋ language to one of these hordes and leaves another off his map (Webb 1933: 411). In later discussion about Milingimbi he makes no allusion to them (Webb 1936: 336–41). The Yan-nhaŋu are not in Warner’s (1937) index despite his three years fieldwork at Milingimbi. They are cited seven times in his book and there conflated with the ‘Nhangu’ (1937: 40). He does not refer to the Yan-nhaŋu in his
Chapter Two: Conflict and change


Warner's (1937) important discussion of the Djaŋ'kawu (Djankgaa) mythology, recounts the Yan-nhaŋu-owned Crocodile Islands created by the Djaŋ'kawu sisters without mention of the Yan-nhaŋu: '... Guria [Gurriba] Marunga Island, [Murrunga], Mart-a-rang-a Island, [Matharrayaŋa] Pu-djer-i-ki, [Budjeriki] Rabuma, [Rapuma], Milpawi-wa [Nilpaywa]' (Warner 1937: 326) (see Appendix eight). Berndt (1952) in his poetic account of the Djaggawul (Djaŋ'kawu) narrates and analyses the myth without indication of the Yan-nhaŋu.21 (see Appendix one) Later he reprises the Djaŋ'kawu (Djanggawul) cycle again without mention of the Yan-nhaŋu (Berndt 1962: 36). Berndt's (1951) ethnography of the Kunapipi, performed and shared by the Yan-nhaŋu, does not mention them (Berndt 1951). Significantly for the Yan-nhaŋu on a number of occasions, Berndt wrongly attributes ownership of the Galiwin’ku estate and major Djaŋ’kawu sites, Burabu, Ba’rarabu (Burrarrapu Gapu Gal 10), to non-Yan-nhanju groups (Berndt 1952: 1, 43, 45, 48; 1954; 1962: 51) (see Appendix seven).

Donald Thomson’s unpublished fieldnotes from the 1930s are a significant early source of reference to the Yan-nhaŋu, although very brief. Thomson’s (1949) book depicts the ‘Jarngango’ in economic themes related to the interdependence and exchange of material and religious resources between Yolŋu groups (Thomson 1949: 9–61). In Thomson (1961) he writes

[the] cult of the ragalk or sorcerer was known to the Yanango of Mooroonga Island in the Crocodile group – a clan of the Maringo malla – who were on the borderline between the east and the west, with many cultural differences as well as differences in social organisation (Thomson 1961: 98).

Thomson’s discerning comment about Yan-nhaŋu location and relations is also one of the most extended references in published work up until this time.

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21Berndt (1952) refers to the Djaŋ’kawu Ganjudingu [Ganyitiŋu] to describe the Djaŋ’kawu brother, which he says is ‘not mentioned by L. Warner’ (1937: 333-40) [in the Milingimi version]. The brother (Rruriya) is central to the Yan-nhaŋu version of the creation of Galiwin’ku by the MalarrGaŋbihrrti two spirit women (mokuy munkaŋu balay Ganyitiŋu and Wayankama, see Appendix one) different from the widley reported Liyangawumirr Djaŋ’kawu version (1937: 333-40; 1952: 1).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Ronald and Catherine Berndt’s (1954) Arnhem Land and its History and its People refers to Milingimbi thirty-five times and Elcho Island nineteen times without making any reference to the Yan-nhaŋu. They refer once to ‘Marungga’ (Berndt 1954: 52) and once to ‘Mooroonga Island’ (Berndt 1954: 186) and one further citation in a footnote refers to the ‘Gunbirri’ (Maḷarra/Gunbirirritji, Yan-nhaŋu). Berndt’s (1962) book on the adjustment movement at Galiwin’ku is dedicated to Badanga (Wangurri, Dhaŋu) and Burrumarra (Warramiri, Djaŋu) and it may be surmised that Berndt was profoundly influenced by the perspectives of these two powerful eastern leaders. Berndt suggests that ‘the Liagalwamiri [Liyagawumirr] is dua and is the original linguistic unit occupying this part of Elcho Island’ (Berndt 1962: 51). Further, he omits the names of Muŋu and Muŋukari from his analysis (see oral history beginning this chapter), and this omission skews his explanation of relations between major actors, groups, and madayin, concealing the Yan-nhaŋu (Berndt 1962: 75).

In the 1970s, with the dawn of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA) period, Berndt (1976a) again describes the ‘Djanggawul’, ‘Wawalag’ and ‘Mandjigai’ ceremonial complexes, important to the Yan-nhaŋu, but minus the Yan-nhaŋu (1976a: 28, 147). In a discussion of ritual, mission and social relations he includes the Nhangu groups ‘Gurlba’ (Golpa) and ‘Brangu’ (Barraŋu) (1976a: 22) and mentions the Yan-nhaŋu sites ‘Buku Damala’ (Ganapay Gal 25) and ‘Gunumba’ (Gunumba Re 1) without any reference to the Yan-nhaŋu (Berndt 1976a: 28, 163–165, 184). However, they dramatically reappear in Berndt (1976b) when he maps ‘Gunbirri’ (Maḷarra/Gunbirirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) sites onto Galiwinku and unequivocally describes their ownership of the estate (1976a: 28, 163).

Keen (1978) was the first researcher to provide a more comprehensive view of the Yan-nhaŋu. He describes their ba:purru relations in ‘clans aggregate’ (1978: 28) land ownership (1978:176), and ceremonial links (1978: 216). Davis (1982, 1984) and Davis and Prescott (1992) give a brief outline of Yan-nhaŋu interests, but as I show later and in more detail, Yan-nhaŋu possessory rights in their marine estates continued to be overlooked in the published and public discourses of the region. Similarly, much research based at Galiwin’ku and Milingimbi since the passing of the ALRA has been focused on topics that do not reflect Yan-nhaŋu interests (see Shapiro 1979, 1980; Bos 1988; Rudder 1977, 1993; Tamasari 1998, 2002; McIntosh 1994, 2000, 2006 and McGowan 2001).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Linguists have made few references to the Yan-nhaŋu. During the 1940s Capell (1941, 1942, nd) collected some 'janango'(Yan-nhaŋu) and cognate terms from the Nhaŋu-speaking groups Gutjiway, Golpa, Bararrŋu and Bararparrarr. Beulah Lowe conducted linguistic analysis at Milingimbi but does not mention the Yan-nhaŋu (Lowe 1951, 1957, nd). Bernard Schebeck is the first to identify Yan-nhaŋu speech varieties (1968: 27–38; 2001). Wood (1972) and Alpher (1977) collected two and three hundred forms respectively. Waters (1989) mentions them briefly in his discussions of Djínay and Djínba, but no attempt at comprehensive description of Yan-nhaŋu language is made (see Chapter five). Popular texts have remained equally quiet on the subject of the Yan-nhaŋu.

An examination of mission and administrative records and popular texts provides no evidence of the existence of the Yan-nhaŋu. For example, many authors describe the mission’s false start at Galiwin’ku, Naphtha Petroleum and the decision to move to Milingimbi, but give not one reference to the landowners (Beazley NTRS 2572; Shepherdson NTRS 226 TS 325; Sweeney NTRS 226, TS 337; Kyle-Little NTRS 226 TS 260; Berndt 1954, 1962: 28; Mackenzie 1976: 26; Harris 1990: 834; Guy 1993: 35; McMillan 2001: 90). More recently, Edith Guy’s (1993) account of life on the islands refers to Elcho Island 168 times and Milingimbi 97 times, with numerous asides about eastern leaders (1993: 13, 18, 20, 27, 28, 57, 103, 119), but she makes no mention of the Yan-nhaŋu. These texts commonly misattribute ownership of Yan-nhaŋu estates to other groups. The published history of northeast Arnhem Land therefore provides limited insight into Yan-nhaŋu perspectives but substantial evidence of their omission.

While the history of Macassan visitation and interaction with the missions are among the major events in Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu history, and of themselves worthy subjects of extended discussion, such an examination is beyond the scope of this chapter. Also significant to the Yan-nhaŋu are the complex historical relations and residence with kin to the west at Maningrida. However, as it throws only subsidiary light on the major themes of this thesis, and as space will not allow, I have omitted a full discussion of these proceedings. I begin this broad brush historical account of the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay with a brief chronological timeline of major events.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Timeline

Geologists speculate that the Crocodile Islands were formed by submergence during the Pleistocene period about 5000 to 6000 years ago (Plumb 1965: 4). Archaeological and genetic evidence roughly establish the time of the putative westerly voyage of Yan-nhaŋu ancestors to northeast Arnhem Land (White 1971; Mitchell 1994: 36). Post-glacial floodwaters rising in the Gulf of Carpentaria propelled the proto-Yolŋu ancestors westwards from what is now Queensland, and before sea levels stabilised around 3000 years BP (before present). This saltwater inundation created the fertile estuarine river environments around the coastal edge of the growing Gulf of Carpentaria (White 1971, 1997: 59–66).

Rich estuaries with abundant shell beds and mangrove creeks furnished a good deal of the material conditions for plentiful coastal life (Woodroffe et al. 1993: 262; Peterson et al. 1998: 8; Hiscock 1999: 465; Faulkner 2006; Bourke et al. 2007: 91). The seasonal round of subsistence food gathering of Yan-nhaŋu ancestors on the newly formed Crocodile Islands was characterised for thousands of years by littoral foraging, creating the enormous Anadara granosa (ŋa’kanyu) shell middens evident on Milingimbi Island. Stone’s (1989) erroneous proposition that the shell mounds were built by generations of nesting scrub fowl has been over turned (Mitchell 1993: Mulveny 1996 :21 Hiscock 2008: 175). In 1965 Mulvaney investigated the eponymous Walamaŋu shell midden site called Milingimbi (M 1), referred to by Europeans as Macassan Well. At this shell midden he found basal shell to be 2500 years old (2445–/+80 BP) (cited in Mitchell 1994: 36).

About 500 years ago the Anadara shell beds declined in productivity due to minute changes in levels of sediment deposition (Woodroffe et al. 1987; Woodroffe et al. 1988; Woodroffe et al. 1993: 262). Transformed levels caused the ‘cockle shell’ shellfish ŋa’kanyu to dwindle to near extinction at the shell beds at Wunybulpumirr (M 10) adjacent to the giant shell middens (see Appendix six Table 37, Map 25 and Appendix seven Map 31). This brought to an end the era of shell mounding that had lasted nearly two thousand years on Milingimbi Island. In its place a new era of outer island resource exploitation and turtle hunting began.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Around the time that the ‘Krokodillen Eilandts’ appeared on Tasmans’ chart (Robert 1973: 175) in 1644, Macassan sailors from Celebes (Sulawesi) had been visiting the islands seeking bêche-de-mer or trepang and other resources (McKnight 1976: 153–4, 158; Berndt 1977; see also Mitchell 1994; Bourke 2000; Faulkner 2006). Arriving with the north-east monsoon in December and leaving in March when the wind turned to the south-east, the Macassans brought with them new technologies including the buoyant wooden dugout canoe. These floating canoes enhanced access to outer island marine resources, transforming economic practices of coastal people (Warner 1937; Thomson 1949; Rose 1961). Warner writes:

The Malay trader undoubtedly widened the horizon of the society by his movements along the coasts, and with the introduction of the dugout canoe made possible longer, more rapid journeys and wider contacts among the peoples of the various clans comprising this and the present Murngin group; Before this time the only means of travel had been by foot or by the frail bark canoe and rafts. It seems likely to me that the Malay’s advent, which occurred at least several hundred years ago, provides sufficient explanation for . . . the formation of a larger Murngin group (Warner 1937: 38).

Even with the introduction of the dugout canoe technology, inter-island travel still relied on the original indigenously constructed bark canoes, which remained an important part of Yan-nhanu material culture. Donald Thomson described the bark canoes of ‘Mooroonga’ (Murrungga) as the biggest and fastest he had ever seen (Thomson fieldnotes 7-1-1937: 115: 2). Nevertheless, these bark canoes were responsible for many fatalities as they were given to unravelling at sea. The robust floating wooden canoe seems to have refocused turtle capture from upending nesting females to the precarious high-status harpooning of male turtles at sea. Marine turtle harpooning remains an important dimension of Yan-nhanu economic behaviour, and an essential element in the quest for social capital for hunters, as hunting, exchanging and feasting are an important means for obtaining renown in Yolŋu society. The title djambatj, good hunter, is celebrated by all Yolŋu people.

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22 I am grateful to Ian McIntosh for this information.
23 Considerable social capital is implied by the term djambatj. The term means the first of the two turtle harpoon tips, one djambatj, and the second nika nhanu, said to be imbued with magical powers. More widely, it is used to denote the skilful, canny ‘hunter’, and good provider with overtones of virility. Success in turtle hunting allows the hunter to distribute the choicest cuts of turtle and dugong meat, bringing him status and prestige advantageous in connubial arrangements.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

The Macassans influenced Indigenous coastal economies like the Crocodile Islands with an increase in foreign goods that stimulated ceremonial exchange with mainland groups (Warner 1937; Thomson 1937, 1949). As inland groups sought exotic cargo such as iron, cloth and tobacco the resultant modifications in economic systems of regional exchange brought change to marriage patterns, ritual associations and seasonal movements (see also Warner 1937; Thomson 1949; Schebeck 1968; Berndt 1977; Keen 1994; McIntosh 2000; Faulkner 2006). Relations with the Macassans were amiable, as they respected Yolŋu rights with regard to land, seas and resources within trading relations (Warner 1937: 458; Thomson 1949: 52). Evidence of Malay burial sites on Murrunga, loan words, places and people’s names (Gawuna (Mu 39) indicate reciprocal relations with the Yan-nhaŋu and other Yolŋu (see also Warner 1937: 456 469; Berndt and Berndt 1954; McKnight 1976; McIntosh 1994, 2000).

Since Tasmans’ naming of the Crocodile Islands in 1644 (Robert 1973:175), a great number of other visitors have mapped this coastline (for example, Flinders 1814; King 1827; Cadell 1868; Brown 1908; Jensen 1914; and more recently nautical maps by the Australian Hydrographic Service, Royal Australian Navy Survey Corps 1995). Their camp sites can still be seen on the islands. Despite the production of numerous maps of this region, the intricate hydrology and ancestral geography remain unknown to all but the Yan-nhaŋu.

In the late 1880s until 1908 a number of pastoral ventures were attempted on the mainland adjacent to the islands, at the cost of many Yolŋu lives. The Macassans ceased to come after 1907, replaced by Japanese and then by European trepangers until the late 1930s (Cole 1979: 58). Tensions existed with the newcomers, but Yan-nhaŋu people I spoke with counted themselves to have had the better part of the exchange (cf. Warner 1937: 459). Nevertheless, Yan-nhaŋu people were unable to stop these interlopers exploiting their sacred sites.

The era of protectionist policy started in 1911 with the Commonwealth Aboriginal Ordinance Act, creating reserves and missions. From a State perspective the missions became the ‘key instruments’ of assimilation policy (Tatz 1964: 18), as smoothing the dying pillow required sedentarisaton in missions. In 1920 the Reverend James Watson visited Murrunga and Milingimbi, and chose Galiwin’ku as the site for the new mission but abandoned it after conflict with lessees Naphtha Petroleum 1921–1926, who found no oil at Galiwin’ku (Cole 1979: 165). The mission site at Milingimbi was
leased to the church by the State on 1 June 1921 without acknowledgement or mention of the landowners (NTRS 473: 1 ML 12).

In 1923 Reverend James Watson, the first missionary, describes Milingimbi as an ‘emerald jewel in a sapphire sea’ (Mackenzie 1976: 28). In contrast, four years later the second missionary, Theodore T. Webb, described his sense of a contradictory experience in: ‘primeval mud, swarming with crocodiles . . . depressing, beyond all description!’ (Webb 1927: 43 cited in McKenzie 1976: 34). For the Yan-nhaŋu a far more profound contradiction was evolving at the mission dividing them and in-migrating kin from the east. Violent conflicts erupted in the context of hitherto unheard of permanent in-migration and settlement on their island under the auspices of State policies of sendentenerisation. As the State had sought to bring nomads to missions in order to control them with meagre resources and with less regard for the consequences wrought in peoples lives.

The mission and its resources fuelled pre-existing competition among local and distant Yolŋu. Keen describes the historical struggle exacerbated by the mission:

In the recent post-colonial past, conflict among men over the control of country and its resources was probably linked mainly to competition over women and the control of ceremonies … both of which were major resources, especially for men. However, new resources such as the appearance of mission stations … introduced new reasons for competition (Keen 1994: 125).

By the mid 1920s the leaders of large groups with estates in the Buckingham Bay area to the east of Yan-nhaŋu country began to assert their control over mission affairs and ceremonial practices such as those exemplified by the eastern cast of the Yirritja and Dhuwa Njarr ceremony described in the era of Warner’s (1937) 1926-9 research and later Berndt (1951, 1954, 1976a). Ensuing ceremonial alliances advanced eastern connubial, demographic and economic circumstances, promoting their greater influence over a burgeoning Yolŋu public political domain. This public Yolŋu domain and it developing discourse is itself an outcome of the emerging community polity, and provides a critical arena for ongoing contestation of community affairs into the

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Prior to the mission, local and subregional ceremonial and connubial relations were relatively confined to topographical regions (Peterson 1976; White 1976, 1997). Pre-mission connubial relations in the Castlereagh Bay area focused on more westerly relations for wives, whereas the marriages of eastern groups reflected an eastward connubial focus (Keen 1978: 99–145; Shapiro 1981: 132; Rudder 1993: 195) (see Appendix three).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

present. Concurrently, some eastern male leaders consolidated their roles as information brokers and translators, in which they interpreted the affairs of this growing Yolŋu polity for Europeans.

An example of the influence wielded by such brokerage can be seen in the 1926 case of anthropologist Lloyd Warner. Warner was adopted and inducted into the Milingimbi milieu by eastern male leader Harry Makarrwala (Wangurri, Dhaŋu). Under Harry’s tutelage Warner focuses his fieldwork on the eastern Yolŋu (Murngin) and in particular the perspectives of the Yirritja group Wangurri from the east side of Arnhem Bay. Consequently the Yan-nhaŋu land owners are mentioned only seven times and their perspectives omitted from his text. Coincidentally, J. W. Bleakely visited the Northern Territory to conduct an inquiry into the condition of Aboriginals on the missions and the Northern Territory as a whole. He found in favour of the segregation of Arnhem Land Aborigines and the Arnhem Land reserve was gazetted on 16 April 1931. One of the many profound implications of this separation was a continuing and unchallenged notion by Yolŋu people of their sovereignty over their sacred sites and a sense of living in ‘two worlds’ that continues to shape broader Yolŋu views (F. Morphy 2008). As a consequence a more durable and impermeable separation between the Yolŋu and European domains improved the scope and efficacy of intercultural brokerage roles.

The motivation for hostilities between Yan-nhaŋu and kin from eastern groups is felt in the close and sustained residential proximity of those with intergenerational scores to settle at the Milingimbi mission produced a long period of violent revenge and sorcery. Theodore Webb remarked on the warlike demeanour of Dhuwal, Dhuwala, Djanu and Dhanu speaking peoples coming to the Milingimbi mission throughout the period (Webb: 1929). Donald Thomson described ‘intense and bitter rivalry’ between groups (Thomson 1949: 5; see also Flinders 1814: 198; Berndt and Berndt 1954; McKnight 1976; Williams 1986: 75, 143). Yan-nhaŋu resistance to the westerly migration during the period lead to the death of many senior Yan-nhaŋu men, which

25 Northeast Arnhem Land reserve was declared after recommendations by Baldwin Spencer (1913) and Bleakely (1929). The reserve may have bolstered continuity of a notional ‘two world’ separation in the minds of Yolŋu between themselves and that of the Methodist Overseas Mission staff (Tatz 1964: 18; Dewar 1992: 3; Morphy 2008: 119).
26 Keen (1994) reports that the Gupapuyngu (‘Gobagoing’) faction in the report Milingimbi F1 1949, 1953/266 was predominantly speakers of Dhuwal, Dhuwala and Djanu, belonging to groups such as the Daygururr Gupapuyngu, Djambarpuuyngu, and Wangurri (Keen 1994: 26).
deeply affected the interpretation and practice of ritual, of economic opportunity and connubial rights within the newly formed community.

In January 1932 a powerful cyclone recorded as far away as Darwin (Bureau of Meteorology Tropical Weather Services 2009) destroyed the expansive Gadatha estuary at Murrunga (Mu 45). This storm was said to be the work of Yan-nhaŋu sorcery. Months later Kakarralili (Yakarakalil), one of the last senior traditional owners of Milingimbi (Kokariar Walamangu Yan-nhaŋu group), was speared to death at the place Bulmatjirra (M 10) on Milingimbi Island (McKenzie 1976: 63) (see Appendix seven Map 28 and Map 30). Conflicts arising over ongoing revenge and sorcery were constant throughout the period. At this time the eastern leader Harry Makarrwala is recorded describing his efforts to resolve conflicts with people from the west (warnba), promoting himself as an excellent mediator and exemplifying his role as a broker (McKenzie 1976: 63).

Harry cleverly adopted all the missionaries that came to Milingimbi, thereby extending his influence in group centric competition, by way of his personal links to the church staff and his role as translator. Harry was ‘family’ to Harold Shepherdson, Wells, Webb and Guy.27 Edgar Wells’s wife describes him as ‘the Nurudawalangu [Nurrudawalangu], the headman for the whole area . . . treated as an equal by white scientists and educated men, and had been mentioned in books both learned and unlearned’ (Wells 1963: 45). As Keen (2004) points out, ‘Warner’s monograph relies heavily on information’ from Makarrwala (Keen 2004: 14). Makarrwala’s influence over the writing of the period stems from his prolific and effective translations critical to the way in which Yolŋu affairs were understood. He worked as a court translator at the trial of Tukiar (Dakiyarr) in the Darwin Supreme Court (Egan 1996), and for patrol officers Sweeney (NTRS 226, TS 337) and Kyle-Little (NTRS 226 TS 260), archaeologists McCarthy and Setzler (1960), the journalist Marshal (1948), and many more. Makarrwala’s dominant voice as an eastern male leader provides an object lesson in the mechanisms enhancing the omission of Yan-nhaŋu interests in the received histories of the period.

27 Harry Makarrwala (Magarawala, Wangurri, Dhaŋu), leader of the Wangurri of Dhalingbuy 150 km east of Milingimbi, was Warner’s chief informant (Warner 1937: 40). He interpreted for numerous writers (Marshal 1948; Berndt 1954, 1976; McCarthy and Setzler 1960; Wells 1963; Hautian 1971; McKenzie 1976). He is recalled by some Yolŋu as the ‘first Aboriginal missionary’ (Keen 2004: 14).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

At Milingimbi the Yolŋu children born on the island became attached to the places of the Yan-nhaŋu through the ideology of spirit conception. Here they grew up speaking an eastern Dhuwall/Dhuwala language and experienced a new suite of mythic interpretations, ritual forms, and views of local history. In the context of the new community they 'acquired a habitus somewhat different from that of their parents' (Keen 1994: 27). The emerging Yolŋu polity produced public views on community events which reflected alliances formed during this early mission period between eastern groups. The Yolŋu mission community engendered a public discourse about mission life and received views about local 'histories' that reflected eastern alliances, and that are recorded in the mission histories.

In 1936 the Reverend Harold Shepherdson, aka Sheppy, launched his first plane from the salt flat called Gurruwa (M 59) and ushered in an era of aviation in this part of northeast Arnhem Land. Aircraft were to become a crucial form of transport to the missions and later communities on the Yan-nhaŋu islands and throughout the region. In 1937 Thomson recorded ritual and hunting at Murrunga Island at Gadjatha (Mu 45) (see Chapter four, and Plate 11 and 12, and Map 34). He reports having seen 'some 70 vessels ... off Moorroonga ... the crews of these vessels had gone to great lengths to ingratiate themselves with the natives and had given them presents of cloth, knives, axes, mirrors and tobacco out of all proportion to the services rendered' (Thomson 1942: 10). For many years the Crocodile Islands continued to be a focus for European and Japanese marine resource exploitation.

Also in 1937 the crew of the patrol boat Larrakiya incarcerated a number of Japanese trepang fishermen on the 'island of Korewa' (Guriba, North east Crocodile Island Appendix eight Map 30) (Haultain 1971: 201). Soon after, with the coming of war from the north, the Australian army installed an observation post and short wave radio transceiver at the site called Gininyguarra (G 5) on this most remote of the Crocodile Islands. This tiny Yan-nhaŋu island was among the first place in Australia to be bombed in the War.

On 19 February 1942 Gurriba was bombed by the Japanese on their way to Darwin. People living on Murrunga at the time report that planes flew over in the morning. One man reported 'They were like a cloud of giant bats'. That year Donald Thomson returned to Milingimbi to start the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit (Thomson 1942). Yolŋu men were provided with spear iron and given orders to
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

capture or kill Japanese servicemen, ironically a crime for which Yolŋu had been incarcerated some ten years earlier (Thomson 1942: 14).

On 20 April 1943 two Hudson bombers collided mid-air over Rabuma Island (Appendix eight Map 30), killing flight lieutenant Gove and 24 other airmen. On 9 May 1943 Milingimbi again was bombed, injuring 10 service personnel and killing one Yolŋu man (Gulmata, Liyagawumirr, Dhuwalmirr). The next day a second air raid sank the Maroubra (30 tons) at Rapuma. The final Japanese raid on Milingimbi occurred on the 28th of May.28

Also in 1943 Reverend Harold Shepherdson (Baːpa Sheppy) returned to Galiwin’ku to start a mission, accompanied by a coterie of eastern male leaders including Makarrwala’s brother Badaŋa (Wangurri, Dhaŋu) and Willy Walalipa (Golumala, Dhaŋu) (Berndt 1962: 34; Shepherdson 1980, 1981).29 Golwa, the Malarra/Gunbirritji estate owner of Galiwin’ku, then living at Dayirri Creek (Gal 48), gave permission to Badaŋa and Walalipa to build a mission on his land. The core of families populating the new mission at Galiwin’ku were drawn from eastern groups, transporting a very particular view of mission affairs and social relations reflecting those established at Milingimbi in the preceding decades, and foreshadowing later community arrangements.

In 1950 the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the education of ‘full blood’ Aboriginal children and in 1952 Beulah Lowe started teaching at Milingimbi and recording the Gupapuyŋu language (Cole 1979: 164). In 1957 many Yirritja Yanṉhaŋu people are recorded at the newly gazetted Maningrida settlement (Milliken 1970). At Galiwin’ku Yirritja male leaders, drawn from the first arrivals (see beginning this Chapter two), came to dominate the political affairs of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku. McIntosh declares that from the ‘1950s through to the 1980s Yirritja leaders governed in their own right . . . as “big men” and emerged to mediate

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29 Berndt (1962) writes, ‘the nominally paramount leader (at Elcho), however, is Badanga (Wonguri mada, Mandjigai mala Yirritja) . . . He is also titular ceremonial leader of the mandjiagi Wonguri (at Arnhem Bay) and has assumed similar authority over ceremonies, ritual and ranga . . . . His present-day role is to, apart from those referred to here, act as “headman” for the Elcho Island people, and serve as spokesman and liaison officer between them and the mission . . . . as interpreter between missionary and congregation. Another leader is Willy Wolili, or Jibidi (Walalipa) . . . of all those associated with the movement he is perhaps the most sophisticated’ (Berndt 1962: 34–5). The force of Wally Walalipa’s (Golumala, Dhaŋu) brokerage is still felt powerfully at Galiwin’ku today (see Rudder 1993: 223, 229).
relations between Aboriginal groups and relations among Aborigines and non-Aborigines’ (McIntosh 2000: 62).

In 1957 Badaŋa, Harry Makarrwala’s brother, attempted to lead Yolŋu at Galiwin’ku into a unified group under Christianity through what Berndt (1962) described as an ‘Adjustment Movement’ (Berndt 1962: 41; Borsboom 1992: 16; McIntosh 2000: 69). Berndt (1962) explained the ‘Adjustment Movement’ as the ‘problem of adjusting or bringing together traditional Aboriginals and introduced ways to achieve maximum benefit’ (Berndt 1962: 39). During this period the public display of highly restricted maŋayin, under the Christian cross, reflected the profound influence of both the mission and the Yirritja leaders over the conduct of public affairs and the restricted knowledge of the Yolŋu domain.

In 1966 the Milingimbi Community Education Centre came under government control. Improved shipping and airlines services supported a burgeoning intercultural domain as increasing numbers of researchers and other interested parties flocked to growing Arnhem Land communities (McKenzie: 167-180). In this same period Ian McIntosh (2000) remarks on the monopolising of leading community positions by members of eastern groups with ringitj rights at Galiwin’ku (2000: 70; see also Rudder 1993: 223, 229). In 1968 Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella) became, after a false start, an outpost and homeland for some of Galiwin’ku’s groups from the east.

In the 1970s Yan-nhaŋu people at Murrungga and Rapuma who had anticipated the homelands movement started to make more permanent-style residences on their islands. In 1974 the homelands movement supported by the policies of the Whitlam Government provided supplies and two houses at Murrungga Island. At Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku eastern groups emphasised claims of guardianship and misrepresented as ‘landowners’ to new non-Indigenous staff in the wake of the withdrawal of the missions and newly arrived instruments of Self Determination. In 1975 Shepherdson College at Galiwin’ku was formally handed over to Yolŋu people. The councils were incorporated as a half century of mission life came to a close.

The inception of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) and the requirement for ‘primary spiritual affiliation’ to prove landownership under the act provided the opportunity for Yan-nhaŋu to re-assert their ancestral links to maŋayin and sites on their Galiwinku and Milingimbi estates. This opportunity had not arisen
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

before and remained largely dormant. Despite opportunities for ownership of sites on land, ALRA failed to adequately provide protection for sea country, handing responsibility to the new Northern Territory Government. The Northern Territory Government had its own complementary and ultimately inadequate legislation for recognising sea tenure. In 1978 the government of the Northern Territory began self-government and exhibited antagonism to land and sea rights up until Blue Mud Bay 2008. It was not until 2008 with the success of the Blue Mud Bay Native Title Claim that marine resource ownership by coastal aboriginal people was recognised by the State.

In 1981 legislation complementary to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth), section 73(1)(d), that allowed for sea closures under section 12(1) of the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978*, was enacted in the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay. Later, in 1988, the Howard Island applications for closure of the seas were successful (Keen 1980, 1985; Peterson 1998). The significance of the moment arises from the fact that Yan-nhaŋu people recognise the import of representing their own interests to the State as a result of this process. These sea closures offered limited protection to Yan-nhaŋu, favouring existent fishing interests. But the claim process was brokered largely by mainland Yolŋu, and heard evidence from only two Yan-nhaŋu: Michael Marragalbiyana (Gamalanŋa, Yan-nhaŋu) and Roy Rewa (Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) (Toohey 1981: 35). The Aboriginal Land Commissioner deemed it unnecessary to carry out ‘detailed anthropological field work’ (Toohey 1981: 30). The opportunity for Yan-nhaŋu to represent their estates, difference, ownership, and interests collapsed into an undifferentiated Indigenous collectivity. This is a crucial moment for a self reflexive Yan-nhaŋu recognition of the need to represent themselves and their estates to State powers.

A number of conditions linked to the changing social and economic circumstances of the ex-mission communities foster increasing complexity for Yan-nhaŋu attempts to gain control over the resources of their estates at this time. The preceding decline in population linked to violent conflict and the success of large incoming eastern Yolŋu clans meant relatively small group size. Competition over mission resources increased as foraging declined around the mission increasing pressures between land owners and others. Negotiations over the identity of land owners were problematised in light of the proliferation of attachment to country in the vicinity of the mission through the
convention of spirit conception. This claim to spirit conception gave people other than those from land owner group’s sound footing upon which to claim spiritual connection to country. The sustained residence on Yan-nhaŋu estates and the rise of large eastern groups in control of the ritual domain have all converged to destabilise the unequivocal assertion of the identities of the estates at which both the missions were sighted. Never-the-less Yan-nhaŋu have continued to struggle.

In 1993 the first Yan-nhaŋu English Dictionary (Word list English/Gupapuyŋu/Yan-nhaŋu) was produced at Milingimbi by Rita Gularbaŋa (Gamalaŋga Yan-nhaŋu) and fuelled interest in recording the Yan-nhaŋu language. In 1994, under the guidance of senior Yan-nhaŋu people, I started the Yan-nhaŋu dictionary project. Yan-nhaŋu people I spoke with were concerned to raise awareness of their distinct historic, economic, social and linguistic rights. This desire has prompted a number of projects, preschool language Yan-nhaŋu ‘nests’, recording Yan-nhaŋu ecological knowledge and incorporating Yan-nhaŋu languages into the curriculum at Murrunga School. This project ceased with the closure of the Milingimbi Bilingual Resources Development Unit in 1995 (Bowern and James 2005: 3). Teaching in Yan-nhaŋu continued intermittently up until 2001 and despite these setbacks in 2003 the Yan-nhaŋu Dictionary was published.

In 2004 preliminary negotiations for land use agreements (LUAs) at Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku led to an acknowledgement by the State of Yan-nhaŋu ownership of maŋayin and estates. This recognition had a ripple effect in the discourse of the Yolŋu public political domain as incumbent leaders scrambled to re-ally themselves with the Yan-nhaŋu Malarra/Gunbirrijiti landowners. ALRA requires proponents wishing to secure an interest in land to negotiate with traditional owners possessing ‘primary spiritual affiliation’ according to Yolŋu religious orthodoxy (maŋayin) to the sites on which the ex-mission townships stand. Recognition of Yan-nhaŋu rights heralded a new level of control over representations of their ancestral sites in negotiations, with Yolŋu resident on their land, and with the State. This legally recognised right began to reformulate alliances with affected resident groups discernable today in local Yolŋu discourse.

For the Yan-nhaŋu efforts to counter marginalisation and promote equity are part of an attempt to find an equitable solution to continuing colonisation of their sites and life space by the State. The conscious attempt to preserve and improve cultural, linguistic
and biological diversity on the islands as a basis for sustainable outcomes is resonating with some aspects of the State vision of ‘economic’ development. These measures were cut short with the 2007 NTER intervention. Under the intervention the seizure of Aboriginal land on prescribed townships of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku became sites of intense colonial struggle between State, Yan-nhaŋu and affected Yolŋu kin. The State pressured landowners to cede their title, changing the power of negotiation and alliance between landowners and affected groups, therefore introducing enormous uncertainty about the future for Yan-nhaŋu people.

This brief timeline has attempted to bring into chronological relationships some of the distinctive events in a previously hidden Yan-nhaŋu history. This timeline forms a context for describing in detail three significant periods that circumscribe the post mission history of the Yan-nhaŋu: the Milingimbi period, the Galiwin’ku period, and the post-ALRA period. The formation of the two missions one at Milingimbi and a second at Galiwinku set the scene for the the third period of negotiation between Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu with the State. In light of changing State policies and the economic and social circumstances of the ex-mission communites we can see the context for relationships between and among Yolŋu, and Yan-nhaŋu groups over time and how report of these relations are fashioned in oral and written histories. And more recently the effect of the ALRA requirement to negotiate with traditional owners possessing ‘primary spiritual affiliation’ according to Yolŋu religious orthodoxy (maḏayin) before the complication of the 2007 NTER. Before considering in more detail these three converging historical periods I wish to highlight three crucial analytical concepts.

**Brokering the Yolŋu domain, misrecognition and the politics of succession**

The level to which the Yan-nhaŋu have been obscured by history has in large degree been shaped by the circumstances of Yolŋu socio-linguistic domain separation. This Yolŋu domain includes a restricted domain inimical to the public diffusion of secret knowledge, a separation that has suppressed Yan-nhaŋu ability to represent the underlying identity of their estates in the discourse of a Yolŋu public domain. A discourse in which restricted information has been consistently brokered by eastern leaders. A second important dimension is the role of obliqueness and ambiguity common to Yolŋu communication styles helping to foster misrepresentation of Yan-nhaŋu interests at a number of levels. Third, the changing contexts surrounding the
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

politics of succession and stories of extinction, *ringitj* rights, and the extension of eastern group religious identities in the public discourse and ritual sphere.

In 1970, Harris (1990), a teacher at Milingimbi proposed the notion of separate domains in an effort to explain discontinuities in discursive practices between Yolŋu and Europeans in a ‘Yolŋu domain’ of distinct practices of referring to the world through language: ‘[it] has connotations of content, physical space and the way things are done’ (Harris 1990: 14). This Yolŋu domain ‘operates “after hours” and on weekends. Here the vernacular is always spoken, all the time; the Aboriginal worldview and priorities reign, and those of the other domain are virtually non-existent’ (Harris 1980: 132; see also Sutton 1990: 59; Trigger 1992) and acknowledge a high degree of separation from the non-Indigenous domain.\(^{30}\)

Yolŋu themselves continue to espouse the usefulness of this ‘two worlds’ view in describing the nature of intercultural engagement (Morphy 2008: 121). Domain separation was a common feature of early missions in which distinct domains of linguistic and social action remained mutually unintelligible. Persistent monolingualism among missionaries buttressed this separation (McKenzie 1976: 99). Yolŋu intercultural brokers skilfully policed and negotiated this boundary translating the Yolŋu sphere for Europeans, and maintaining separation, ambiguity and misrepresentation for advantage. Yolŋu male leaders from eastern groups in brokerage roles translated the minutiae of Yolŋu affairs to the missionaries, thereby gaining a significant level of control over the growing public Yolŋu political discourse and power linked to the Christian mission.

The Yolŋu domain is divided into two distinctly separate parts, ‘open’ and ‘secret’. The restricted or secret domain of the *madayin* is characterised by Yolŋu as the ‘inside’ (*djinaga*) or the Yan-nhaŋu expression ‘through the ground’ (*dumimurru*). This is distinct from the ‘outside’ (*waragul*), or public stories called ‘on top’ (*gankiya*), existing in the public Yolŋu political domain. The ‘inside’ contains stories warranting the ancestral identity of a group’s land and *madayin*. These sacred stories (*dhuyu*) are known (with authorisation) by the most senior men (see Berndt 1954; Keen 1978; 1994, Morphy 1984). Knowledge of the underlying identity of an estate, signified by the possession of *madayin*, is restricted. The restricted nature of such

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\(^{30}\) Recent theorisation of this intercultural zone growing out of the work of Merlan (1998) tend to overlook the particularities of Yolŋu construction (cf. Morphy 2009).
information makes ‘inside’ knowledge unavailable to counter misrepresentations in the open (gankiya) public assertion of succession claims. This information has been brokered by leaders of the large eastern groups that came to the mission.

Two aspects of the growing public Yolŋu domain (gankiya) become increasingly recognisable. One, an escalating State and administrative engagement bolsters the rise of the secular domain; two, a burgeoning Yolŋu Christian movement after 1942 at Galiwinku, creates three major spheres of interest. These arenas of customary, Christian and secular interest are again brokered by eastern leaders and their authority recognised by Yolŋu. For example, McIntosh (1997) quotes Burramarra (Warramirri, Djaŋu) saying ‘in discussion with Elcho Islanders’ clarification may be sought to find out what level one is speaking on. ‘It might be on the ‘government line’, the ‘mission line’, or the ‘Yolŋu line’” (McIntosh 1997: 284-5). Despite the customary divide of ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ matters, descendent of eastern group leaders come to dominate all aspects of the customary, Christian and secular affairs of Galiwin’ku township. Yolŋu male Christian leaders retain secular administrative links with the State and a strong influence over the public Yolŋu political discourse, giving them unprecedented power to represent the Galiwin’ku estate and its resources.

Styles of obliqueness characteristic of the shifting identities employed in Yolŋu interpersonal interactions promote indistinctness of identification, a key tool for maintaining power and ideological control. Keen (1994) writes ‘modalities of obliqueness and deceit were pervasive features of Yolŋu social interaction’. He invokes Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘misrecognition’ (meconsaissance) as a general condition, ‘not so much intentional deceit as a pervasive failure to make motives and conditions explicit: such as self interest ... and the arbitrary nature of an ideology justifying domination’ (Keen 1994: 20). Obliqueness is characteristic in conversations with senior men about restricted matters with anthropologists. For example, claims of Yan-nhanju extinction have been enabled by this ambiguity. Ambiguity and misrecognition in the context of the mission and Yolŋu commentary on its internal affairs has also contributed to Yan-nhanju invisibility in published accounts of mission life (see Warner 1930, 1937; Webb 1933; Berndt 1952, 1954, 1962; Shapiro 1979, 1980; Bos 1988; Rudder 1977, 1993; Tamasari 1998, 2002; McIntosh 2000, 2006; Magowan 2001).
Claims to succession of the estate of an extinct group is based on the possession of shared *maidayin*. Succession claims contested by groups standing in the relations of grandparent to grandchild *ma:ri-gutharra* (MM-wDC) or sisters reciprocal *yapa* (Z) are often referred to as *ringitj or ringitjmirr* (see Peterson 1971: 229; Keen 1978: 116; 1994: 312; Williams 1986: 79, 88). Typically contested in the *gankiya* public domain, these *ringitj* groups assert links to the underlying identity (*luku*) of a place, through closeness of shared *maidayin* links to the place, in the form of public stories. Keen (1994) shows that these stories bear a great similarity or ‘family resemblances’ across groups, thus:

A of the dying group asked B to look after country C, B looks after C because B or B’s father was born on/lived at/died at C; A and B were in a relation of *ma:ri-gutharra* (MM-wDC), were sister groups, or had the same *maidayin* (Keen 1994: 129).

What is important is that ‘a community should publicly subscribe to the truth of a story, willingly or unwillingly, and allow the claim which the story justifies’ (Keen 1978: 56). The reliability of such claims, contested in the *gankiya* public political domain of the post-mission polity may obfuscate or misrepresent underlying ancestral links. That is, by deploying obliqueness and ambiguity common in Yolŋu communication styles, senior men and brokers may obfuscate about the underlying identity of an estate *luku* in the public sphere. Many such claims and public stories propounded by senior men and all exhibiting such family resemblance are in daily use at Milingimbi and at Galiwin’ku. Misrepresentation is a powerful tool for the control of public ideologies and the shaping of a received version of history.

Before turning to review the history of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku Mission and the implications of domain separation, brokerage, obliqueness and succession on the marginalisation of the Yan-nhaŋu, it is useful to identify the major Yolŋu groups involved. This is especially the case as many of these groups continue to play major roles in the contemporary public and restricted Yolŋu, church and secular arenas of community. Table 3 identifies the six *Yirritja* and *Dhuwa* Yan-nhaŋu groups of the Crocodile Islands followed by the six main eastern Yolŋu groups implicated in this story.
Table 3 Yan-nhaŋu and eastern Yolŋu groups and languages

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<td>Golumala</td>
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The *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* moiety groups speaking (or affiliated to) *Dhuwala, Dhuwal, Djaŋu* and *Dhaŋu* languages presented here are but a few of many such groups speaking these languages, with estates to the east of Galiwin’ku and the Crocodile Islands. The remainder of the discussion focuses on those groups that migrated to Milingimbi, starting in 1922 (Webb 1933; Warner 1937; Thomson 1949; McKenzie 1976).

**The Milingimbi period**

Conflict loomed large in the lives of the people of the Crocodile Islands in the 1920s. By all accounts everyday life at Milingimbi was a bloody affair. The missionary Webb (1938) writes that, ‘[F]ighting and brawling were of almost daily occurrence and altogether a state of chaos and utter futility existed’ (1938: 19). Warner (1937) describes in detail six kinds of armed conflict contending that warfare was one of the most important social activities of the Murngin (Yolŋu) and surrounding ‘tribes’
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

(Warner 1937: 144, 487; Shepherdson 1981; Keen 1978, 1994). The presence and circumstances of the mission seem to have contributed to the Yolŋu reputation for a warlike demeanour and ‘intense and bitter rivalry’ (Thomson 1949: 5) (see also Berndt and Berndt 1954; McKnight1976; McIntosh 2000: 6). At first glance it seems unusual that permanent eastern in-migration was not identified as the cause of mission violence. Opposition by the Yan-nhaŋu to permanent in-migration precipitated decades of conflict and sorcery. Characteristically, identification of the protagonists remained vague and indistinct until at least the 1970s (Keen 1978).

Harry Makarrwala, until his death in the 1950s, was chief interpreter of everyday events to the missionaries and others. Shepherdson (1981) after fifty years at the mission says, ‘in order to communicate with the Aborigines we relied solely on Harry’ (1981: 82; see also McIntosh 1994: 23). Harry, leader of the powerful in-migrating group, the Wangurri, told the missionaries that people from the west (warnba) were the reason behind the vexatious and near-continuous fighting. The Reverend T. T. Webb, classificatory brother of Harry, had tended to under-represent violence at the mission in his reports to minimise the risk of more brutal state intervention (Keen 1994: 26). Feuding inside the mission continued around issues important to Yolŋu: disagreements over religious orthodoxy, economic rights, access and control of ritual and connubia (see also Berndt 1964: 265; Berndt and Berndt 1977: 95; Hiatt 1984; Williams 1986: 18).

References to internecine fighting typically depict aggressive ‘western tribes’ (Webb 1933), whereas in-migration of eastern groups goes unremarked. The following report by Webb is typical of the misrecognition of Milingimbi ‘natives’ (Yan-nhaŋu):

The Milingimbi natives are a distinct type, coming from the Liverpool River on the one side and as far as the English Company and Wessel Islands on the other. They do not mix unrestrainedly with the neighbouring natives. A general improvement is reported as apparent amongst those who have become attached to the mission. They are becoming more orderly in their conduct (Webb 1929: 22).

Conflicts over economic resources with the Yan-nhaŋu, not from the Liverpool or the Wessels, were amplified in the new conditions of the mission. As a consequence of this violence Yan-nhaŋu sustained considerable fatalities, especially among senior men, and particularly significant in considering their small group size.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

As a result of conflict and decades of sorcery and revenge killings some Yan-nhaŋu people migrated west to live with relatives on the Cape Stuart mainland. People on this western side of the mainland would later (1957) play host to the Maningrida settlement. Other Yan-nhaŋu people withdrew across the deep water and behind a veil of sorcery to the outer islands. As a consequence of the troubles at the mission the Makarrata (conflict resolution) ceremony became an almost daily ritual during the Milingimbi period (see Plate 4; Webb 1933; Warner 1937: 163–4, 478; Sweeny (NTRS, TS 337); Kyle-Little (NTRS, TS 260); Wells 1963: 218; McKenzie 1976: 100; Guy 1991: 55–58; Keen 1994: 26).

Harry and later Djawa (Yirritja Gupapuyŋu, Dhuwala) were in their time the highest authority in the Yolŋu domain (Wells 1963: 43–48; Shepperdson 1981: 82; Keen 1994). Makarrwala and Djawa had immense power as ceremonial leaders, which they enhanced in their secular roles as cultural brokers in exchanges with the missionaries and others. Their power lay firstly in the control over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes), and extended by their control over resources (physical, human, economic), and especially by polygyny (Keen 1980). Consequently, these two Yirritja leaders held considerable sway over the opinions of the missionaries, as their confidants and informants. Secondly their authority over the restricted domain and madayin enhanced their power over the growing secular space of public Yolŋu political domain and opinion within the emerging polity.

Concomitantly a Dhuwał/Dhuwala lingua franca arose as the common language used in the community at the time (Schöbbeck 1968: 57; Devlin 1976; Morphy 1977). Together the common language and complementary secular or public opinion space became linked to the growing population and residence patterns of the mission. - now a common feature of contemporary Aboriginal ‘community life’. This public Yolŋu political discourse on mission affairs may well have reflected, in its content and opinions, the demographic ascendency of Dhuwal/Dhuwala groups and an eastern Yolŋu perspective. This eastern take on history later became a received view prevalent in the public Yolŋu discourse and evident in much of the written history of the mission (Wells 1963: 45; McKenzie 1976: 213; Slotte 1997: 32, 48).

In the beginning Harry, and later Djawa, joined with missionaries to support a call for peace by publicly championing non-violence (Slotte 1997: 32). Both were extolled as peacemakers by missionaries and in the numerous accounts of mission times by
kinsmen depicted as peacemakers (Wells 1963: 45; McKenzie 1976: 213; Slotte 1997: 32, 48). For example, Harry’s role as church ‘peacemaker’ eventuates in his fighting stick becoming embedded in the church logos (coat of arms):

... the official logo of the Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress features a symbolic reference to the peace-making process ... The logo includes a fighting stick to remind people of Harry Makarrwala, the Yolngu ‘head-man’ at Milingimbi mission, who always carried a stick as a sign of peace and reconciliation, especially when intervening in fighting situations (Uniting Church of Australia 1983:12 cited in Slotte 1997).

One may speculate on the truism that says history is written by the victorious. In particular, the level to which Makarrwala was able to conceal his role as a leader in clan-centric competition for ideological and material control over the Yolŋu domain of the Milingimbi mission, in light of his canonisation as a peacemaker. His extraordinary skills of diplomacy were clearly effective in controlling the interpretation of Yolŋu affairs to the missionaries. Harry’s vision, later taken up by his brother Badanja, was to have profound implications felt strongly throughout Yolŋu society today.

With the passing of Makarrwala, another immense character, Djawa, was consulted on all matters relating to the Yolŋu domain (McKenzie 1976). Wells’s wife describes a close relationship with Djawa after Miyangala (Makarrwala) had died and ‘Jawa (Djawa) was the undisputed king of our Yulnu’ (sic) (Wells 1963: 43–48). Slotte (1997), writing about the mission in Arnhem Land, recounts Djawa’s classificatory grandson Jimmy saying of his grandfather:

That is why we had freedom and we survived through the tribal war because our grandfather was a peacemaker. Yo (yes) ... He was a leader for Gupapuyngu and ceremony and line (family) (Slotte 1997: 48).

This Gupapuyngu version refers to another powerful leader, from a slightly later period, but this story resonates with the representation of Harry. The power of these two Yirritja leaders to control the interpretation of their actions and interests shaped the writing of history at Milingimbi (see Wells 1963: 45; McKenzie 1976: 213; Slotte
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

1997: 32, 48). 31 Just as importantly this power was to shape the ideology of the emerging polity and its recital of a received history of events.

The demographic ascendancy of eastern groups during the Milingimbi period was enhanced by improved connubial relations arising from the circumstances of mission residence (Keen 1980). High rates of polygyny combined with the convention of patrilifial recruitment enhanced the rapid growth of some patri-groups, especially in the case where highly polygynous sons followed highly polygynous fathers. On the other hand, other groups declined because of a lack of wives in the competition for connubial resources (Keen 1978, 1980, 2004: 203). Djawa’s FF Ngarritjngarritj bore two sons who between them acquired some 22 wives. Djawa himself had between six and eleven wives (Wells 1963: 208–214). Today this Gupapuyŋu group from Arnhem bay is among the largest Yolŋu groups. Large families provided considerable political and economic advantage in the early mission days and these same families and their large populations remain a key influence in community politics in contemporary times (see Chapter eight).

Webb (1939) laments the persistent monolingualism of the missionaries to the General Secretary of the Mission Board in 1939, ‘Why is it that there is no and never has been a single one of us with a real knowledge of an Aboriginal tongue’ (McKenzie 1976: 99). From the very beginning brokerage by leaders like Harry, of the flow of knowledge about Yolŋu affairs, continued to be a critical factor in the writing of history in northeast Arnhem Land. Yirritja leaders employed styles of obliqueness common to Yolŋu social interaction to ambiguate the identities of those involved in internecine conflicts and obfuscate their involvement. Through their brokerage of these domains they promoted their links to mission resources, power and authority and enhanced their domination over a growing sphere of secular public Yolŋu discourse in the newly emerging polity. So it was that an eastern Yirritja ideology, view of history, interests and social relations shaped in the Milingimbi period was transported to Galiwin’ku in 1942.

Chapter Two: Conflict and change

The Galiwin’ku period

Two characteristic features of the Galwin’ku period converge to eclipse Yan-nhaŋu interests and suppress representation of their possessory rights to the restricted domain. First, the relations and histories consolidated in the old (Milingimbi) mission prolonged Yirritja leaders’ Christian influence and their suasion over community affairs. Second, eastern Dhuwa groups with riŋgiŋji rights in the Malarra/Gunbirritji Yan-nhaŋu estate at Galiwin’ku began to assert a case for succession promoting rumours of their extinction. Particularly, with reference to the deaths of the Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu women Mulupu and Muŋukari, the putative ‘last’ of the Yan-nhaŋu, and therefore widely reported to be extinct (Thomson fieldnotes 1937: file 10; Berndt 1955, 1976b; Davis 1984; Rudder 1993 see beginning quote). A similar and parallel process is at work at Milingimbi during the same period led by Gupapuyŋu leaders. These two features in the changing context of increasing competition for control over resources, religious and secular, in the rapidly modernising Galiwin’ku mission, have sustained misrepresentations in public discourse. This discourse reflecting the received histories of Milingimbi combine to exclude Yan-nhaŋu from the published literature and obstruct benefits owing to landowners under the ALRA.

In 1942 Harold Shepherdson and a number of senior eastern leaders went to Galiwin’ku to start a new mission on land and sea country owned by the Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu group Malarra/Gunbirritji. Zealous Christian converts, Badaŋa, Harry’s brother (Yirritja Wangurri, Dhaŋu) and Walalipa (Dhuwa Golumala, Dhaŋu) were given permission to start the mission on the Galiwin’ku site by senior landowner Golwa, classificatory father of Mulupu and Muŋukarri (Dhuwa Malarra/Gunbirritji, Yan-nhaŋu) as described in the beginning of the chapter. Badaŋa and Walalipa, related to the landowners as ngaŋdi (mother, M) and maŋri (mother’s mother, MM) respectively, had rights in and obligations to their child’s (wC) and/or grandchild’s (wDC) group’s people and country. The extents to which these and other eastern leaders and their descendents have exercised their rights and looked to their obligations in the public domain have shaped the circumstances of the Galiwin’ku period.

Yirritja leaders continued to compete for control over public political discourse of the new mission and continued to interpret aspects of the Yolŋu domain for missionaries and other non-Indigenous commentators throughout the period (see Berndt 1952, 1954,
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

1962; Shapiro 1979, 1980; Bos 1988; Rudder 1977, 1993, 1998, 2002; McIntosh 1994, 2000, 2006). Long-time Galiwin’ku resident Ian McIntosh (2000) reports that during the 1950s and 60s, it was the ‘sole province of Yolŋu of the Yirritja moiety’ to determine ‘policy on relationships with non-aborigines’ (McIntosh 2000: 56). He shows that in the early years the ‘Aboriginal council supporting the missions were led by members of the Yirritja moiety Wangurri and Warramirri clans’ (McIntosh 2000: 46). He alludes to somewhat of a challenge to Yirritja ascendancy becoming apparent from people of the opposite moiety in the late 1960s (McIntosh 2000: 46), a challenge with profound implications for the period.

At Galiwin’ku during this period leaders of Yirritja groups like the Wangurri and Gupapuyngu were denied the power of physical coercion that had marked earlier conflict, coming to rest more heavily on mission authority and as such allying themselves more closely with Christian beliefs. McIntosh suggests that the appeal of Christianity to the mission Yolŋu consisted in its ‘promised relations between balanda and Yolŋu of a spiritual order’ (McIntosh 2000: 93). Together, Christian themes and changing secular circumstances at the mission produced radical transformations in the relationship between Christian belief, a Yolŋu public domain, and the laws of the restricted domain, culminating in what Berndt has described as the ‘Adjustment Movement’ and the extraordinary public exposure of sacred objects (Berndt 1962: 41; Borsboom 1992: 16; Mackintosh 2000: 69).\(^\text{32}\)

Berndt describes the ‘problem of adjusting or bringing together traditional Aboriginal and introduced ways to achieve maximum benefit’ (Berndt 1962: 39). In 1957 Badanja (Wangurri, Dhaŋu) and Burramarra (Warramirri, Djaŋu) undertook with others to redefine Yolŋu conceived as a unified block under Christianity by publicly exposing restricted sacred/religious icons called ranga.\(^\text{33}\) The ranga were displayed under a Christian cross. Badanja says the Christian cross on the ranga represented how ‘he changed himself and he also changed genesis to follow Christian fellowship’ (Berndt 1962: 60). However, this powerfully symbolic and highly political exposure of

\(32\) Berndt (1962 in McIntosh 2004) suggests that Yolŋu were provoked to action by a sense of outrage at the ‘theft’ of their most precious possessions (ranga), a general erosion of sovereign rights, and growing tensions among clans living together (McIntosh 2004: 142).

\(33\) Ranga (rangga), is a restricted word denoting secret ritual objects often made of wood or stone and decorated with sacred designs representing particular ancestral beings and the bu:purra, which have rights over it (see Toner 2001: 71). Zorc describes ranga as a totem-sacred, ceremonial object(s), in Burarra (an-) rangga sacred object (of Mu-dayan rituals) Exp: rangga-yonin – high totem. See also madyeiny (Zorc 1986: 298).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

restricted material in the public domain may also have had at its core more pragmatic aims in response to government policy, and the fulfilment of more material desires.

The Galiwin’ku Adjustment Movement, likened by some to a Melanesian style ‘cargo cult’ (Berndt 1962: 41; Borsboom 1992: 16), attempted a strategic alignment of powerful influences both inside and outside the mission, to attract resources (Berndt 1962). By emphasising unity under Christianity on the one hand, and a rapprochement with the wider society on the other, it was hoped to stimulate in the settler society a desire to provide for growing Yolŋu aspirations (Kolig 1989; Borsboom 1992). The premise that such an alignment might cause resources to appear may have been a misinterpretation about the ability of the Christian god to provide for the people of Galiwin’ku. Christianity, says McIntosh, was presented as a belief transcending all others (McIntosh 2000: 70). In hindsight, the possibility of such a unification of the fractured Galiwin’ku social space, into a pan-Yolŋu identity, and its disparate Yolŋu groups, seems optimistic even for someone with Badaŋa’s power. However, given the history of conflict and tendency for loose temporal alliance within the Yolŋu domain so evident in the Milingimbi period, such reconciliation at this time seems in hind sight very unlikely.

McIntosh relates the enormous dilemma of Yirritja leaders as they tried to balance the spiritual values of Yolŋu religious orthodoxy and the church with the political needs and aspirations of the period (1994: 112). Had it been successful, this ‘adjustment’ may have been a powerful strategy for underwriting a Yirritja groups domination of mission resources, the public Yolŋu domain and State and secular relationships under a pan-Yolŋu flag. As it was, the dynamics of disaggregation and alliance in competition for resources continued to transform Yolŋu social arrangements. The outcomes desired by Badaŋa and others did not eventuate. Deviation is evidenced by some groups that had not displayed restricted madayin in the public memorial (McIntosh 2000: 68). As the excitement faded from public memory and the memorial was forgotten, interest groups in and outside the mission continued to compete for resources. Resident eastern

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34 Berndt (1962) describes three significant ranga (3,4,5) linked to the Galiwin’ku estate [Rangga 3 representing the Malarra/Gunbirirji site Burrar-Gapu Gal 10 see Appendix seven Map 35], in the monument connected to the Djaj’kawu and described by Berndt as affiliated with the ‘Liyagal/wamirr mada, maidjara or majar/majar mala’ (Berndt 1962: 52). He later describes this group as ‘Gunbirir majar/majar mala’ (Appendix B). This single appendicular relegation of the Gunbirir (Malarra/Gunbirirji) to an Appendix at this crucial historical moment is another significant omission of land owner interests.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Dhuwa groups sought to usurp the prerogatives of owners on the Galiwin’ku estate and assert claims of succession.

Succession politics at Galiwin’ku

The deaths of Mułupu and Muñukari in the early 1960s emboldened a rash of succession claims between resident eastern Dhuwa groups. These assertions were vigorously contested between groups related to the Malarrra/Gunbirrirrtji people and their Galiwin’ku estate, in the ma:ri-gutharra (MM-wDC) or yapa (Z) relationship (see Peterson 1971: 229; Keen 1994: 312; Williams 1986: 79, 88), despite the fact that the Yan-nhanu landowners were not extinct. Their virtual absence of residence, an outcome of the Milingimbi period, encouraged groups in ringitj relations to forward claims to succession in the changing social and economic circumstances of the Galiwin’ku community. This lack of residence may also account for a lack of awareness by Yan-nhanu about their mooted extinction. Three significant factors shape succession claims at this time. First is the ranking of the closeness of ringitj, second a public acquiescence to such claims now more frequently negotiated in the public discourse and finally the provisional nature of such agreement promoting contesting views.

Succession is contested among groups called ringitjmirr, in the relationship of grandmother to grandchild (ma:ri-gutharra, MM-wDC) or sister (yapa) and is calculated on the basis of notions of shared ancestral essences. This shared ancestral heritage is signified by the ownership of madayin, which acts like a deed of title that demonstrates ownership rights to places, songs, ritual paraphernalia (including rangga) and names. This supernatural provenance defines and signifies group identity, signified by madayin, as equivalent to a title deed to a group’s estate. Public acquiescence to the truth of a claim about the closeness of a ringitj claim may sanction the enactment of landowner privileges by groups claiming this ringitjmirr status (Keen 1978: 56). Williams (1986) writes that a group may cede rights in an estate exchanging madayin symbolising title within the ritual context, but ‘no absolute right in perpetuity is entailed; the continuance of the grant is always subject to renegotiation’ (Williams 1986: 80).

Pursuant to the need for continued public agreement, such claims to ‘ownership’ or ringitj precipitate perpetual struggles over the social construction of similarity and
difference so thematic to Yolŋu relations, and as such distinguishing one claim from another. At the town site of Galiwin’ku, and areas in and around the community, a number of such claims are in constant negotiation by multiple eastern groups. A powerful engine of constant dissent and contest among individuals and groups is driven by competition for diminishing resources. Golumala, Datiwuy, ɲaymil, Djambarrpuynu, Liyagalawumirr and Galpu groups from the east sustain strident public demonstrations of assertion of their ancestral similarity, closeness of madayin and consequent ringiti rights to sites on the Galiwin’ku estate. The incessant contest with each other for control over public discourse has burgeoned in the absence of senior Yan-nhaŋu men and a negligible resident population. Shapiro (1971) records the relative dearth of Yan-nhaŋu people on their Galiwin’ku estate in the 1970s:

In 1942 the Methodist Church of Australia re-established itself on Elcho ... More than 95 percent of the Aborigines living on Elcho at the time of my arrival (1970) are what Warner (1930, 1937) called ‘Murngin’ ... There were also small numbers of Yarmungu (Warner’s ‘Yaernungo’) ... (Shapiro 1981: 4).

Throughout the development of Galiwin’ku the virtual absence of landowners enhanced conditions for resident groups to assert clan-centric stories. The clamour of claim and counter claim at Galwin’ku has come to characterise public Yolŋu discourse and political expression. Rudder (1993) describes this situation in general terms:

In summation then, the township of Galiwin’ku is a ferment of politics, a continuous scene of claim and counter claim ... Every marriage is considered in terms of advantage and disadvantage. Every funeral is, among other things, a statement of relationships, a leveraging for advantage and an occasion for imposing obligations on others (Rudder 1993: 234).

The clan-centric competition characterised by Rudder in claims by ma:ri-gutharra (MM-wDC) groups has been secured by the demographic success of early mission connubial successes. Demographic superiority for the most part has presented a prevailing basis for influence and control over public affairs or ‘on top’ (gankiya) opinion in regard to such claims. Through out this period public discourse and positions on the council and in administration were monopolised by members of these eastern families (Bos 1988: 257; Rudder 1993: 234; Keen 1994: 282; McIntosh 2000: 70).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

One may well ask at this point what were the senior *djungaya* or ‘managers’ of the Maarrra/Gunburritji doing about these contested succession claims given rights and responsibilities toward their mother’s *madayin* and estates. As mentioned senior *djungaya* were the very Yirritja leaders involved in the ‘Adjustment Movement’. The misrepresentation of historical relations and the extension of ritual ideologies described are key strategies for advancing clan-centric stories in the Galiwin’ku milieu. Stories not recounted in ear shot of the Maarrra/Gunburritji. During the Galiwin’ku period groups in *ringitj* and *djungaya* roles to the Maarrra/Gunburritji estate have increasingly presumed to regard such rights as identical to ownership.

In summary then the Galiwin’ku period started in 1942 with the transportation of incumbent *Yirritja* leaders from Milingimbi. In the struggle between Christian and Yolnu ideologies, mission resources, transformations in a public Yolnu discourse and an ‘Adjustment Movement’ community politicking over resources of the Maarrra/Gunburritji estate increased in intensity. The Galiwin’ku period is also the time at which rumours of Yan-nhanu extinction became evident, ostensibly exacerbated by the death of Mulupa and Munukarri. In the public sphere misrepresentations about the underlying identity of the estate *luku* promotes a rash of succession struggles on the basis of *ringitj*. The public clamour of claims and counter claims and posturing over landowner rights in the absence of Yan-nhanu residents continues to eclipse Yan-nhanu interests well into the post-ALRA decision period and support the usurpation of land owner rights by eastern kin.

The ALRA period

The changes of the ‘Self Determination era’, the withdrawal of the Methodist Overseas Mission and the intervention of the ALRA lead to a late transformation in the status of Yan-nhanu claims in this period. The 1974 retreat of the missions contemporaneous with a broader secular range of engagement with non-Indigenous advisers created new opportunities for alliances for Yolnu people in the public domain at Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku. The following examination continues with a focus on the Galiwin’ku example as it presents an interesting case. Some groups were well positioned to take

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35 *djungaya (djungayi)*, a category of ‘managers’ who have certain rights and responsibilities toward their mother’s *madayin* or *ŋa:muŋu* (ŋa:muŋu/gukulŋuk (mother/child or yothu/yindji, M/C) and the potentially two or more *gukulŋuk pidu* (MMM) and the other is the (wC/ZC) groups with ‘managers’ rights in their mother’s estates.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

advantage of these new conditions publicly claiming ownership of parts of the Galwin’ku estate on the public record.

Two features characterise this post-ALRA decision period. First an initial continuation of the preceding characteristics of the Galwin’ku period is then countered by the second, in the advent of LUAs and the requirement for primary spiritual responsibility under the ALRA. At this time Malarra/Guŋbirritji seek to represent themselves in regard to their estate. Their evidence pertaining to the largely hidden and partly restricted knowledge about the underlying identity luku of their estates became known and began to overturn historical misrepresentations. Before looking at the LUAs that arise from Malarra/Guŋbirritji evidence I will detail one of these continuing ringitj claims over their estate that exemplify the mechanisms deployed by ‘land holders’ to usurp ‘land owner rights’ and overlook Yan-nhaŋu interests in the public discourse at Galiwin’ku.

For the purposes of this historical description the Liyagamurmirr claim to ringitj succession on the Yan-nhaŋu Malarra/Guŋbirritji estate of Galiwin’ku provides a good example of the dynamic negotiation of similarity and difference in the politics of succession. Of crucial importance is the difference between ringitj ‘land holders’ and wanguŋalaŋa watanaŋu ‘land owner rights’. Moreover the Liyagamurmirr claim sheds light on other similar claims of a ‘family resemblance’ also usurping Yan-nhaŋu ‘land owner’ rights prevalent at both Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku. By the 1970s the Liyagamurmirr (Garrawurra) claim was dominant in the public discourse and they were in receipt of benefits owing to landowners.36 The legitimacy of the Liyagamurmirr (Garrawurra) claim is widely subscribed to in the public Yolŋu domain and consequently widely reported in the literature (Thomson fieldnotes 1937: file 10 see also Berndt 1955, 1976b; Davis 1984; Rudder 1993; McIntosh 2000). The public Yolŋu political discourse becoming a key arena for the negotiation of public opinion about community affairs lying over pre-existing relations and the underlying ancestral identity (dhumimurru) of the Galiwin’ku estate.

The Liyagamurmirr claim to ringitj is different in essence to others on the Galiwin’ku estate only in the agreement of the Malarra/Guŋbirritji to its basis in religious

36 Other claims in the changing economic and social circumstances of the Galiwin’ku community by groups with ringitj rights in the maŋi-gurarrara (MM-wDC) relation to the Malarra/Guŋbirritji ie Djambarrpuyulŋu (Dudupu, Nayawili), Golumala, Datuŋu, Namiŋu, Galpu (Djoniŋa, Ganapay) Liyagalawurmirr (Naŋumaŋu) all claiming rights over parts of the Galiwin’ku estate as ‘land owners’ have gained considerable attention in dealings with the State.
orthodoxy madayin, its genuine ancestral ‘closeness’, added to by the fact that it has already been acted on, and receives widespread public subscription to its legitimacy. This ‘closeness’ to the madayin of the Malarra/Guñbirritji, gives the claim legitimacy in all regards. The claim is confined to one rapam (big named place) Dambalanja (Gal 14), linked to the Malarra/Guñbirritji myth of creation of the island, waters and madayin (see Appendix two transcription of the Djam’kawu myth, and Appendix seven Map 35) The Liyagawumirr myth is similar to, but not the same as, the Malarra/Guñbirritji myth. The Yan-nhaŋu wayarr Ganyitiŋu, Wayaŋkama (Guturkuturr) and their brother Rurriya are somtimes refered to as two women spirits (wuymu munkaŋu balay) are different than the two Liyagawumirr Djam’kawu (Barratawuy and Dhalkurrngawuy) that came to the site Dambalanja (Gal 14). Consequently, the Liyagawumirr do not possess all the madayin for the site, but share it with Malarra/Guñbirritji, who also possess all the other madayin for all the other sites on their Galiwin’ku estate.

In order to elucidate the nature of the Liyagawumirr claim I examine and describe the way madayin are deployed to rank closeness in regard to such ringgitj claims. Further, I describe how Liyagawumirr have deployed misrepresentation, extension of their clan identity and ceremonial influence to extend their ringgitj rights to the level of ‘land owner’ status in regard to the Dambalanja (Gal 14) site on the Yan-nhaŋu estate in the public discourse. This description brings together aforementioned key understandings about the wider historical implications of Yolŋu sociolinguistic domain separation and brokerage of the restricted domain by eastern leaders. Aslo it demonstrates how styles of obliqueness and ambiguity converge in the public discourse with the politics of succession, extinction stories, and claims to ringgitj rights to explain the historical omission of Yan-nhaŋu interests. Finally, all is revealed in negotiations over LUAs under the ALRA.

Mythological basis of similarity and difference of madayin

Yan-nhaŋu mythology tells of the ancestor wayarr creating the islands, sea places, people, language and madayin. These wayarr are believed to bequeath ownership and obligations in property and custodianship of these sites and madayin. These possessory rights include the power to grant permission for entry and duty of care in the places or wangaŋala (land/sea country) invested in the people’s ancestors. The ancestors bestowed language (yan), special names (bundhurr), and paintings (mityįji), some of which are
classed as a group’s *madayin*\(^{37}\) (Keen 1978: 41; Williams 1986: 37; Morphy 1984: 17). This abovementioned supernatural provenance defines and signifies group identity. The group’s estate may be signified by *madayin* representing among other things a consubstantial link to the ancestors and title deed to the estate. Some elements of categories of *madayin*, are shared in part with other groups. These shared elements of *madayin* provide an ancestral basis for claims of similarity.

Taking over another group’s land is incompatible with creation ideology but the sharing of *madayin* helps smooth dissonance between reality and ideology (Keen 1978: 69). Ranking of the closeness of groups sharing *madayin*, the *ma:ri-gutharra* relationship and *ringitj* rights in areas of land and sea is determined by recourse to a number of criteria. Most substantial is the significance of shared categories of *madayin*. Knowledge of these links and such associated ranking is the particular concern of senior men and understood to be the ‘business’ of the restricted domain.

Table 4 describes the possession of *madayin* by the Malarra/Gunbirritji and Liyagawumirr (Garrawurra) groups linked to the site Dambalaŋa (Gal 14)(see Appendix seven Map 35). This is the site for which the Liyagawumirr have the strongest claim on Galiwin’ku and which now holds a Liyagawumirr (Garrawurra)-run outstation on the site.\(^{38}\) Table 4 shows ownership of the major categories of *madayin*, and other ancestral bequests, linked to the cosmogonic identity of the site. No restricted information is included.

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37 *Madayin*, sometimes Mardayin means sacred and so may refer to the *Nu:rra* ceremony.

38 Relationships in these *madayin* relate only to this site linked to the Malarra/Gunbirritji Djan'kawu mythology at the outstation created by senior Liyagawumirr (Garrawurra) leaders on the Malarra/Gunbirritji estate. For more detail see Appendix seven Map 35.
### Table 4 Comparison of rights in madayin at Dambalaŋa (Gal 14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of sacred possession</th>
<th>Malarra/Gunbirritji</th>
<th>Liyagawumirr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Luku</td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Bundhurr</td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestors</td>
<td>Wanaŋarr</td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where both groups have possessory rights in the *madayin* they are said to share the item. The ownership of shared *madayin* demonstrates significant *ringitj* rights belonging to the Liyagawumirr in the site Dambalaŋa (Gal 14). These *ringitj* rights, negotiated in the (restricted) ritual domain, and always subject to potential renegotiation, give the Liyagawumirr authority over the caretakership of the Yan-nhaŋu site. The Malarra/Gunbirritji retain the primary spiritual responsibility for this site and all others on their estates at Galiwin’ku (see Appendix six Table 38). So the question is not land ‘ownership’ but the legitimate ‘caretaker’ or ‘land holder’ role of the senior ranked *ringitj* group based on shared ancestral essence. These *ringitj* rights belong to the Liyagawumirr for the site Dambalaŋa (Gal 14). The question then becomes how have ‘land holders’ like the Liyagawumirr usurped the rights of land owners?

Historically, the closeness of Liyagawumirr *madayin* and minimal impediment by small resident Yan-nhaŋu to their claims has promoted their assumption of the prerogatives of landowners. Keen explains the imperative of:

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39 There is some dissention as to whether paintings by Daypurrun Garrawurra are really of the site Birrkbirrkparation (Minbirrkŋur) at Dambalaŋa or Milminydjark representing Garriyak (*Wa:lanjir*) totemic geography and so are an example of partial re-identification (see Rudder 1993).
... being able to act on one's version of ownership; to enact the prerogatives due to a land-holder or dja:gamirr (one who looks after), which include control of access to the land and use of the country, such as to establish an outstation, and performance of the related ceremonies (Keen 1994: 129).

Land 'holder' rights and performance of the related ceremonies, but not necessarily the ownership of important ritual paraphernalia, are the grounds upon which groups have competed in the public sphere for succession rights during the Galiwin'ku period.

In the first part of the ALRA period the discourse of Yolŋu public domain at Galiwin'ku subscribed to the legitimacy of claims by the Liyagawumirr group. The Liyagawumirr have, as have other ringitj groups in the Galiwin'ku milieu, continued to increase the ambit of their claims. Liyagawumirr have deployed the reattribution of Liyagawumirr site names on the Galiwin'ku estate as a strategy to extend their influence and ambiguise the underlying identity of Yan-nhanju sites. I present some examples of this extension of group identity recorded by other researchers as a background to highlight this attempt. In the 1970s Keen (1978) recorded the following Dambugawumirr (Liyagawumirr) story relating to the ancestral creation of the Galiwin'ku estate:

The Dambugawumirr clan version of the story is quite irreconcilable with stories recorded by R.M. Berndt (1976: 152) connected with Elcho Island and the islands to the North east; according to the people of those places – including Gunbirridji – ... Berndt (ibid) has recorded many sites belonging to the Gunbirridji clan and associated specifically with the Dja'kawu ... as often as not nowadays the Dambugawumirr refer to the Gunbirritji clan countries as their own (Keen 1978: 76).

The Liyagawumirr account of control over madayin granted in ringitj has been extended to authority over sites. Keen (1994) writes that the 'Cloudy Water [Liyagawumirr] story seems to be intended to ratify a claim on the part of Warduuma and his lineage to that part of Galiwinku' (Keen 1994: 53).

Rudder (1993) in the 1980s collected the following version of Liyagawumirr assertions of ownership over sites and madayin that clearly show attempts to merge the identity

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( Dambugawumirr, Garrawurra and Cloudy Water are pseudonyms for the Liyagawumirr group.)
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

of Liyagumirr ancestors with those of the Yan-nhaŋu Gunjbirritji/Malarra. In addition, this story asserts a partial re-identification of site names thus:

Djilipa and Bunbatjum said that: The local two (Gunjbirri) gave to Djan’kawu (their ma:ri [M.M.B.J] saying, ‘I give authority and responsibility to you, manikay’ (songs), madayin (sacred things), land’. They gave the springs of gapu (water) and names of places. The Djang’kawu were Liya-gawumirr when they came here so now all is Liya-gawumirr. They identified with Liya-gawumirr... All the secrets from Garriyaknurr [Liya-gawumirr clan homeland centre] bathi (sacred basket), ɲanyباك (ceremonial armbands), and yakumirriyaŋal (putting of names), all the named places at Dhambalajur, were given by Djan’kawu. The names came from Garriyaknurr to here. Walinydjunajur (Walinyuna) is the name of a place there and here (Rudder 1993: 213, my emphasis).

This story merges distinct mythologies in order to promote the appearance of ancestral similarity and extend grounds for Liyagumirr control over the estate and its resources with the assertion ‘so now all is Liya-gawumirr’ (Rudder 1993: 213). He then goes on to say ‘Local (Elcho) tradition has it that the area is really Gunjbirritji country, but they arranged for the Liya-gawumirr to take over responsibility for it’ (Rudder 1993: 217-8). Another example, translated by Rudder, of the merging of distinct mythologies to promote similarity with a different kind of ambiguity, this time collapsing mythologies and histories on the Galiwin’ku estate:

The Djang’kawu came in a canoe called Guluwurrur. They were Dhalkurrngawuy and Barratalay who came in the canoe, but also there were those two here, Gudurrukuturr and Ganyitingu. He said of these latter, ‘Don’t know if male or female. They take the one stone, it was already there. (Munukarrri, Golwa, Mulupu), Gunbirri were here when they arrived. The Djang’kawu gulngiyinan Minbirrkngur (went inside at Minbirrkngur). The Djang’kawu made all fresh water holes there dhonay (with digging sticks)” (Rudder 1993: 211, my emphasis).  

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41 The principal Djan’kawu site at Galiwin’ku is the rapam ‘big name place’ Burrar Gapu (Gal 10), where a sacred freshwater well bubbles up engendered by Yan-nhaŋu wagarr Ganyitiŋu, Wayankama (Guturrukuturr) and their brother Runriya, omitted from the Garawurra story of Dambalaŋa (Gal 14) (see Appendix seven Map 35).
42 Davis records Liyagumirr man Barriya explaining that Liyagumirr men Damarrapa and Djilipa are ‘big people for Galwin’ku’ (Davis 1982: 34).
43 Garrawurra dhona (madayin) are coloured with raitjpa (haematite) from the Malarra/Gunjbirritji site Ganapay (Gal 25). This signifies a consubstantial link between madayin and sites of the two ba:purr groups. Similar reference is recorded by Berndt (1952) at the site Galijadjina (Gal 12) linking Runriya (brother of Ganyitiŋu and Wayankama), the principal Malarra/Gunjbirritji wagarr and linking the names Ganyitiŋu with Barratalay of the Garrawurra Djang kawu myth.
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

A substitution of names in the Liyagawumirr story of maŋayin (-Yan-nhaŋu Guluwurrru) and the substitution, the Liyagawumirr site name Minbirrkŋur for the Yan-nhaŋu site Birrkbirrkŋa (Gal 6) helps merge and make ambiguous mythological (ancestral) identity of the estate. So too the expression ‘they take the one stone, it was already there’ can be construed to mean the stone is gone, but it most definitely is still there. The integration of deceased Yan-nhaŋu people ie Mulpur, Mupukari and Goluwa, recognisable from the story beginning this chapter, is a characteristic strategy of identity extension. Ambiguity, merging and misrepresentation promote subscription to ‘group centric’ stories within public Yolŋu discourse. This discourse has been translated and brokered to anthropologists by eastern leaders. The ceremonial sphere and restricted domain may also be a site for the extension and control of group-specific mythic interpretations.

The Liyagawumirr group has deployed their ceremonial power to enhance their claims. The Ŋa:rра ceremony (also Maŋayin, meaning sacred or holy) is performed across Arnhem Land (Warner 1937; Bermdt 1952; Elkin 1972; Keen 1978, 1994). The Ŋa:rра is the most significant local religious expression of endemic mythology. The performance of the Ŋa:rра is flexible enough to allow for provincial variations while promoting mythological links between local networks. Control over the Ŋa:rра is an aspect of ceremonial power that may be deployed to promote the ritual and other interests of the controlling group, over those groups with smaller numbers.

History thus far demonstrates how demographically superior groups at Milingimbi, and later at Galiwin’ku, control the power to hold the Ŋa:rра ceremony. Keen (1994) demonstrated how the Gupapuyŋu leader ‘seemed to have effective control over whether the Yirritja maŋayin ceremony was performed at Milingimbi’ (Keen 1994: 154). Similarly, he found in the 1970s that the Liyagawumirr controlled the Ŋa:rра ceremony of the Malarra/Gumbirridji (Keen 1978: 77). In the early 1980s Davis (1984) describes Liyagawumirr ‘justifying their control’ of the Ŋa:rра ceremony for Yan-nhaŋu in the following way:

Gamalangga are giving that Ngarra ceremony. Malarra is the mari for both Gamalangga and Gorryindi. There are not many Malarra left so Bariya (senior Dambugowumirr [Liyagawumirr] man) is looking after that business (Davis 1984: 95).
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

Control of ritual ideology from within the ceremonial sphere promoted reinterpretations validating power relationships. Keen (1978) describes a Liyagawumirr version of the Djan’kawu myth that ‘justifies a subordinate relationship’ of Gunbirrtji/Malarra in the Njarra (see also Warner 1937: 565). According to the Liyagawumirr history their ancestor came to Galiwin’ku and heard the (Gunbirrtji/Malarra) wayarr singing. Keen describes the version thus:

. . . . he told his märi (MM/MBM) ‘sing with a slow clapstick beat’. The [Malarra/Gunbirridji] singers said ‘Very well gutharra, (ZDCh) you are the boss of the Ngàrra ceremony, we will work (Keen 1978: 77-8).

The assertion of shared ancestral events warrants Liyagawumirr claims. They look after (dja:ga) Gunbirritji/Malarra rangga (key maddyin) associated with this part of the estate, and control the Njarra ceremony establishing their authority to act on behalf of the traditional owners in regard to the site (Djirbalang) (Gal 14), of which they have been granted caretakership as rirritjmirr.

To generalise from these Yolngu historical examples, the right to represent and to speak publicly for and assert ownership of an estate and its religious property is the most significant expression of ownership. Rirritj holders or care takers have enacted the prerogatives of estateowners by representing estates in ways equivalent to the authority of owners, in particular using their power of influence over public political discourse. The reproduction of historical misrepresentations obfuscating the underlying identity of estates by brokers in the public discours about the licit owners has been a potent strategy which, from the perspective of the Yan-nhaçu, has meant the prerogative to represent their estates and control their resources has in the past been enacted by other groups at their expense. The second feature of the post-ALRA period is marked by opportunities for the Yan-nhaçu to represent the ownership of their estates in the context of land use agreements.

ALRA, LUAs and the NTER— a history of negotiation

Land use agreements under ALRA (distinct from Indigenous land use agreements (ILUAs) under Native Title) are formal, legally binding agreements between the Land Trust on behalf of traditional owners and the proponents – for example, a store or

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44 Warner’s informant attributes the episode to Malawalpu (bambama) from the Banumbirr (morning star) mythology that accounts for the Malarra/Gunbirritji site at Dujuanpu (Gal 35) at First Creek on Elicho Island (see Appendix seven Map 35).
mining company – for the purposes of securing an interest in land. An LUA requires consultations with the traditional Aboriginal owners of sites and affected peoples. This process requires detailed anthropological investigation of the underlying identity of estates and their licit holders. Consultations in communities including the Yan-nhaŋu landowners provided a public forum that enhanced their efforts to counter historical marginalisation and promote equity in the control and governance of their ancestral estates and assets. Through the process of legal recognition changes have taken place in the context of Yolŋu social action, discourses and in regard to the negotiation of alliances of similarity and difference.

Affected groups are necessarily consulted in regard to LUAs and include kin in the djungaya (djungayi), a category of ‘managers’ who have certain rights and responsibilities toward their mother’s maŋayin or ŋa:muŋu (ŋa:muŋu/gukulŋuk (mother/child or yothu/yindi, M/C) and the potentially two or more gukulŋuk pulu (MMM) and the other is the (wC/ZC) groups with rights. Also affected are secular groups like the council or resident groups, as well as the aforementioned ringitj groups. Consultations require the informed consent of landowners as well as decision makers (male leaders), and negotiated outcomes on the conditions, terms, rents and purposes of these leasing arrangements.

LUAs have presented a context that supports the legitimacy of Yan-nhaŋu landowners over the underlying identity of their estates (dumimurru). In the present LUA context it is counter productive for kin, affected and other groups to obscure the ancestral authority of landowners linked to maŋayin, as the authority of this legislative requirement also underwrites their claims as kin and affected groups under ALRA. For example, the recognition of Malarra/Guŋbirritji primary spiritual responsibility for maŋayin by the State has required a re-negotiation of alliance, similarity and difference within changed dynamics negotiated on top in the public Yolŋu political domain (kankiya). Inside the public domain scenes of frantic pursuit of renewed alliances and reaffirmation of ancestral links before the Yan-nhaŋu landowners has peeled back layers of local public stories. The public repudiation by contemporary leaders of eastern groups, of received histories and the open, but transitory, public affirmation of Yan-nhaŋu rights in regard to the estate were demonstrative. As old and new alliances are formed and reformed over similarities and differences of ancestral links, there is a
reaffirmation around the historically fraught relationships between groups with long histories of residing on Yan-nhaŋu estates.

More broadly speaking the early period of ALRA appears as a dormant period in stark contrast to more recent Yan-nhaŋu attempts to represent their estates under LUAs. The negotiation of LUAs provides a vivid example of ongoing struggles for authority and control over resources within the Milingimbi and Galiwin'ku communities reminiscent of historical competitions. The 2007 NTER compulsory acquisition of townships including Milingimbi and Galiwin'ku introduced greater uncertainty for the landowners. Intense State pressure was forced on landowners to cede their title over their land and accept leasing arrangements for services in these communities. These uncertainties exacerbated political and social tensions between affected groups, residents, and landowner groups in negotiations over control and responsibilities inside the public Yolŋu political arena - an arena deeply influenced by these local and national pressures.

Relations with the State continue to shape the context in which social action and a public Yolŋu political discourse emerges and is negotiated. Persistent contests over authority and control of sites and resources by kin at Milingimbi and Galiwin'ku are dependent on the mediation of alliance and difference at a number of levels. The negotiation space of the public Yolŋu political sphere favours those kin from large families with prior bureaucratic attachments, administrative roles, and brokerage skills harking back to mission times. Links forged with the indigenous representative body the NLC (Northern Land Council) by Yan-nhaŋu remain crucial to their acknowledgment. Yan-nhaŋu opportunities to represent their estates remain vulnerable in light of fragile LUAs and the uncertainty of conditions under the NTER. Recognition of Yan-nhaŋu rights to their ancestral sites continues to be dependent on the support of wide adherence to Yolŋu religious orthodoxy and broad networks of kin from many interdependent Yolŋu groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to reveal the major events in a Yan-nhaŋu version of history from the beginning of the Milingimbi era to the present. It has described historical perspective that provides a backdrop on which to unpack and understand a history of Yan-nhaŋu relations to other Yolŋu groups as they have evolved through three crucial
Chapter Two: Conflict and change

periods. These complex historical contexts, shaped by the mission and State, promoted the rapid development of a public Yolŋu political domain. Interactions between these influences shaped this history of relations and its representation in the oral and written accounts. This history continues to influence relations between the Yan-nhaŋu people other Yolŋu people and the State. The translation and brokerage of Yolŋu affairs by eastern leaders was critical to the writing and omission of important aspects of Yan-nhaŋu history. The domination and transportation of an emerging public Yolŋu political discourse played an important role in the subsequent history of the region. The histories, families and alliances of this period were manifest in the trajectory of the ‘Adjustment Movement’, succession politics and ensuing religious and sociopolitical movements at Galiwin’ku and Milingimbi.

The ALRA(NT) 1976 period, 1981-1988 sea closures, 2005 LUAs and 2007 NTER have produced new contexts in which the representation of land and sea ownership is being negotiated. These are the contexts shaping and constraining Yan-nhaŋu responses to kin and contradictory State policy, at once inhibiting and also supporting Yan-nhaŋu claims. Crucially, currents affecting both public Yolŋu discourse, lying overtop (gankiya), and underlying pre-existing ancestral links (duminurru), follow the religious orthodoxy of the mądajin. These insights are critical to understanding the complex historical environment in which the Yan-nhaŋu have attempted to negotiate their survival. Further, these insights serve to allow a better appreciation of the implications of history, to themes of similarity and difference, and to the playing out of conflict and alliance by Yan-nhaŋu with other Yolŋu groups over time in the Crocodile Islands that permeat this thesis.

In regard to the themes of change and continuity history reveals colonial pressures promoting innovations in the lives of Yolŋu people. The story that begins this chapter demonstrates the complex human interrelationships lying beneath the broad sweep of written history. In the encounter with the mission and State Yolŋu have generated creative responses, self-reflexive counter movements, resistance, adjustments, and resurgences affecting both the public political and the restricted Yolŋu domain. Nevertheless, despite the omission of Yan-nhaŋu claims in the public domain, a broader underlying Yolŋu acknowledgement of Yan-nhaŋu ancestral sovereignty over their estates continues. Yolŋu acknowledgement of pre-existing ancestral links, following the mądajin, serve as an underlying template for spiritual and social
relationships. These social relations entail cosmological (mythological), ecological and political interdependencies that have profound implications for trajectories of relatively autonomous cultural re/production - sphere of cultural re/production of particular importance to understanding complex story of the Yan-nhaçu and their resurgence.

The continuity of Yan-nhaçu historical, spiritual, and physical links to their estates are of fundamental concern. Insignificant reference to the Yan-nhaçu in the early and later mission period, and the written record, emerge from the abovementioned control over the flow of knowledge about internal Yolŋu affairs to Europeans. Despite this historical omission, the Yan-nhaçu have continued to live on, and care for, their estates historically, physically and spiritually. The context of LUAs under ALRA reinvigorated opportunities for them to represent their pre-existing ancestral links, rooted in the maŋayin, to their estates on which the missions were sited. These spiritual and physical links to ancestral sites are fundamental to understanding the history of Yan-nhaçu cultural specificity. More so understanding this historical legacy can explain the influence of Yolŋu kin of terrestrial groups from the east over the Yan-nhaçu estate.

This brief timeline can only introduce the broad historical events of the region and omits much of the deeper history of conflict and change. This complex history has shaped the Yolŋu and Yan-nhaçu experience of the last eighty years. Nevertheless, a Yan-nhaçu perspective provides an important counterpoint to the omissions and misrecognitions present in so many of the received histories of the region, be they oral or written. Notwithstanding the brevity and incompleteness of this impressionistic broad brush depiction, this first glimpse of Yan-nhaçu history sets the scene for a far more detailed ethnographic delineation. The following chapters illustrate the sociological, mythological, ecological, and economic dimensions of a particularly Yan-nhaçu experience of their estates linked to the sea. The tiny detail that started this chapter has revealed a new historical picture, a background upon which to paint the transformations of patterns of kinship, marriage and ceremonial alliance, which are the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Yan-nhanu social organisation

Plate 5 Narawandhu (M 3)*

The fundamental basis of the society is an elaborate kinship system in which everyone is related to everyone else. This kinship system is organised into more general units which are patrilineal, exogamic clans which have local territories that were “given to them by the totems” (Warner 1937: 4).
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Having investigated events central to the historical context and experience of the Yan-nhaŋu, this chapter describes some key features in the social construction of Yan-nhaŋu identity. From a sociological perspective it examines the theme of similarity and difference, of distinctiveness, and aspects of differentiation and alliance among Yan-nhaŋu groups, and with other groups in Yolŋu society. Like Barth (1969) I see boundary processes as a necessary part of the mutual constitution of identities. Moreover, I see such social process articulated and maintained through the precepts of shared ancestral law. Yolŋu society is internally differentiated by the construction of social identity boundaries, expressed in terms of ancestral law (rom), sacra (madayin), sites (waŋgala) and language types (yan or matha). Furthermore, I seek to show that these ancestral laws create networks of interrelationship that both differentiate and conjoin social groups, and create criteria of similarity and difference under a shared cosmology. This cosmology underwrites a flexible system of kinship, metaphorical schemas and rhetoric providing a common language sustaining differentiation and coalescence. This language lends coherence to these social processes involving the negotiation of shifting multiple identities, heterogeneous ritual forms and variable group formation over time with the concomitant stability of estate ownership and ba:purru group identites.

The comparatively long history of ethnographic description in northeast Arnhem Land provides an opportunity to appreciate the structuring of kinship and connubial relations on processes of transformation and continuity in regard to Yolŋu social systems. In considering the themes of change and continuity in regard to the Yolŋu system of relations I have drawn on the idea that continuing encounters with local, national, and global influences generate sites of creative response and innovation. The continuing historical encounter with the colonial Settler State is having a transformative effect on the social context of the relatively autonomous systems of cultural re/production. Equally, attention is paid to the conservative and continuing relationship between Yolŋu, country and myth as structuring influences in the re/production of Yolŋu sociocultural systems. I explore the transformations of Yan-nhaŋu social organisation in light of these contemporary influences and in particular by a focus on the foundations of the kinship system, continuities in the ownership of marine estates, and changing connubial relations.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

This chapter is organised into four parts. First, it reviews the literature on Yolŋu social organisation and provides some key concepts. Second, I examine similarity and difference in kinship and metaphorical tropes deployed between and among Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu groups. Third, I reveal some of the distinguishing features of Yan-nhaŋu groups, and the ancestral basis for their regional ceremonial and connubial relationships. Attending to metaphors inherent in ancestral complexes I observe the implications of change and reorientation in Yan-nhaŋu connubial engagements as a result of changing contexts wrought by the coming of the mission. Finally, in part four I present evidence of post-mission transformations in the configuration of such marriage arrangements demonstrating continuities and change in Yan-nhaŋu strategies of alliance and differentiation over time.

Review of literature on Yolŋu social organisation

To locate the Yan-nhaŋu in the social fabric of the broader Yolŋu society it is first necessary to consult with the anthropological ancestors; an exercise sometimes affording greater ambiguity than insight! Earlier attempts at naming schemes to depict Yolŋu in the literature reflect a muddle of designation. Yolŋu have in the past been called the Murrgin and Mewartj, Wulamba and Balamumu, and constituent groups have been described as tribes, phratries, clans, sibs, mala/mada pairs and more. The composition and significance of these terms has been the focus of much debate over the years (see Warner 1937; Berndt 1955, 1976; Schebeck 1968; Shapiro 1981; Keen 1995). As noted in Chapter two I use the term Yolŋu in the way that Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu people now use the term to refer to themselves. The Yolŋu word yolŋu means person, and in particular dark skinned as distinct from light-skinned persons such as balanda or specifically in Yan-nhaŋu biriyanaranju. Yolŋu people themselves identify with many different named groups of different kinds, some of which are highly complex and variable in organisation and composition. The substance of rhetorical device, metaphors and ancestral significances in understanding the constitution of such groupings remained for a long time difficult to discern. Before discussing some key concepts shedding light on these relations I begin with a brief overview of the literature, describing something of the heritage and genealogy of the anthropological ancestors of Yolŋu ethnography.

Much of the enormous body of ethnographic literature on northeast Arnhem Land has been concerned with definitions of the clan. According to Hiatt (1996), the first
application of the term ‘clan’ in the Australian context was by Fison and Howitt in 1880 (see Hiatt 1996: 20–29). They used the term ‘clan’ to describe local groups where organisation was patrilineal. In 1913 Radcliffe-Brown applied the term to ‘a body of persons related to each other through either male or female descent’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1913: 2) and later as a ‘group based on patrilineal descent’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1930: 1). In his posthumously published 1956 paper, he defined the clan as a patrilineal, corporate landowning group, the constitution of which changed only through the birth and death of its members (Hiatt 1996: 20–29). This latter structural functional definition, also employed by Warner, has proven to be a most enduring motif in the lexicon of Australian local organisation models.

Warner attempted to untangle the fundamental structures of identity and organisation in ‘Murngin’ society, particularly its kinship structures and the way they are implicated in the articulation of groups in the architecture of Yolŋu society (Warner 1937). He revealed elementary and essential links in Murngin conceptions between kin relationships, cosmology, exogamy, patrilineal decent, and the possession of property (Warner 1937:16–19). He recognised the key ontological symbol of the clan waterhole and its relationship to totemic ancestors writing that the “clan” water hole is the basis of solidarity and identity’ (Warner 1937: 19). This appreciation of the elementary significance in Yolŋu cosmological thought of key sites, and water, as a basis of social organisation is taken up by others later.

Warner also distinguished the elementary significance of kinship in the organisation of Yolŋu society remarking that:

The fundamental basis of the society is an elaborate kinship system in which everyone is related to everyone else. This kinship system is organised into units which are patrilineal, exogamic clans which have local territories that were ‘given to them by the totems.’ All parts of the clan land have totemic references. Each clan has multiple totems; all clans have at least one, possibly more, sacred water holes where live the high totems, the totemic ancestors, the ancestral dead, and the totemic spirits of the unborn. The names of all clansmen have totemic significance, and the whole general totemic pattern is related to the clan (Warner 1937: 4).

Warner theorised that the clan, after kinship, was the most significant element of social architecture. He correctly attributes the import of the kinship to group relations writing that the kinship system, which underlies social organisation, serves as the framework
to combine ‘clans’ into an integrated structure linked to the cosmological themes of
totemic belief, which sustain the whole system (Warner 1937: 378–9). Totemic
ideology is recognised as the ontological basis of the ‘clan’, emerging from the
existence of sacred waterholes and associated ritual paraphernalia, which functions as
a signifier of group identity. Then as now, the imperative of social reproduction, of
links between groups, based on ancestral identities, and between people, gives rise to
connubial competitions and violent conflicts over women (Warner 1937: 155).

Donald Thomson’s fieldwork among the Yolŋu from 1936 led him to conclude more
ambivalently about simple translation of Yolŋu groups focusing on the term ‘barpuro’
(ba:purru). On this point he makes the following statement:

Barpuro [ba:purru] is a term that is difficult to define in the intricate and
aberrant social grouping of this area. It is applied in eastern Arnhem Land
to loosely integrated clans often occupying discontinuous tracts of
territory, geographically sometimes widely separated, but never-the-less
having in common at least some vital and significant part of their total
totemic heritage (Thomson 1961: 98).

His nascent recognition of heterogeneity inherent in this aspect of group formation
would become the focus of more detailed examination in later years. The conventions
of Yolŋu self identification were addressed by Ronald Berndt (1955) in his attempt to
distinguish the patri-line, which he names the ‘babaru’ after the Yolŋu formulation
ba:purru, from a number of ‘mada’, from the Yolŋu ‘matha’ (lit: tongue). These
‘mada’ linguistic groups, sharing a common dialect, form part of the ‘clan’ mala
(Berndt 1955: 95). He writes that a ‘number of these descent groups babaru
[ba:purru], taken together, form the mada or linguistic group, which speaks a common
dialect, shares cosmology, songs, artistic designs’ (Berndt 1955: 97) and is the
landholding unit (Berndt 1955: 101). He then posits that ‘several mada make up a
“clan” or mala’ (Berndt 1955: 98) as the landholding group sharing songs, ceremonies,
tracts of land, and a common dialect. In 1976b he proposes the ‘mala/mada pair’ as
cross cutting categories in which some mala contain a number of matha and,
conversely, some matha include a number of mala (1976b: 20). Keen (1995: 518)
suggests the model probably arises from the Yolŋu propensity to pair names of
different kinds, noting that rhetorical pairing does not necessarily denote a kind of
group.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Berndt's 'babaru' construction appears smaller than Warner's (1937: 4) 'clan', seeming more like Schebeck's (1968: 6-8) clan subgroups, or at the level of lineage in Keen (1994: 68) or a 'clan' subgroup in Williams (1986: 64), while his mala is a social grouping larger than that of the 'clan'. After 1970 Berndt replaced the 1955 mala/mada pair with mada, or linguistic group, as the group that holds territory and ritual in common (Berndt 1976b) (see also Williams 1986). This interpretation of social organisation linking language, groups and land in common recognises the key importance of the linguistic aspect of group identity and appears to reflect much more closely Yolŋu reckoning. However, Berndt's schema does not adequately account for Yolŋu group organisation for the simple reason that the Yolŋu do not consistently pair patrilineal *matha* and *mala* identities and this is confirmed by the Yan-nhaŋu data.

In 1968 Bernhard Schebeck offered an explanation of the 'native theory' of social organisation in his then unpublished paper, *Dialect and social groupings in northeast Arnhem Land* (now published, Schebeck 2001). Schebeck recognised that categories and terms used by Yolŋu such as *matha*, *mala* and *ba:parru* are not used consistently. Schebeck categorises the terms *ba:purrum*, *mala* and *mitchji* as groups of people, while *matha*, literally tongue, refers to 'dialect', 'language' or 'language group' (Schebeck 1968: 29). His analysis of the systemic relationship between *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* dialects provides a detailed catalogue of dialect names, war names and ritual names of lasting significance. He attempts to account for inherent heterogeneity and inconsistency in the Yolŋu system, with its varying ways of constituting and referring to groups, and finds ultimately that the Yolŋu schema does not form a unified system. This finding has lasting implications for the description of local social organisation. This kind of variability is apparent in Yan-nhaŋu groups identifying with Burarra language, and in ceremonial aggregations (*ba:purrum yindi*) like *Marrinja* and *Mandjikay* discussed ahead.

Warren Shapiro (1981) prefers the term 'sib' to 'clan' and considers 'sibs' as constructed in terms of the group's foundation in shared *waŋarr* and land, but not strictly recruited in common patri-descent. He considers connections between members of a 'sib' are not necessarily genealogical. The unity of a sib is conceived as elementally linked by its association with a particular estate and associated *maŋayin*. Its 'association with a particular estate implies the ownership of designs, dances, and other items mythically connected with the land' (Shapiro 1981: 20–1). This view of
recruitment is in agreement with the constituency of groups as previously envisaged by Warner in shared Ḃa:rra well affiliations. Shapiro, like those before him, emphasised the principle of connection to sites in group identification; however, it would seem that Shapiro himself seems to have had little or no engagement with the landowners of the Galiwin’ku estate, as he mentions them only once (Shapiro 1981: 20–4).

The principle of language affiliation landownership is attributed an elemental role in the work of Nancy Williams (1986). Language is accorded a central position in her explication of Yolŋu social organisation, affirming matha as ‘the maximum potential membership of groups whose corporateness is defined by joint ownership of land’ (Williams 1986: 63). Williams’s matha-group is most consistent with the concept of ‘clan’ espoused by Warner, or Shapiro’s sib, uniting around the principle of joint ownership of land as characteristic of this level of social organisation. Williams (1986) designates mala and ba:purru, equivalent to the Yan-nhaŋu word mittji, as a ‘group of people in terms of some shared entity of greater value and deeper meaning than that endowed by the shared affairs of everyday life, including the use of a particular matha’ (Williams 1986: 66).

Williams, like Warner (1937) and Schebeck (1968), indicates the coalescence of larger groups, based on ancestral links, in the order of ceremonial aggregations. She says a group of people may be considered ‘one ba:purru’ if they are connected through mythology to a common ancestral being, whereas groups such as mala, maŋayin mala and ba:purru (in its extended sense) refer to groups more inclusive than the ‘clan’. That is, a number of distinct groups, sharing a body of myth, are then joined together for a ceremony, and so create an extended ‘ba:purru’. Invoked here is a category equivalent to the phratry described by Warner (1937). Yan-nhaŋu designate such groups with the term yindi mittji, or ba:purru yindi (big groups). An example of such a ritual aggregate, comparable to Williams’ extended ba:purru and Warner’s phratry, continues to be evidenced by the Mandjikay. The Mandjikay group is a Yirritja ritual alliance linking groups speaking languages from Dhaŋu to Burarra and stretching right across northeast Arnhem Land and is described in more detail ahead.

Howard Morphy (1991) contends that ‘clans are named patrilineal descent groups which acknowledge common ancestry, hold common rights over land, and have the same mardayin [maŋayin]’, understood to be a body of sacred knowledge, or “sacred law”’. He observes that clan names are the ones ‘most frequently given when an
individual is asked what group/clan/tribe/people he or she belongs to’ (Morphy 1991: 47). He emphasises that the ancestral heritage of a group of people, in both senses of ‘bapurru’, includes songs, dances, painted designs and sacred objects – all sharing ancestral essences with the group’s wajarr. In relation to the physical expression of these cosmological forces in the form of natural resources he shows that ‘permission of the owning clan is essential if its resources are to be used by others ... permission obtained by ... agreement of clan leaders ... secondary rights acquired through maternal links or ritual affiliation’ (Morphy 1995: 7; see also Williams 1986).

This necessary condition of ‘permission of the owning clan’ is of deep-seated importance and consequently it is dealt with in this thesis through an investigation of turtle and marine resources exchanged among Yolŋu and Yan-nhanu groups in the Crocodile Islands (see Chapter seven). Sufficient to say at this stage that these conditions continue to inhere in the cosmological conception of ownership and links to sites and resources by Yolŋu today. A continuity of great significance to group identities and estate ownership over time.

The terms of Yolŋu ethnography were refined by Ian Keen (1995) in Metaphor and the Metalanguage in which he brings attention to the open and variable nature of Yolŋu social groups (Keen 1995: 502). In suggesting that the constitution of Yolŋu groups is ambiguous, that people disagree about their structure and that groups do not sort into neat taxonomies, he readjusts the lens on Yolŋu groups. Instead of being defined by boundaries, Yolŋu groups form networks extending outward from geographic and social foci in a rhizomatic configuration (Rumsey: 1993). This reflection on organic tropes in networks or relations separates it from images of bounded and taxonomic hierarchies that do not match Yolŋu conceptions (Keen 1995: 517). The constitutive nature of Yolŋu metaphors about groups prompts Keen to avoid the term ‘clan’, preferring to use the term ‘group’ in the same way that Yolŋu use the term mala (group) (Keen 1994: 63–4). This formulation provides a starting point for understanding the structure of least-inclusive group names as significant criteria of identity.

Yolŋu groups have been described as constructed around metaphors that reflect natural images of connection such as roots and branches. Keen (1994) suggests ‘that even though Yolŋu speak of extended group identities as groups (mala), it is misleading to
think of them as sets of groups; rather, they are open and extendable strings of groups with a shared identity’ (Keen 1995: 516). This network imagery promotes the possibility for people to discover further ancestral connections and thereby to extend the list of related peoples (Keen 1995: 516). He suggests that open-ended, flexible and contextual group identity is a more appropriate way to envisage group connections.

Yolŋu metaphors and rhetoric used to denote groups emanate from their experience of place and ideas based on country and extended names. Keen (1995) shows that the variable strategies that produce the multiple attributes of identity can also be conjoined with other identities to form strings of groups. Consequently it is clear that shared identities do not produce consistent groups, and that a number of rhetorical devices and metaphorical tropes are coexistent in group construction. People manipulate ancestral connections, country and names to make claims of particular identity, shown by Keen (1995: 518) and recorded in Chapter two.

Morphy (1988: 253) emphasises the dynamism of clan construction in more eastern Yolŋu groups. He demonstrates how anomalies in clan structure may be explained by processes of growth and fission. He shows how sub-group identities within a ‘clan’, as in the case of lineages, may provide the basis for the eventual fission of the ‘clan’ into two separate ‘clans’ (Morphy 1988: 266). Through fission, clans with ancestral links to larger clans may in time become incorporated (Morphy 1988: 268). In subsequent work he describes differences between structural, group-focused models and individual, praxis-oriented ones, showing how both aspects of Yolŋu sociality can be integrated into a single system (Morphy 1997: 124). He writes of Yolŋu funerals, in which structural, ‘clan’-level organisation in the form of madayin (property of the clan) is juxtaposed with individual, kindred-level features such as individual action within the funeral’s ritual framework. This view counteracts an overemphasis on the corporate nature of clans precisely because kindreds are ‘always framed in terms of structures ... [which are] ... immanent, emergent’ (Morphy 1997: 148). The most important point here is the implication that anomalies generated by processes of growth and fission continue to produce variations in the structures of Yolŋu group organisation.

Sutton (1998) challenges Keen’s (1995) critique, arguing that his model downplays ‘that which is systematic in Aboriginal cultural and social life’ (1998: 14), emphasising the ‘continuity of patrilineal social constructs as ideally enduring
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

institutions' (Sutton 1998: 32). Sutton reiterates the emic emphasis on 'repeating one’s patrilineal forebears' by having the same name, totem, ceremonial identity, language affiliation and estate (Sutton 1998: 32). Sutton argues that 'mutual commitment to the system signifies Aboriginal dependence on 'collectively shared rules for belonging, of shared understanding of means of construction of various kinds of groups' (Sutton 1998: 38). This view seems to support the proposition that social identities are largely self-constructed in groups but has little to say about the variety of social processes promoting existent heterogeneity in Yolŋu group composition.

Emphasising the construction of multiple identities in discourse and action, Peter Toner (2001) approaches the analysis of groups from a new, slightly different direction. He gives a new emphasis to groups with 'shifting identities', focusing on 'multiple, overlapping and contingent' aspects of identity formation (Toner 2001: 37). He argues that groups with proper names are 'kinds of identity which are constituted through discourse and action and which may be contingent on the context in which they are constituted' (Toner 2001: 24). Further, he argues that they are 'only one among many such identities relevant to Yolŋu social life' (Toner 2001: 24.). His approach uses theories of practice and structure to develop a dynamic view of Yolŋu social action and circumvent constructs of bounded groups.

Toner suggests it is not his 'intent to offer "identity" as a replacement for "clan". Rather, I offer "identity" as a new way of examining Yolŋu sociality' (Toner 2001: 66). He draws attention to Keen's (1995) description of groups of people sharing ba:purru names, connections with waŋarr ancestors, and other spirit beings and maḏayin, as sharing a common ba:purru identity (Keen 1995: 512). He explains the identities of Yolŋu sociality as the product of social history, and 'habitus', and as such an acquired system of generative schemes (Bourdieu 1992: 55). This means multiple and overlapping Yolŋu identities are created and reproduced in the dynamic interactions between past and present, individual and collective practices, and eventually contribute to their own history. Toner argues (2001: 66) that we must view Yolŋu sociality in terms of identity instead of membership in bounded groups, this approach allows us to understand sociality as a process of social re/production.

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45 Schebeck hints at this fundamental link invoked by buŋddar and likan elbow or 'power' names as an aspect of group identification (Schebeck 1968: 45). Yan-nhaŋu people habitually use the expression buŋddar rather than likan; however, these sacred names, sometimes called out at important moments in ritual performance, link through the concept of shared ancestral essence connection between people, places and ancestors.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

constrained by history and structures. I agree with Toner’s view of the significance of history and sociopolitical structures in shaping the re-production of Yolŋu society. In terms of my own analysis, it is a crucial dimension for understanding continuities in Yolŋu sociopolitical identities such as ‘Yan-nhaŋu’, in the light of powerful local, national and global forces for change that are fundamental to the ideas upon which this ethnographic description is based.

The history of Yolŋu engagements with the State and the mission have been a significant factor shaping contemporary circumstances. Variations in the structure of Yolŋu groups is in part a reflection of the structuring effects of ancestral laws and in part, contemporary politics and also the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Keen says people of a ‘local network inherit and work out their own particular way of doing things, subject to their relations with neighbors, and to demographic and other contingencies’ (Keen 2000: 432). More recently Frances Morphy (2007c, 2008) provides an insightful analysis of broader historical events that have shaped realignments of Yolŋu groups and kin and continuities in the trajectory of their re-production. I take this one step further and argue that despite the pressures on Yolŋu society from local and wider factors Yolŋu groups continue to re-produce continuities in identification and estate ownership recognizable over generations with a characteristically high level of localised cultural autonomy.

The character of group identifications produced over time demonstrate persistent anchorage in notions of ancestral complexes that overturn more provisional identification created in the negotiation of everyday political expediency in community life. Pre-existing ancestral networks lie underneath daily social action, and are described as dhuminurruru (at bottom) connected to the maŋayin and there for a matter of Yolŋu religious orthodoxy. Ancestral law works as a conservative structure with deep historical roots shaping the re-production of group identity and estate ownership within Yolŋu society. It is not my intention to imply the ancestral causation of social organisation here but to emphasise that ideas of ancestral providence, ontological metaphors and the lived experience of island and sea space are used to negotiate group identity. I will turn to investigate this dimension of cultural re-production in regard to Yan-nhaŋu distinctiveness and similarity within a wider Yolŋu society.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Yan-nhaŋu distinctiveness in Yolŋu society

An examination of Yan-nhaŋu social identity and relations with the wider Yolŋu society must take account of self identification. This self identification is an imperative in the system of sociocultural re/production that sustains Yolŋu sociopolitical groups. However, such identification is always contingent. Anthropologists, declares Schneider, cannot escape the ‘hermeneutic process of constructing their own meaning from native people’s symbolic systems’ (Schneider 1984: 196–201). Keesing (1987) also notes that the interpretation of the configuration and meaning of symbols comprising the conceptual schemes of ‘native peoples’ can be accomplished with varying degrees of sensitivity (Keesing 1987: 174). Consequently, in line with their cautions we must approach Yan-nhaŋu claims cognisant of the subtle distinctions afforded by the pallet of self description. Linked to these self descriptions are notions of ancestral essences at the heart of Yolŋu group formation. This fundamentally metaphysical conception of relations underpins the Yolŋu logic of rhetorical and metaphorical tropes, kinship arrangements and group construction.

In the following analysis I outline the fundamental principles of Yolŋu ontology to provide a foundational conceptual schema on which to base the following discussion (see also Chapter four). Yolŋu law (rom) has been described as the ‘precepts and practices that shape the cosmic order’ and the ‘parameters of human social life’ (Keen 2004: 211). This ideational system divides the world into two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirrijita, that classify every aspect of the Yolŋu universe. Everything is either one or the other, and belongs to a Dhuwa or a Yirrijita group. Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu social, linguistic and territorial identity flow from this fundamental belief in the ancestral endowment of the law. This law then creates and articulates the networks of interrelationship that both differentiate and conjoin social groups.

Yolŋu share a common religious ideology of positing links between ancestral beings, religious paraphernalia and sociopolitical group identities focused on sites of ancestral significance or land/sea country (wangala). The waŋarr endowed these places or wangala, and religious icons (ranga), special names (bundhurr), and paintings (myintji), altogether classed as a group’s maŋayin (Keen 1978: 41; Williams 1986: 37; Morphy 1984: 17). These maŋayin and language (yan), invested by the groups major waŋarr, comprise the unique supernatural provenance of that group, and define that group’s identity. This endowment by the ancestors constitutes the foundation of the
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

spiritual, social and cosmic order of life. This order is evoked in the metaphorical discourse of society and has a constitutive dimension that is linked in a number of complex ways to the foundation and structure of sociopolitical groups. As metaphor provides such an important basis for understanding the emblems, symbols and practices decisive to the construction of distinction and similarity in Yolŋu society, I will briefly describe its articulation.

The subjective experience of being Yan-nhaŋu is inflected by the sea space that is their home and the origin of their myths and legends. This sea space has a particular character ‘categorized and reasoned about’ in what Lakoff and Johnson have called ‘ontological metaphors’ (1980: 25). These ontological metaphors are influenced by the physical experience, spatial orientations and the religious and social experience of places and histories in socialisation. Metaphors expressed in notions of ancestral substance are conceived of in images resonating with organic processes and the imagery of natural forms drawn from the environment (see also Williams 1986, 1999; Morphy 1988, 1990, 2006; Keen 1994, 1995, 2006). Stories of creation and saltwater origin, metaphors of connection and distinction, and the rhetoric of ancestral inheritance of marine estates underwrite the elements of Yan-nhaŋu similarity and distinction.

For the Yan-nhaŋu then, the ancestral creation and cosmological inheritance of marine sites and associated emblems provide their distinctive spiritual provenance. This provenance forms the basis of their social difference, taking the expression of its forms from metaphors drawn from the natural world. This natural schema lends coherence to experience and shapes its expression in discourse. As such they are key constructs for expressing fundamental understandings about the nature of the world, and therefore have such a profound influence on interpretations of local organisation and social identification. The ideology of shared ancestral essence links the descendents of the ancestors to the identity of the group, and to the identity of the country of the ancestors.

Patrilineal links define how an individual is recruited to a particular ba:purru group identity. By act of birth and spiritual conception one is restored to life in the father’s line associated with the principal wangarr. Conception restores life to another aspect of wangarr essence linked to all the sites, ritual paraphernalia, kin living and dead and to the group’s ancestral identity, ba:purru. Yan-nhaŋu people often say they are ‘one’,
walipma, by virtue of sharing the substance of a particular ancestral being or place – yirralka or bone country. Each cosmogonic act, each site of ancestral transformation and passing is understood to endow these places, and people, with a common, yet distinctive, mystical provenance emblematic of their individual and group identity. Yan-nhaŋu people commonly refer to the places, reefs and trees and phenomena to which they are consubstantially related as ‘one group’ (ba:purru walipma) or of the same essential identity. This socio-centric ‘one group’ identity is different from another aspect of one’s ego-centric individual identity as linked to the identity of the site of spirit conception.

Another dimension of Yolŋu identity linked to the ancestors is one’s individual identity. This identity emanates from one’s putative site of inception. This is fundamentally different from the abovementioned membership/identity by descent/filiation, as this identity is found through spirit conception described in the concept of gantajirri maly' thanway, (Lit: follow the water). That is, to follow or share essence with one’s ‘country of the water’ or one’s ‘very own country’. Yan-nhaŋu say ancestral beings (speaking Yan-nhaŋu) left traces and essences in the waters (salt/fresh), and islands giving rise to the spirit essences or images (mali/mayili) of unborn children. These essences are said to enter women, causing their pregnancy, expressed in Yan-nhaŋu as gantajirri maly' thanway, and in Burarra as ngun-anya bugula bukumarra (that is, ‘begot of the water’), from salt water and fresh water, and from then on developing or existing as ba:purru ‘group members’, in one’s ‘one group’ socio-centric shared essence (Keen 1995: 510; 2005: 11; see also Bagshaw 1998: 162).

Shared wayarr essences link members of a ba:purru group through the ideology of patrilineal descent. Yan-nhaŋu identify wayarr ancestors at the apex of their genealogies and refer to these wayarr as ga:thu’ (FFF/FFZ). The term ba:purru is used by people when referring to aggregations, linked by ancestry to named wayarr identified as the core or foundation of the ba:purru.47 The members of the lineage

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46 Yirralka (also ɲaraka waŋa, luku waŋa) is commonly glossed as spiritual home or bone country from which animating essences arise. Further discussions by authors who have dealt with emotional attachment to land (Hiat 1965; Peterson 1972; Morphy 1984, 1990, 1995; Tamisari 1998; Toner 2001) make us aware of the centrality of sentimental attachment to land. Keen (1995: 509) refers to ‘ngaraka waŋga’ bone country, also one’s bone country, where the ancestral bones reside, re-interment of marr through the dhupun to the yirralka, origin of the clan links bony parts to wayarr of patri-clan (see Keen 1978; Williams 1986: 44; Rudder 1993: 29).

47 These ba:parru group ‘lineages’ or ‘patri-lineages’ (having a common patrilineal ancestor) include the FF and FFZ, F, FB, FZ, eB and yB, depending on age and generation. So the father (gunuŋu) and
customarily hold possessory rights in regard to their principal *wayarr* identity and associated properties and *wayarr* essences including land, sea, water, kin (unborn and dead), language, dances, songs, paintings and names. Each member has responsibilities and obligations, articulated at individual and group levels, to the elements of the *wayarr* and its property. These obligations require the protection, continuation, and ceremonial and ritual performance and re/production of the ancestral essence of the *ba:purru.* This *ba:purru* identity forms a crucial part of one’s identity.

Following from this, variable social identities are constructed from multiple links of different kinds, formed on notions of shared ancestral essence. As the Yan-nhaŋu say, one patrilineal identity, one group, *ba:purru walipna,* with individual variability, *gantajirri maly’thunway.* As mentioned, people born at the mission now consider the Yan-nhaŋu islands to be their home, through the ideology of spirit conception, but their different fathers from groups whose country lies far away give them another identity. So too, their mothers and grandmothers endow particular relationships with the rest of society. Rather than give provide evidence of variabilities at this point I reveal a map of marriage networks ahead (Map 3), mythological variations (Table 9) and linguistic differences (Table 11).

The complex context of multiple overlapping and contingent identitites articulates with a wider regional networks of socioreligious identification (see Toner 2001). Before examining the complex heterogeneity of identification emerging from marriage conventions and the broader system of connubial relations I reveal some similarities and divergence in kinship relations between Yan-nhaŋu and surrounding Yolŋu and Burarra kin that articulate connubial links to demonstrate the point.

**Contrasting Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu kinship organisation and terminology**

The kinship model provides an exceptional vantage from which to view the relative differences and similarities inherent in the Yan-nhaŋu and more easterly Yolŋu kin arrangements. The kinship system determines and articulates the exact relationships between people, places, totemic identities, and every known aspect of the universe. This creates a complex network of reflexive interconnections in a system in which all

father’s sister (*gatjamirringu*), father’s father (*ma:ri’mu*) and his sister (*ma:mu*), father’s father’s father and his sisters (*gatjamu*) also include a man’s child or brother’s child (*gatjamu*) and a man’s brother’s son’s child (*marratja*).

48 Ritual consubstantiation is the performance of ritual action designed to bring into ‘substantiality’, make real or substantial, the essences of the ancestors in a dimension conceived of as a coexisting inside dimension of spiritual essences.
the nodes are named. It is from a position in this network that one draws one’s unique
individual relationship with everyone else in the social universe.\(^{49}\) Within the ongoing
forms of contemporary Yan-nhaŋu sociality, kinship is a key determinant of roles and
responsibilities. The following discussion focuses on egocentric kinship relationships
to explicate the complexity existing between the many individual nodes inhabiting the
human genealogical dimensions of the kinship system.

To highlight the theme of similarity and difference in social organisation I have
undertaken a comparative analysis of Yan-nhaŋu and Yolŋu kinship systems. By
contrasting the Yan-nhaŋu and eastern Yolŋu kinship terminology it is possible to
highlight the existence of fundamental equivalences and differences in the two
asymmetrical systems of kinship organization. To do so I draw on the foundational
surrounding groups to the west, Yan-nhaŋu women marry into a different group than
their mother married into, and that their brother might potentially marry into (and
although Yolŋu men don’t always marry into their mother’s group they may be
involved in marriages). A circular chain of six patrilineal groups cycle women in
marriage, both giving and receiving down the line, although as mentioned variability is
common. The significance of this shared Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu system lies in its
provision of transforming connubial relations after the mission that sustained the small
Yan-nhaŋu sociopolitical groups.

The Yan-nhaŋu people have also traditionally linked into systems of marriage that
have more symmetrical organisation, like that of the Burarra to the immediate west.
Nevertheless, the flexibilities inherent in the Yan-nhaŋu system enable it to articulate
with that of the wider Yolŋu block. With the exception of terminological and a small
number of structural differences, some of which have changed over time, the Yan-
nyaŋu system is equivalent with those of other Yolŋu groups. I refrain from an
elaborated explication of the terms and genealogical data giving a more abstract
explanation of Yolŋu kin as this relates to the Yan-nhaŋu as Yolŋu kin has been treated
in detail by others. The equivalence and difference in kinship arrangements (known as
the gurrutu system), and ideal marriages between kin categories, are shown in Figure
1. Kin terms in parentheses are contingent on marriages or are not consistently defined.

\(^{49}\) For kinship arrangements of the Yolŋu see Warner (1937: 31, 113) and Keen (1978: 98–146; 1994).
For genealogical basis of kinship see Scheffler (1973), Shapiro (1981) and Morphy (1984: 6), and in
Each vertical column represents kin terms linked ideally by patrilineation. The diagonal connections are those of matrilineal links. Ego’s patriline from the perspective of a male receives women as wives from the right and sends out women for wives to the left. The term to the right of a given kin category is the ideal wife/brother’s wife category, and the term to the left is the ideal husband/sister’s husband category for the given category. From this diagram it can be seen that a man marries a woman from a different patriline than the one to which his sister is passed. The children of his sisters will pass their female offspring down the chain of matrilineal connection. As kin terms are projected onto members of groups, this may lead, in the case of a certain connubium, to the specific recircling, or completion of the cycle, through the link between dhumungur and mukul rumaru and maralkur – it ‘comes back’ to mukul four generations later. These kinds of connubial links may enclose six or more patrilineal groups of distant kin in a chain of marriages from beginning to end.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Keen (1978) shows that larger patrigroups such as Dhuwala speaking Daygurrurr and Dhuwa - speaking Liyagawumirr are linked by reciprocal marriages, and that still other assemblages of four groups are linked in a circle (Keen 1978: 130-45). Marriages within such groups sort into asymmetric relations at the lineage level. However, a terminological patriline corresponds more to a patrilineage than a larger patrigroup. This is because a ba:purrru group may contain more than one lineage, so that other configurations are possible. This formulation may also make symmetrical marriage links between ba:purrru possible. Chains of marriage are then most often open ended, with the occasional ZDD exchange closing the circle between six lineages. Keen (1978) found many examples of ‘marrying in a circle’ from clans east of the Yan-nhaçu in Buckingham Bay in contrast to more open-ended marriage links characteristic of groups further to the west (Keen 1978: 125). Morphy (1977) records that further to the east again, toward Gove and south toward Blue Mud Bay, marriage frequently cycled between six or more clans (Morphy 1977: 58).

To bring these differences into greater contrast I present a table to compare Yan-nhaçu kin categories with the eastern Yolŋu system. There has been some transformation of Yan-nhaçu marriage patterns in recent times that will be discussed later. What can be revealed now is that these changes have come about because the focus of Yan-nhaçu connubia had hitherto been on groups with a more westerly orientation. That is, to groups with a more open-ended system of marriage relations.

Table 5 presents an abbreviated form of the Yolŋu kinship (gurruru) system following Morphy (1984: 6). I use Morphy's construct because of its contrastive potential, affording as it does a way of making prominent the similarities and differences between eastern Dhuwali/Dhuwala and Yan-nhaçu kin arrangements.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Table 5 Contrasting eastern Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu kin terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dhuval/Dhuwala terms same moiety</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu same moiety</th>
<th>Relational indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba:pa</td>
<td>Gunuŋu</td>
<td>F, ZDDS, SSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukul ba:pa</td>
<td>Gatjamirriŋu,</td>
<td>(sisters of the above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutharra</td>
<td>Gunjiŋu</td>
<td>ZDCM SC, FFZDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wawa</td>
<td>Wawa</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yapa</td>
<td>Yapa</td>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Máŋi'mu</td>
<td>Máŋi'mu / Máŋmuku(Z)</td>
<td>FF / (Z)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Máŋi</td>
<td>Máŋi</td>
<td>MM(B), MMBSS(D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukul Rumaru</td>
<td>Gunuŋu</td>
<td>MMBD (WM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maralkur</td>
<td>Máŋmuku wukundi</td>
<td>MMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurrŋu</td>
<td>Ruruŋŋu</td>
<td>FZDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaːthu</td>
<td>Gatjamu</td>
<td>C, FFF(Z), FMB(Z)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marratja</td>
<td>Marratja</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dhuval/Dhuwala terms opposite moiety</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu terms opposite moiety</th>
<th>Relational indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naŋdì</td>
<td>Naŋmungu</td>
<td>M, ZDDD, MBSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napipi</td>
<td>Gaykay</td>
<td>MB, ZDDS, MBSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhathí</td>
<td>Nhātji</td>
<td>MF (FMB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momu</td>
<td>Momu</td>
<td>FM (MFZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galay</td>
<td>Galimmirriŋu</td>
<td>W (MMBDC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhathí walkur 4</td>
<td>Gukulŋu walipma</td>
<td>MMMBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuway</td>
<td>Dhumirriŋu</td>
<td>H (woman speaking) FZC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waku</td>
<td>Gukulŋuguk</td>
<td>ZC, FFZC, MMMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaminyarr</td>
<td>Dhawarak</td>
<td>ZSC(DC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhumungur</td>
<td>Daŋkaŋu</td>
<td>FZDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumakur</td>
<td>Gukulŋu</td>
<td>MMMBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Morphy 1984.

The following points relating to Table 5 identify the key structural differences between the Yan-nhaŋu and eastern Dhuwala/Dhuwal kinship terms. It is clear there exists a high level of correspondences between these two Yolŋu systems as well as a number of differences.

(1) Father’s-Father FF(Z) are distinguished in the west from Mother’s Mothers Brother MM(B) mukul ba:pa (gatjamirriŋu) FZ (Morphy 1977, 1984: 6, 1991; Keen 1978: 118).

(2) Yan-nhaŋu from the western region distinguish the term maːmuku (FFZ) from maːri'mu (FF).

(3) Marratja is used in the same way to designate SC.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

(4) In Dhuwala/Dhuwal terms momalkurr and ηathiwalkur are used to distinguish MMMBS and MMMBD for which the Yan-nhaŋu use gulkulŋu and gulkulŋu walipma to identify the difference.

An important convergence between the two groups is the significance granted the relationship of ma:ri’mu FF to ma:muku walipma (FFZ), in line with conceptions of shared ancestral essences, and consistent with the patrilineal model. Although not marked in the same way, this relationship is still of great consequence to the people of Blue Mud Bay (H Morphy pers. comm.). Before I elaborate on this relationship I will briefly discuss the role of the ma:ri (MM(B), MMBSS(D)),

Ma:ri and Mari’mu

The role of the ma:ri (MM(B), MMBSS(D)) in connubium is well represented in the literature (see Warner 1937: 102; Keen 1978: 125, 1994: 88). From a man’s point of view his mother’s kin are his potential wife’s family. Chief among these is his mother’s brother’s gaykay/ŋapiŋi (MB, ZDDS, MBSS). The latter’s wife is a potential mother-in-law and his daughters are potential wives. This relationship is marked by some trepidation; with mother-in-law prohibitions and formal relations with gaykay/ŋapiŋi, any offence could spell disaster for a young man’s marital prospects. In favour of a young man was his easy relationship with his ma:ri (MM(B), MMBSS(D) and ŋathi of his gaykay/ŋapiŋi (MB, ZDDS, MBSS). The deep friendships often existed between them inside this relationship often referred to as joking relations (wakalkunhamirr). These joking relations may be influential in connubial arrangements. In this way a ma:ri (MM(B), MMBSS(D)) might bring gentle persuasion to bear on his son, a young man’s gaykay/ŋapiŋi (MB, ZDDS, MBSS), on behalf of the young man, his gujijunjungu/latharra (ZDCM SC, FFZDC).

For the Yan-nhaŋu and Dhuwala/Dhuwal it is important to distinguish mari’mu (FF/FFB/FFZ) from ma:ri (MM/MMZ/MMB). Although having less to do with connubial relations, this is an important relationship to the Yan-nhaŋu as it is believed that the father’s father (FF) looks after one’s wellbeing in this life and the next. It also is the case that the mari’mu (FF) is believed to pass on magical powers to his descendents. The impact of this (FF/Z) and (MM/B) distinction in these two categories of grand kin lies in the fact that it gives a particular prominence to the relationship between a man and his brother’s son’s children (mSC) (that is, between ma:ri’mu and
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

*marratja*. This strongly patrilineal expression of kinship gives the *ma:ri’mu* (FF) distinctive significance to the unborn child *marratja* (mSC) in the ancestral line (*ba:purru*).

The *ma:ri’mu* (FF) has a special interest in the unborn (*marratja* (mSC)) as noted by Warner, and equally in mortuary preparations as they affect the return of the spirits of the dead to the ‘clan’ waterhole (Warner 1937: 22, 62). Warner writes, ‘Narmarngo walked by his water hole … When he slept that night he dreamed that the child’s marikmo [Narmarngo’s father’s father] came to him and said, “I’m bringing my maraitcha (son’s son) back to you”. Soon the child was born’ (1937: 22). This relationship signifies an assumed continuity inherent in the essences of the male line through the generations from antecedents or first born (*ŋurrungangabo*) to their descendents in the aforementioned patrilineally comprised *waŋar ba:purru* (see Chapter four).

Similarly, at the other end of life, the relationship with the father’s father is important as he acts as a guide on the journey of the spirit into the clan water. For the Yan-nhaŋu this interment may equally well be conceived of as a return to special sites in the sea as well as to fresh water. This concept of a spirit’s journey to the group’s water is reinforced by the convention among the Yan-nhaŋu of naming the body of the deceased with names used to name canoes.

Warner’s (1937) informants describe the shared convention that when a man dies his ‘marikmo’ (*ma:ri’mu*) directs his return to his ‘Narra well’ (*ŋa:rra*):

> A Murngin who is about to die … dances his death dance … to send his spirit back to his ranga well …‘we can drink that narra water; we can see the bottom of the well. That is nothing. That man is far down below in the deep water with his ranga, with his wongar and his old marikmo.’ (Warner 1937: 25).

Clearly the notion of paternal ancestral essences, in the form of the grandfather (*ma:ri’mu*), religious icons (*ranga*), and the ancestral creator being (*waŋarr*) returning to the elemental water hole is essential to Yolŋu ideas about life and death. In fact it is quite conventional on the outer islands to talk to the spirit of a deceased grandfather, sometimes referred to in English as talking to one’s shadow. Exclamations and unreserved asides made to *ma:ri’mu* in the daily round are commonplace. For
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

example, when fishing, hunting, playing or fighting, it is to this particular category of ancestral kin that one addresses one’s wish for assistance. The *ma:ri’mu* is believed to be omnipresent and is often invoked when introducing someone unfamiliar to the country or for domestic incantations (*guwikthana’ba*), to help provide food or, as in the following example, where someone entreats their father’s father’s spirit to provide fish.

This *ma:ri’mu guwikthana’ba* was transcribed from a recording of a young Yan-nhaŋu man from Murrunga Island, spoken as he carried his fishing spear to the sea at Wagiranga (Mu 72) (see Map 34):

*Ma:ri’mu guwikthana’ba* (Father’s Father incantation)

\[
Naŋa garran gurrku bakulunha maypal, girratu, babalaway.
\]

I will go to collect shellfish, fish and whatever I can find.

\[
Naŋi:li naŋa ratha baman naŋa ŋunuyu ŋarranha gan’nya maranili.
\]

Long ago when I was a baby you took me to the seashore to hunt.

\[
Naŋa waŋadanama, naŋa gurrku garrama guyalili, nhunu dhola, naŋa bakulunha ŋalitjalama guya.
\]

I will make a wish to you, while fishing, and you will get us a fish.

*Ma:ri’mu, marratja nhunukuli gurrunha ŋarrakala guya*

Grandfather, give me, your grandson, a fish.

(Fieldnotes Murrunga 4.4.1998)

On this occasion, the demand for fish met with success. This *ma:ri’mu* relationship, continuing after death and signifying the profound link between place, kin and ancestors, permeates the day and night. Dreams are often said to be sent by one’s *ma:ri’mu*. Yan-nhaŋu children soon learn that their *ma:ri’mu* is listening, as an invisible social actor: a kinsman who will accompany one through life, a life and death surrounded and permeated by encounters with invisible kin.

For the Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu, kinship provides an overarching system enabling social exchange across wide networks, a shared framework enabling connections and concomitantly disconnected by important differences. A distinctly saltwater orientation
is indicated in the metaphors and rhetoric of life and death flowing from the patrilineal sites in the sea, including waterholes on islands. Yan-nhaŋu people have distinct saltwater conception sites because of the ancestral endowment of saltwater estates. Similarly and distinctly for the Yan-nhaŋu their maŋiŋu may pass on magical gifts, as in sorcery powers that are said to provide for, and protect one, through the life cycle. From an ego-centric perspective the links to one’s father’s father’s ancestral seas and sites permeate one’s life. Having laid out a framework for understanding Yan-nhaŋu difference from other Yolŋu groups I want to turn now to examine Yan-nhaŋu groups and their internal differentiation, particularly by examining the kinds of metaphor and expressions of ancestral essence that link and differentiate these baŋpuŋuru.

**Similarity and difference between Yan-nhaŋu groups**

Yan-nhaŋu groups share a Yolŋu-wide cosmology from which blossoms stories that explain the nature of the cosmos and the links between groups. Myths about site-based ancestral phenomena bequeath the parameters of local ontological perspectives. These localised perspectives are fixed to site-based ancestral endowments that include the members of one’s own group, spirits, maŋayin and the focal ancestral endowments of the baŋpuŋuru. But importantly, the myths that are a basis for localized ontological perspectives may also link groups to networks of ancestral relations in a wider mythological system of beliefs shared by all Yolŋu (see Warner 1937: 234; Williams 1986: 37; Morphy 1990: 313; Keen 1994: 90; 1995: 520; Tamisari 1998: 252–253). For Yan-nhaŋu groups some of these myths are shared and others are not.

The distinctive features of the land and sea scapes are the sites created in the ancestral journeys of the Yan-nhaŋu wanŋarr. These travels, punctuated by acts of creation, bond specific identities to a complex of names, sites and ancestors. These complexes are laid down by a wanŋarr creative incident, or cosmogonic act of transformation (see also Munn 1973; Morphy 1988: 250–252; Keen 1994: 44–45; Tamisari 1998: 260–1).\(^{50}\)

These sites, wanŋala, are distinctive, but some of the extended tracks and journeys of the wanŋarr generate links between groups in long strings of attachment with different

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\(^{50}\) The consubstantial transformation of ancestral beings discussed by Munn (1970) in relation to Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara cosmology consists of three forms: metamorphosis, imprinting and externalisation. Tamisari adds to these processes the concept of placement and orientation, which she links to the ideas of ‘turning’ as described by Yolŋu (Tamisari 1998: 254).
groups covering vast distances (see Keen 1994; 1995). Among the Yan-nhaŋu these acts create their distinctive marine inheritance.

Often at these sites (wangala) of ancestral creation and ancestral transformation the ancestors are said to leave some part of themselves, or imbue some aspect of the site with their essence. The site and the things they imbue are madayin. These madayin, part of the group’s sacra, share the essence of the creation ancestor, and so may be used to signify the ancestral identity of the group that owns them (Munn 1970: 141). The different types of madayin coalesce in Yolŋu thought into categories. Yan-nhaŋu characteristically name these types or categories of madayin in the following way: wangala sites, minyji painting and colours, manikay songs, and bungul ceremonies. Madayin within each of these classes may be divided into different kinds; for example, songs may be public, restricted, women’s songs, unaccompanied or impromptu. People may say, for example, that all the madayin in such a category, such as manikay songs, are shared. At other times, the same madayin may be said to be different (even if some or a number of songs may be the same and belong to each group). High levels of ambiguity are the rule. Such reckoning is generally group centric and context dependent. Group perspectives on what is ‘shared and/or different’ and who are close or distant may be altered. Contingent group reckoning means some links are recognised and others denied; none are definitive, and all may change given the contingency of context.

Table 6 shows a number of different categories of Dhuwa moiety Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru and the cosmologically derived criteria of similarity and difference. The table gives an indication of the type and number of categories of ancestrally derived things that may be used to show similarity or difference between ba:purru groups. The criteria shown in the following Table 6 are commonly said to be shared by Yan-nhaŋu people in order to signify links between Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru. Given the preceding discussion, contingency marks the reckoning of links: some may be cited to signify closeness, while other cosmologically derived criteria may be emphasised to mark difference.

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51 Munn, exploring the idea of transformations of Warlpiri ancestors, says an ancestor – a sentient being – takes on or produces a material form, an object, consubstantial with himself (Munn 1970: 141). The Oxford Dictionary defines consubstantial as the real substantial presence of the body and blood of the Christ together with the bread and wine in the Eucharist. We can understand the reason why Munn has used the theological term as it draws attention to the debate between the Catholic and Protestant doctrines, in which the Protestants consider the bread to represent the Christ, in distinction to the Catholics who assert that the bread is the Christ, not symbolic but is consubstantial.
Table 6 Criteria showing similarity and difference of three Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malarra</td>
<td>Gurryindi</td>
<td>Gamalanga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Estate</td>
<td>Wangala</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Painting</td>
<td>Minyti</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Group</td>
<td>Ba:parru</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Key sacra</td>
<td>Raŋga</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Language</td>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Rhythm</td>
<td>Biŋma</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Tune</td>
<td>Riya</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Song poetry</td>
<td>Makarr</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Sacred words</td>
<td>Bundhurr</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above criteria, many of which are madayin, are here divided into different types, and identified as shared or different. The designation ‘shared’ forms a basis for people to say they are the same. Further, if such criteria are deemed to be the same, the relative closeness of such sameness can be negotiated. For example, the category of songs may be shared but individual song items may be different. In this case the expression maːrr gaŋga galkimiyama, ‘a little bit close’, is an all-purpose equivocator in the class of ‘same but different’, gently blurring the exact nature of links.

The Yan-nhaŋu groups represented in the above table are related to each other, and refer to each other through the idiom of kinship. The Gamalanja and Gurryindi groups are so related that they call each other maːri-manydjį (MM-wDC). The Gamalanja and Malarra/Gunjbirritji refer to each other as maːri-gutjįngu (MM-wDC). These groups may refer to each other as same or different depending on context. One key link between these Dhuwa moiety Yan-nhaŋu groups is their amalgamation into a ‘big group’ (ba:parru yindi) sharing the ancestral identity ‘salt water essence’ (Mariŋa). Such groups have been described variously in the anthropological literature as phratries by Warner (1937), totemic union or linguistic groups by Shapiro (1981), clan sets by Morphy (1984, 1988, 1990), clan aggregates by Keen (1978). The formation of this big group is said to exist on the basis of a number of shared types of madayin, of the categories shown in Table 6. Mariŋa baːparru yindi group links Gurryindi,

52 I have simplified Grandchild–parent reciprocal – maːri – MM(B), FF(Z), MMBSS(D) – gutjįngu ZDCM SC, FFZDC to MM-wDC.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Gamalannga and Malarra people in a ritual association based on shared ancestral essences originating in the sea.\textsuperscript{53} This ritual association is often signified by the metaphor of the turtle rope with its inter-twined fibers characteristic of the interdependence of these groups on each other, and on their sea country. Rudder (1993) describes a widely known story of ancestral beings twining turtle rope together, twisting each strand as they passed it, causing each to bind closely to the others' (Rudder 1993: 388). The Yan-nhaŋu Marinya use this image to metaphorically describe their ancestral closeness. Referring to each other as 'company' in Aboriginal English, they share responsibility for providing mothers-in-law to each other, burying each others' dead and supporting each other in feuds according to the conventions of ma:ri-gutjingu relationships.\textsuperscript{54}

A slightly higher level of resolution reveals more delicate links between types of maŋayin inside particular categories. For example, song subjects (the specific subject matter) and song series (an assemblage of songs) inside the category of songs manikay shared by the Marrinya ba:purru yindi, in which some things are shared and some things not. Song subjects shared by the Marrinya ensemble are divided into saltwater (ganatjirri rathaŋu), bush (dilijii), or freshwater series (raypany).\textsuperscript{55} Table 7 shows some of the saltwater and bush song-subjects belonging to Malarra, Gamalannga and Gurryindi, some of which are shared and others that are distinct. The first six songs are highlighted as they are shared across all three Yan-nhaŋu groups in the Marrinya ba:purru yindi.

\textsuperscript{53} Groups may 'borrow' each others' tunes, and share the same or similar rriya (words) as a sign of relatedness. For example, Gamalannga and Gurryindi 'share' types of beat, bilma, but differentiate the speed with which songs are played based on the metaphor of seasonal bird movements. The white-breasted wood swallow (mulanda) leaves the Gamalannga island of Garuma (Banyan Island, Appendix seven Map 33) earlier in the season June–July, Dharratharramirr, than it does from the Gurryindi island of Rapuma (Appendix seven Map 32), apparently giving the Gamalannga rendition a quicker tempo although I was unable to discern the difference myself.

\textsuperscript{54} The seas of the Crocodile Islands are home to five species of marine turtle, of which the Yan-nhaŋu are renowned hunters. Turtle, and stories about turtle, are of great import to Yolŋu people (see also Morphy 1990: 322–24). Ritual, economic, and cannibal interdependencys linked to the hunting of marine reptiles and mammals, turtles, crocodiles, and dugong are signified by the metaphor of the turtle rope. The rope, named by the Malarra ba:day, by the Gurryindi balgut, and the Gamalannga rawu, is made from the inner bark of balgurr (Brachychniton paradoxus). This rope maŋayin also appears as a type of seaweed in each of the group's sea estates (see Chapter seven, Map 12). In a shared ritual of manufacture, the twisting together of three differently named strands, each strand twisted by a member of each of the three groups in turn, metaphorically connects them to each other. This combined ritual action is a physical correlative of the symbolic relations between Marrinya ba:purru yindi groups Malarra, Gurryindi and Gamalannga.

\textsuperscript{55} Peter Toner's (2001) Dhalwaŋu material recognises 'salt' or 'fresh' water songs but he notes that this division did not form the conceptual basis for musical organisation. Yan-nhaŋu songs are grouped into series usually divided and referred to as saltwater or bush songs, providing a salt/fresh dichotomy of song series consistent with Dhalwaŋu practice as described (see also Keen (1978: 146; 1994); Morphy (1981, 1984); and Morphy and Morphy (2006) for extended discussion).
Table 7 Dhuwa Yan-nhanu Ma:riŋa ba:purru songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Malarra</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Gamalanga</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Gurrindji</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td>Djunjakowu</td>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td>Djunjakowu</td>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td>Djunjakowu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stringy bark</td>
<td>Gadayka</td>
<td>Stringy bark</td>
<td>Gadayka</td>
<td>Stringy bark</td>
<td>Gadayka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Yarrpany</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Yarrpany</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Yarrpany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Wuymu</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Wuymu</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Wuymu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Gurtha</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Gurtha</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Gurtha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>Baday</td>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>Rawu</td>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>Balgut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barracuda</td>
<td>Larratjanja</td>
<td>Olive python</td>
<td>Witj</td>
<td>Rock cod</td>
<td>Burrumitjpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propria</td>
<td>Nyambal</td>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>Manha</td>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>Manha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying fish</td>
<td>Dikarr</td>
<td>Eleocharis</td>
<td>Rakay</td>
<td>Morning star</td>
<td>Manharru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning star</td>
<td>Baumbarirr</td>
<td>Oyster catcher</td>
<td>Bagapaga</td>
<td>Lapwing plover</td>
<td>Birrakabirka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapwing plover</td>
<td>Birrkabirka</td>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Wak</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Gurrimirrku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bark Canoe</td>
<td>Guluvuru</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Bitak</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Narapulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea water</td>
<td>Maranmba</td>
<td>Stringy bark</td>
<td>Gadayka</td>
<td>Stringy bark</td>
<td>Gadayka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Malawalangu</td>
<td>Splinter</td>
<td>Birpa</td>
<td>Splinter</td>
<td>Birpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea eagle</td>
<td>Dhamala</td>
<td>Goanna</td>
<td>Lapakarra</td>
<td>Goanna</td>
<td>Djanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black ibis</td>
<td>Garrala</td>
<td>Wood roach</td>
<td>Boduk</td>
<td>Milky way</td>
<td>Bajarru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goanna</td>
<td>Djanda</td>
<td>Swallow</td>
<td>Mulanda</td>
<td>Black bird</td>
<td>Gwudalpadal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar glider</td>
<td>Barrandji</td>
<td>Turtle spear</td>
<td>Lungu</td>
<td>Fish trap</td>
<td>Betju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef</td>
<td>Gukuda</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Barra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brolga</td>
<td>Gudurkku</td>
<td>Green Turtle</td>
<td>Wurrulgurra</td>
<td>Rainbow</td>
<td>Ganybalatj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There exist some closer links, or a little more ‘sameness’, between Gamalanga and Gurrindji in this version of shared song subjects. That is, there are an additional four song subjects shared between them (as opposed to only two more than the first six shared between Gurrindji and Malarra).

The performance of such songs follows the contours of tunes, clapstick rhythms, song subjects and the repertoire as prescribed by law. However, extenuating conventions complicate the clear delineation of song subjects and series in ceremonial performance. Certain song subjects are sung by members of all groups. Songs, whether shared or not, always retain attributes that refer to the owning group. The crucial point is that in just the way other types and categories of madayin can be used to signify links between Yan-nhanu estates, kin, madayin and groups, some of these songs may also

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56 I have found that individual singers exhibit considerable diversity and idiosyncrasy in their use of song texts, although other singers would acknowledge that all singers in the group COULD, if able, use those words. So, too, dhakay gulkhana (lit: tasting a piece) is a convention of using another group’s tune for a shared song to invoke relatedness. Individual musical styles and the variety of song texts is related to knowledge, so younger singers exhibit fewer song words and phrases than more experienced singers (Keen 1994: 149; Toner 2001; 2007: 173).
create sources of potential difference, all of which may be expressed as ‘a little bit close’ (*maːrr ganga galkimiŋama*).

Before going on to discuss elements of social differentiation between Yan-nhaŋu and other Yolŋu groups I want to highlight the point about connection and difference between Yan-nhaŋu groups. The same categories that can be depicted as nodes of similarity, also contain distinct elements with the potential to signify the distinctive endowment of a locality based ancestral provenance. The shared ancestral endowment of the Yan-nhaŋu language, while it is a significant element signifying a shared Yan-nhaŋu identity and distinguishing Yan-nhaŋu speakers from other groups, also contains elements of difference.

*Sociolinguistic variation in Yan-nhaŋu groups*

The sociolinguistic identifier ‘Yan-nhaŋu’ is divided into six *baːpurru* groups with distinct but continuous estates in the Crocodile Islands. Despite all of these Yan-nhaŋu people identifying as members of the Yan-nhaŋu group they also identify as speakers of the distinct patri-lectal varieties of Yan-nhaŋu given to them by the ancestors. Three groups are of *Dhuwa* moiety and three are of the *Yirritja* moiety (see Table 2). Yan-nhaŋu language is a significant dimension of a shared Yan-nhaŋu identity, distinguishing Yan-nhaŋu speakers from others not speaking a Yan-nhaŋu language. But identification by Yan-nhaŋu people to a Yan-nhaŋu identity is context sensitive, and always subject to re/negotiation depending on the contexts in which it is constituted. A case in point is the marked variation in the patrilectal varieties of Yan-nhaŋu language used by Yan-nhaŋu people of different groups. One may identify as purely Gamalanga, or as Yan-nhaŋu, identifying with the more inclusive Yan-nhaŋu sociolinguistic identity, or both.

People may share a number of overlapping identities. The extent to which people may identify with distinct groups and then identify with others on different occasions, or may suppress one identity while highlighting another according to context and motives, can be considerable. Toner (2001) describes ‘multiple, overlapping and contingent’ aspects of identity formation (Toner 2001: 37). Moreover, he argues that groups with proper names are kinds of identity constituted through discourse and action and which may be contingent on context. This kind of overlapping and heterogeneous group identification is present in ongoing links between Yan-nhaŋu
people and their Burarra kin. For example, in certain contexts some Yan-nhanju will refer to themselves as Burarra and some Burarra will refer to themselves as members of a Yan-nhanju ba:puurr and identify as speakers of that language. Bagshaw writes:

Despite marked differences in language and social organization – Burarra speak a prefixing non-Pama-Nyungan language (cf Gasgow and Gasgow 1985) and subscribe to an Aranda-like system of kin classification (Hiatt 1965), whereas Yan-nhanju speak a dialect of the suffixing Pama-Nyungan Yolŋu Matha language (Zorc 1986) and classify kin asymmetrically (Keen 1994) – the two people characterize themselves as ‘close’ (B: yi-gurrepa; Y: galki) and maintain high levels of socio-cultural interaction (including intermarriage) (Bagshaw 1998: 155–156).

Some Yirritja Yan-nhanju groups and Burarra groups share principal common ancestors (and hence shared sacra) representing what Morphy (1988) has called a ‘constellation’ of potential or latent ancestral connections that may be contextually united (Morphy 1988: 258). Powerful influences arising from the conditions of mission life described in Chapter two promoted the out-migration of many Yirritja Yan-nhanju to Maningrida. Of those people now living at Maningrida many now speak Burarra. What this means is that Yan-nhanju people subscribe to and identify with many overlapping kinds of identity, in many kinds of groups, variously composed, and in multiple kinds of linkages formed across the region (see also Toner 2001).

Regional ritual connection subsuming linguistic differences

Mythological frameworks in which shared kin and group relations nestle, and the logic by which similarity and difference are negotiated, underlie the ritual, economic and connubial relations across the region. The Yan-nhanju share ceremonial and connubial links with groups speaking Dhuwal/Dhuwala, Djinaŋ, Djinba, Burarra and other languages.57 As mentioned previously, ancestral journeys link the creative acts of ancestors (waŋarr) and thus create links forming the potential for wider collectivities like ba:puurr yindi (lit: big groups) to form around groups sharing linked ancestral journeys. Contemporary links with other groups of the region are a key aspect of ceremonial and connubial resources implicated in the survival of small groups like the Yan-nhanju. Ceremonial groups like ba:puurr yindi provide regional conduits for the exchange of resources and women that transcend linguistic boundaries. Yan-nhanju is a

Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

sociolinguistic title signifying their cosmological inheritance of language, but the Yan-nhaŋu, like all these groups, are multilingual. Ritual links form a basis of social groups and links between these groups may subsume linguistic difference; for example, socioreligious forms link groups speaking many different languages. I will examine two of these variable larger ceremonial socioreligious formations.

The Burarra live just to the west of the Yan-nhaŋu on the mainland at Cape Stewart. Yan-nhaŋu share links with the Burarra on multiple levels: Yan-nhaŋu Ḧurruru, Bindarrar and Walamangu ba:purru groups of the Yirritja moiety are joined in larger ceremonial complexes with the Burarra-speaking Gamal. For example, one of these ba:purru yindi is the Gulalay ba:purru yindi. This ceremonial aggregation links Gamal and Yan-nhaŋu Ḧurruru, Bindarrar and Walamangu specifically through the travels of Yirritja seawater and mangrove seed wanjarr around the Crocodile Islands and west to Cape Stewart. These ancestral links are described by Bagshaw (1998) thus:

For Burarra and Yan-nhaŋu, the customary ownership of gapu dhulway, gapu maramba and associated maŋayin is primarily predicated on consubstantial identification with the relevant salt water wanjarr. Articulated at both the individual level and the level of the yakarrarra, or baparru ... in this connection, members of most of the yakarrarra and baparru generally considered to own ... (the sea) ... explicitly state that they were begotten by, inter alia, their human genitors ... and the body of water which forms part of their respective estates ... and its associated ritual names; such individuals are sometimes given salt water bundurr names as personal names and may be addressed or referred to as ‘salt water’ (Bagshaw 1998: 162).

As noted before, Yan-nhaŋu identify foremost as speakers of Yan-nhaŋu language, as a symbol of social identity broadly emblematic of their particular cosmological inheritance. However, some of the multilingual Yan-nhaŋu may also speak and identify as Burarra. Yan-nhaŋu sites in the seas and islands, sharing Burarra names, and linked through ancestral essences, enable a variety of religious sociolinguistic associations and identification of people. Another example of extended threads of ancestral connections crosscutting linguistic boundaries is demonstrated by Yan-nhaŋu speaking Yirrijta groups’ membership in the Mandjikay ba:purru yindy.

The Mandjikay ba:purru was first described by Warner (1937: 34) and later Berndt (1948). This wideranging ceremonial alliance has persisted into the present. The
ancestral journey links groups in the Mandjikay including Dhaŋu-speaking Wangurri, Dhuwala-speaking Gupapuyŋu, Gunaymirrilili, Wobulkarra, and Burarra-speaking Gamal, none of whom speak Yan-nhaŋu. These ritual links between three separate Yan-nhaŋu ba:purr ru groups (Nguruwula, Walamanu and Bindarra), form the Walamanu ba:purr ru yindi. This Yan-nhaŋu ba:purr ru yindi also may join with the Mandjikay ba:purr ru including the Burarra-speaking Gamal people from Yilan, in extendable ‘strings’ of potential relations across the region (Keen 1995).

What these Mandjikay and Walamanu ba:purr ru yindi demonstrate is the importance of ancestral links as the basis for the construction of ba:purr ru identities. These groups have varied forms and more than one kind of rhetorical metaphorical device is at work in their group construction. In the case of the Yan-nhaŋu it is evident that myths conferring localised ontological perspectives fixed to site-specific identity complexes provide a number of categories of ancestral endowments potentially signifying difference or similarity. Yan-nhaŋu can identify as speakers of their own patrilects, the wider sociolinguistic title, or members of various groups related to each other as ma:ri-manydji (MM-wDC), or which form into larger groups (ba:purr ru yindi) on the basis of these shared ancestral endowments or wider social identities such as Yan-nhaŋu speaking Yolŋu.

Yolŋu social practices are continuously innovative and contingent. The eastern Yolŋu social practices of using regional titles such as the eastern “Balamumu” or “Dholpuyŋuy” reffer to a distinctive set of cross moiety groups occupying a particular region. The Yan-nhaŋu identity is part linguistic, partly cosmological (mythological and ritual), social, has a particular socio-political history and a distinctive marine lifestyle linked to the salt water estates. Continuities in Yan-nhaŋu social identity including cross moiety linguistic identification reconstruct relations from multiple potential identifiers in contingent social discourse of the everyday. This explains why Yan-nhaŋu includes groups of both moieties, because lived experience itself also transcends cosmological links and divisions. Having said this, social practices are contingent and innovative, permitting changing identifications consistent with changing contexts and but maintaining a putative continuity with cosmic precedent.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Transformations in Yan-nhaŋu connubial arrangements

Yan-nhaŋu groups maintain crosscutting marriage alliances and ceremonial ties with a wide range of geographically separated groups. These alliances reflect the paramount significance of connubial resources for small groups after the coming of the mission. Links based on mythological beliefs support crucial relations of religious, economic and conjugal interests. Yan-nhaŋu groups have extended regional links outward to the east, south and west to make up for the demographic costs due to circumstances around the arrival of the mission. These circumstances, referred to in Chapter two forced Yan-nhaŋu to expand alliances to reproduce their numbers and resources. Access to the reproductive and economic potential of women continues to be a primary concern of Yan-nhaŋu men. I begin with a brief analysis of the basis of connubial relations before examining transformations brought on by historical circumstances.

Relations of Yan-nhaŋu marriage exchange

Yolŋu marriage exchanges are articulated on the basis of matrilateral relationships between groups (Shapiro 1969: 52; Keen 1978: 106; Morphy 1984: 10). Significant matrilateral ba:purru group relations were between groups in geographically and ritually close proximity. Among groups related in a connubium, the mother’s group (ŋa:muŋu pulu) provides wives, and the mother’s mother’s group (ma:ri-pulu) provides mothers-in-law (milma mirr). Milma mirr groups can rely on generous ceremonial and economic support from their matrilateral grandchildren’s (wDC/ZDC) groups. From the perspective of ego, genealogical relations strongly reflect these matrilateral links (Figure 2).
From a Yan-nhaŋu man’s perspective, the surrounding groups, as shown in Figure 2 above, contain kin involved directly in one’s marital relations: the ŋa:muŋu pulu (mother’s group) (above right of ego’s group), is involved in marriage bestowal, as the mother’s brother is a potential wife’s father. Further, a man’s ŋa:muŋu pulu contains particular others of his matrilateral kin; these kin also help define one’s rights in marriage, country and ceremonies, and in addition have rights in those of other connected connubial groups. For example, one’s ŋa:muŋu pulu and their ma:ri pulu (mother’s mother’s group) are ego’s gulkanŋuk pulu (mother’s mother’s mother’s group). In the other direction, assuming a male perspective, ego’s sister’s husband, and children’s group, and lastly one’s gutjingu pulu (sister’s daughter’s children’s group), are ego’s matrilateral relations in descent. Gutjingu pulu contains your gulkanŋuk’s gulkanŋuk, a woman’s children’s children, with whom ego shares ceremonial links and to whom ego is ma:ri. The maternal kin essential to ego’s marital relations are shown in Table 8, illustrating the principal relations in each of these categories.
### Table 8 Kin relations of the principal groups in Yan-nhanju marriage exchange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man’s M group</th>
<th>Man’s MMM group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Na:muju, M, wDDD</td>
<td>Gukulŋųguk, wC, ZC, MMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaykay, MB</td>
<td>Dhimirriŋų, mFSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galimirriŋų, MB, MBSD, MBSSD, MBSD</td>
<td>Dhawarak, mDC, BDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naṭiŋji, MF</td>
<td>Gukulŋų, MMMBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momu, MMM</td>
<td>Gukulŋų walipma, MMMBS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man’s MM group</th>
<th>Man’s ZDc group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma:muku, MM, MMB</td>
<td>Gatjamu, mC, FFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guŋŋuŋu, mWM</td>
<td>Rrundaŋu, mSHSHC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatjamu, mC, FFF</td>
<td>Guŋŋuŋu, mSSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma:muku wukundi, MFWS</td>
<td>Gatjamirriŋų mSSD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Morphy (1984).

The man’s mother’s groups, because there may be more than one of them, may be widely geographically separated, resulting in wider marriage networks. The ma:ri pulu, of the same moiety as the male ego’s group, shares names, country, sacra and possibly language. This group holds potential mothers-in-law (milma mirr) and so lies in a significant relationship in a sociopolitical, religious and economic sense. Gukulŋųguk pulu (wC/ZC, MMM) are managers or djungaya for one’s country and sacra; there are potentially two or more gukulŋųguk pulu groups. One is the (wC/ZC) group to whom the man’s group gives wives, the other is the MMM group (gukulŋųguk also waku), who provide wives’ mothers’ mothers.

The MMM group provides wives’ mothers’ mothers, and can be the same (wC/ZC) group if the marriage network connects four groups in a circle (in the case of six lineages having ‘straight’ marriages). The primary ‘managers’ are one’s wC/ZC, who are ŋamini-wataŋu or the yothu in the yothu-yindi relations. It is the gukulŋųguk pulu about whom the ego’s group says, ‘we give them sisters and for us they circumcise our children’. Completing the interconnectivity of this network is the gutjiŋu pulu, ZDC, with whom one’s group shares names, sacra and important ceremonial obligations. This type of relationship between groups in Yan-nhanju connubium continues to be reproduced. However, the geographical orientation and distribution of connubial groups standing in these relations to Yan-nhanju groups has begun to change over time.
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

These changes are consonant with the wider transformations of Yolŋu relations under the influence of sedentarisation occasioned by the policies of the settler State.

Yan-nhaŋu men, under growing demographic pressures in the context of post-mission sociopolitical struggle and the diminution of their sociopolitical influence, began to look elsewhere for wives. In Chapter two I briefly described the growing power of Dhuwala Daygurrurr Gupapuyŋu, and the rapid growth of the Dhuwal Liyagawumirr (and indeed Djambarrpuyŋu) due to polygyny. As mentioned, there exists a strong correlation between connubial success, martial and political power and high rates of polygyny, especially if highly polygynous sons followed highly polygynous fathers. Concomitantly there is also a steep decline in the availability of wives for other groups, because of the increased competition for connubial resources (Keen 1978; 2004: 203).

Preceding the mission Yan-nhaŋu marriage patterns reflected those of Anbarra groups described by Hiatt (1965). Yan-nhaŋu people would customarily marry into groups such as those speaking Djinaŋ, Djinba, Burrara and other languages living on the western extremity of the Yolŋu region. Yan-nhaŋu connubial preferences formerly had a westerly propensity. These groups – like the Ganalbiŋu, Wurrki-ganydjarr, Balmawuy, Mildjing, Wulaki and Batjimurrungu – were of similar size and composition to those of the Yan-nhaŋu (see Meehan 1974; Rhys Jones 1981; Keen 1982). The Yan-nhaŋu were severely disadvantaged by competition with the larger incoming groups. Over time this inevitably led to westerly patterns of Yan-nhaŋu marriage alliances becoming more easterly in orientation as the remaining lineages of Yan-nhaŋu people married into the dominant groups at the mission. Some of these changes are depicted in Map 3.
Transformation in the pattern of post-mission marriage by Yan-nhaŋu reflects changed patterns of MM bestowal, with greater adherence to eastern Yolŋu marriage bestowal patterns. The eastern patterns contrast with more symmetrical patterns of connubial exchange such as those found to the west. However, both systems stress, and are
predicated upon, moiety exogamy (Hiatt 1965; Keen 1978). Djinaŋ marriages sometimes exhibit reciprocal marriage between groups that are more typical of those living further to the west speaking prefixing languages, including the Gunadba (Borsboom 1978: 24–25).58

Evidence of transformation in the system of marriage can be seen in the changing attitudes to marriage alliances as they are depicted in public Yolŋu discourse. Yan-nhaŋu people had in the past practised intra-moiety marriages like those to the west. These amalgamations, called *gumurr dutji* (lit: chest friction), denote same-moiety assignments (punishable by death, according to eastern Yolŋu ideology).59 Moiety exogamy is rigidly guarded in the eastern Yolŋu system but less marked in more westerly arrangements. Keen (1995) observes that ‘Yolŋu assiduously guarded moiety exogamy and did not tolerate intra-moiety unions … (whereas those) … whose country lay to the west of Cape Stewart seem to have been more tolerant of intra-moiety unions’ (Keen 1995: 67; see also Hiatt 1965; Keen 1978: 100). Consequently, a substantial number of children resulting from intra-moiety unions at Milingimbi in the past have reassigned their genitor in discourse in the public sphere in more recent times. (A similar condition obtains at Galiwin’ku; see quote beginning Chapter two.)

Nonetheless, *gumurr dutji* marriage was tolerated, at least in some degree, during the period of the early mission. With the later ascendancy of an eastern public ideology, those more westerly conventions, evidenced in some Yan-nhaŋu marriages, were labelled deviant and forbidden. Thomson (1961) remarks on the eastern stigmatization of intra-moiety relations referring to intermarrying Yan-nhaŋu and Burarra, including the allegation of incest practices:

As often occurs when a people are brought into contact with those of a different culture, the natives from the east tended to exaggerate traits of the Burara that they regarded as undesirable and often told me ribald stories stressing the misdeeds of their neighbours. After a long recital of the faults of the Burara, whom he stigmatized as warnba, one informant remarked by way of special emphasis, “yappa lukka!” – they cohabit with their sisters. The brother–sister taboo is rigidly enforced in east Arnhemland. Even to mention the name of a woman in the presence of their brother is a grave ritual offence, called miritiri, and brother sister

58 Larger Yolŋu patri-groups may marry reciprocally as well, because they have two or more lineages each, and the marriage network zig-zags back and forth (Keen 1978: 120–140; 1982).
59 Same-moiety unions are described as unthinkable within Yolŋu public discourse, with the possible exemption of certain restricted aspects of the Gunapipi ceremony (Berndt 1951; Keen 1978: 100).
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

incest is a crime for which there is no expiation, punished by the death of both parties (Thomson 1961: 99).

The stigmatisation of westerly (warnba) marriage conventions further reduced the number of potential partners, thereby diminishing the size of the Yan-nhaardu marriage reservoir. The curtailment of potential partnerships, in concert with demographic decline and eastern ascendancy, promoted an easterly shift in Yan-nhaardu connubial orientation in the period after the coming of the mission (see Chapter two).

Today in public discourse Yan-nhaardu people commonly refute any mention of past observance of these gumurr dutji intra-moiety marital practices. They stridently confirm adherence to current eastern marriage conventions. The easterly reorientation of contemporary connubial relations has the effect of stimulating robust competition for wives in the Milingimbi milieu. Contemporary competition is fierce between young men of Yan-nhaardu and other groups for resources, and social capital, in football games, turtle hunting and the accolade of djambatj, a title transferable to excellence in dancing and singing. Despite the eastern propensity of Yan-nhaardu marriages in more recent times, marriages continue to be described as following ancestral precedent demonstrating continuity in rhetorical and metaphorical strategies used to consecrate them.

A shared cosmology imparts a mythological logic articulating the formation of distinct Yan-nhaardu ba:purru identities. These logics impart mechanisms enabling the reorientation of connubial relations. What at first glance may appear to be a contradiction in the denial of transforming marriage practices, with the concomitant assertion of ancestral immutability, is smoothed over by ambiguity and flexibilities inherent in the system. The processual or innovative dimensions of social forms contrast with an ‘ideology’ of permanence and ancestral precedent. It has long been recognised that innovation and change in social forms are not anomalies but intrinsic elements to an analysis of social systems (McConvell et al. 2002: 138–141). Continuity in the metaphors and rhetoric of marriage, madayin and the underlying ideational system provide a blueprint for the reproduction of society along cosmological lines. Stability is discernible in the uninterrupted identity of Yan-nhaardu groups and their maritime estates (Warner 1930: 457, 1937: 187; Webb 1933: 336–41, 410, 411)(see Appendix three Map 17 and Map 18).
Chapter Three: Kin, country and identity

Conclusion

Keeping in mind Schneider’s (1984) caveat, that the interpretation of the meaning of the symbols of others may be accomplished with varying degrees of sensitivity, it appears that the more inclusive Yan-nhaŋu sociolinguistic identity is only one of a number of potentially different groups, of different kinds, variously composed and named, that Yan-nhaŋu people may subscribe to. Nevertheless, the Yan-nhaŋu identity continues to be significant in the contingent context of contemporary Yolŋu sociality.

Social processes necessitate the identification and articulation of similarity and difference in competition and/or collaboration, in recasting alliances and enmities in contemporary conditions. Belief in Yolŋu ‘law’ (rom) shapes social practices, understandings of the cosmic order, the working of the kinship system and the practical elements of social identification and differentiation, lending cohesion and giving meaning to the system of similarity and difference. Myths conferring site-based specific identity complexes also confer powerful links between the ancestors of different groups, and provide the practical mechanisms for the differentiation of people and groups. For Yan-nhaŋu people, metaphors of ancestral essences, spirit conception, matrilateral relations, and the flexible and parallel workings of the kinship system crosscut linguistic and regional boundaries, linking Yan-nhaŋu people into local and regional networks of kin, in connubial and ceremonial networks speaking many different languages.

Continuities in the pattern of Yolŋu society enable the Yan-nhaŋu to reformulate ‘post-mission’ matrilateral connubial access to wives, and in this way to sustain the patrilineally constituted sociopolitical group and enact new strings of ancestral connection. Paradoxically, transformation of Yan-nhaŋu marriage arrangements may appear on some levels to contradict the law of ancestral immutability. But flexibility and ambiguities in social forms, kinship, metaphor and rhetoric coalesce with the ‘ideology’ of ancestral permanence to elide such contradictions. A shared cosmology ensures the reproduction of society consonant with ancestral belief. These crucial beliefs reflecting relations between estates and sociopolitical groups continue to map a changing society back onto the land and the sea in continuity with cosmological belief.

These social processes also find expression in contemporary Yan-nhaŋu engagement with governing regimes and associated institutions of the State, as they compete with
other Yolŋu groups and with kin for official recognition and market-based resources in the public Yolŋu political domain. Complex social processes of identification and alliance are further complicated in contemporary engagement with a rationalist State that continues to deny Yolŋu ontological differences. These complex social processes of conjoint identification and temporary alliance are diminished by bureaucratic devaluation or disavowal of Yolŋu styles of negotiation. A pan-indigenous construction of Yolŋu social action denies the variability and heterogeneity of group formation characteristic of the subtle complexity of Yolŋu sociality. For the Yan-nhaŋu the context of recognition by the State remains firmly predicated on delicate alliances with kin based on a shared and imperiled Yolŋu cosmology. Pre-existing alliances laying underneath (думбирру) the ‘on top’ (ганкия) assertions of brokers in public Yolŋu domain, are grounded in the мадайн, which is the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter Four

Yan-nhanju religious and ceremonial life

Plate 6 Rulkanjura (M 61)*

Because the cult of the ragalk or sorcerer was known to the Yanango of Moorongga Island in the Crocodile Group – a clan of the Maringo malla – who were on the borderline between the east and the west, with many cultural differences as well as differences in social organization, the impact of the kalka upon them was not as sudden or as destructive as it was upon the people of Elcho Island (Thomson 1961: 98).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Catastrophic storms are not uncommon in the Crocodile Islands, especially on the outer islands. Ferocious winds and spectacular pyrotechnics associated with these storm cells are visible for hundreds of kilometres along the mainland coast. Some of these marvellous storm clouds have names and all are understood to have cause, as the following anecdote from my fieldnotes demonstrates:

I arrived amid a furious uproar; someone had caused lightning to partially melt the public phone box. At the centre of the rumpus, the old woman was silent, and then with profound gravity, pronounced [name] the culprit, and named the type of incantation, and the cost of retribution. Later we heard a sheepish law man had sent two hundred dollars and the solemn promise of good weather for the rest of the year (fieldnotes, Murrunga, 22/2/1999).

This promise seems to have been made good, as this was the last storm for the remainder of the wet season in the beginning of that year, 1999. At Milingimbi in the 1950s Anne Wells writes about an apologetic Yan-nhanju man called Rruriya, after some of his rain magic went wrong.60

... following the week-long deluge my husband received a profound apology from Rruriya (sic), the rain-maker. He was living at Cape Stewart at the time. His message was that when he sang for the rain that time he forgot to say how much was wanted (Wells 1963: 195).

Rruriya, like the 1999 phone box lightning man, was a practitioner of a well known, but veiled convention of sorcery common to the Crocodile Islands.61 Warner (1937) and Thomson (fieldnotes 1937) provide accounts of sorcery at Murrungga, but only Thomson observes that such procedures were characteristically practised by the Yan-nhanju. Sorcery (ragalk) is a distinct category of law but with practices that overlap with other Yolŋu ritual forms. Although it is distinct, it is closely aligned with the body of rom connected with the magayin. It is an important and distinguishable and,

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60 Rruriya is a significant Malarr/Gunbiriritji name signifying the male Djan'kawu brother (two sisters; Wayanjkama and Ganyitiŋu (Gurrulkurrul)) in the renowned ancestral myth underlying the Nyangga ritual belonging to this Yan-nhanju group.
61 The Yan-nhanju word gayayaway (discussed in detail later) describes the public face of rain magic however, the practice of sorcery (burr' bu) is understood to be a secret activity. Sorcery (burr' bu), meaning incantation/curse, is recorded by Zorc as a Dhuwal/Dhuwal noun burrupy (1986: 54); other meanings include leprosy, curse, black magic and sorcery. He goes on to describe the expression burrupy-buma V-2b-tr curse – to put a curse on – or burrupy-marrama – to work black magic (syn: nyerrra', nyirra' wiya'yi) (Zorc 1986: 271). A rarely used form of nyirra' is nyirrawunguynma meaning to sing (magically) or magic song (sorcery with intent to kill), and is present in most languages. Such curses may have a more mundane use in the domestic setting for quarantining personal items of senior men from the proper exercise of demands by kin. For example, a smoking pipe may be thus sequestered by laying on a curse (burr' buba yirrpānaha).
for that matter, mostly veiled part of the complex interconnected system of ancestral beliefs in northeast Arnhem Land (Keen 2006: 515).

This chapter takes up themes of similarity and difference in Yan-nhaŋu ancestral beliefs and religious and ritual practices demonstrating variations from, and correspondences with, the shared body of wider Yolŋu religious forms. I show specifically that a Yan-nhaŋu ontological perspective informs the doctrines of their particular religious practice inside the shared Yolŋu cosmological system. I illustrate how the distinctiveness of Yan-nhaŋu social identity is linked to their particular mythological and ancestral endowment. I argue that this endowment is the product of a distinctive provincial Yan-nhaŋu ontological perspective, and that this perspective is a structuring principle in their engagements with country and with their kin. To describe the parameters of Yan-nhaŋu religious beliefs a number of restricted topics are considered, although no secret information is revealed.62 This deeper examination of a Yan-nhaŋu ideational system reveals logics rooted in shared ancestral essences, in myths, in ideas about places as conduits for ancestral powers, and rituals for control of these powers for personal and social purposes (see also Keen 2006).

This chapter is structured in four parts. First, I render a framework for understanding the parameters of a shared Yolŋu cosmology and ancestral laws (rom) that inform Yan-nhaŋu ontology of site-specific ancestral powers. Second, I provide comparative examples of the revered Djanŋ’kawu ancestral myth underlying the associated rites of the eminent Nāːrra ceremony to demonstrate ritual links between Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu people and groups in a ceremonial network extending beyond Arnhem Land. Third, I examine similarities and differences between Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu religious forms, through presenting a comparative typology of ancestral entities, and a second typology of ceremonial practices. Last, I describe examples of types of Yan-nhaŋu sorcery with a case study from Murrunga Island.

An axiom of this thesis is the notion of a shared Yolŋu cosmology. It is this shared cosmology that lends coherence to the ideational system underlying Yolŋu social relations and the maintenance of Yan-nhaŋu ontological precepts. But like all societies the social system is shot through with the schisms of social differentiation in the material struggles of life, love and death. Morphy (1990) suggests that any system

62 The sensitive nature of restricted information means that many of these understandings are not for public viewing and appear here under the understanding that they may not be discussed with Yolŋu people without first consulting the author.
posing a cosmological world order in relation to the social order will face ongoing conflicts ensuing from demographic change and political action (1990: 313). From the perspective of this thesis conflicts arising from contrasting and contradictory ontological perspectives in the context of religious tradition emerge from the parochial nature of geographically specific, site-based ancestral provenance. This locality-based ancestral provenance, an underlying principle of the Yolŋu ritual system, is crucial to an understanding of Yan-nhaŋu social identity. Further, despite the antagonisms of local variation and sociological struggle, a shared Yolŋu cosmology also furnishes the all-important commensurabilities accommodating these apparently irreconcilable local perspectives.

The character of a distinctive Yan-nhaŋu socioreligious identity arises from the cosmogonic action of their particular ancestral wagarr. These cosmogonic acts are made manifest or corporeal in the ancestral endowment of their saltwater estates. The marine environment, and the elemental ontological experiences arising from its character, underlie Yan-nhaŋu religious doctrines. In so doing they furnish the signifiers for distinguishing likeness and dissimilarity to other Yolŋu socioreligious identities. What are of enormous significance, in categories manifesting social boundary maintenance, are not only the objective signifiers of differences, but the underlying basis of similarity and difference vested in the system of meaning. Myths and madayin, linguistic style, and sites relating to ancestral marine endowment are the absolutely decisive emblems of Yan-nhaŋu identity, defining their discrete and distinct niche or node in the web of Yolŋu cosmology. Ancestral laws provide the fundamental framework upon which this system of differences is recognised. This aspect of Yolŋu tradition has been well described (Morphy 1984; Williams 1986; Keen 1994). However, there has been very little anthropological examination of the distinctly Yan-nhaŋu socioreligious corpus, the implications of which are evident in the misrepresentation of sites, underlying identities of estates, and sociopolitical groups described in Chapter two.

Yan-nhaŋu marginalisation from the mission and opposition to immigration has furthered rumours of sorcery. For the Yan-nhaŋu dispossession and permanent immigration to their land promoted, both at Milingimbi and in the wider Yolŋu community, allegations about the practice of sorcery by Yan-nhaŋu (see Chapter two). Chapter three noted that the westerly orientation of pre-mission Yan-nhaŋu regional
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

networks had close contact with those considered by more easterly Yolŋu as masters of *ragalk*, *galka* and black magic. Today, strong beliefs in efficacious manipulation of ancestral power through sorcery continue, but the practice is discouraged. Keen (2006) argues that ‘beliefs in ancestral doctrines and practices are, amongst other things, practical means of action in and on the world’ (2006: 527). Belief in the imputed powers of ancestral essences retains its potential force to compel and influence potent social actions. Importantly, these beliefs in the powers of ancestral essences continue to permeate Yolŋu society in such a way that has significant consequences for relations between groups and individuals into the very present.

Today religious ceremonies at Milingimbi and at Galiwin’ku provide a powerful forum for sociopolitical, economic, and ritual collaboration and exchange. Within the everyday routines of meeting institutional, familial and group obligation, ceremonies provide a domain for the enactment of sociopolitical authority, and ritual and economic power. These social processes, including rituals of different kinds, form an important layer in the fabric of everyday life in these island communities. Responsibilities and rights to exchange goods and services within the ceremonial sphere can enhance the ritual and political capital of groups and individuals. For example, the accrual of political and social capital within various social fields, especially the ritual sphere, remain pivotal in the all-important contest for connubial rights. *Ragalk* or sorcery is among the ancestral doctrines deployed for the purposes of attaining such an advantage as is possible in the conflicts and collaborations, and contemporary struggle, of Yolŋu society. For the Yan-nhaŋu, site-based ritual, and to a lesser extent sorcery, is a telling element in the reaffirmation of their socioreligious identity, and by extension rights over physical and symbolic resources. It is therefore a central dimension of this ethnographic examination in order to identify what is distinctive about Yan-nhaŋu culture.

Review of literature on Aboriginal religion

In the past sorcery was one of a number of significant currents present in the realm of Yolŋu ritual and regional ceremonial exchange at Milingimbi (Wilkins 1924; Webb 1936; Warner 1937; Thomson 1961; Wells 1963). Widespread Aboriginal belief in the Christian church and simultaneous adherence to a largely incompatible animistic cosmology brings into stark relief the quixotic relationship between magic and religion in an imagined Aboriginal other. Early debate is divided, as Durkheim (1912
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

(1965): 43) sees ‘magic’ as antithetical to religion, whereas Warner, having lived on the Crocodile Islands, contends that ‘magic is also as much a “church” in the Durkheim sense as religion’ (Warner 1937: 9). We may note the role of ‘miracles’ and ‘creation’ in Christian belief as synonymous with the inexplicable cosmogonic acts of the warjarr.

The literature indicates that throughout Australia, Aboriginal beliefs in ancestral creation of land and sea country form the basis of people’s spiritual and physical connections to their respective environments (see Stanner 1933; Elkin 1945; Berndt 1970; Peterson 1972; Meggitt 1974). Consistent with this view, Yolŋu continue to believe in a cosmologically inscribed ancestral law, signified in magnificent mythology sustaining and reproducing the social order along cosmic lines.

Berndt’s (1952) insight into Yolŋu social and sexual themes in the Djangawul (Djan'kawu) mythology led him to admire the power of the myth. He writes that it is performed so that ‘[M]an, as a social being may continue the life he knows, in the way dictated by the Gods’ (Berndt 1952: 23; see also Morphy 2009: 75). A multitude of ‘gods’ continue to be relevant in the Yolŋu pantheon (see Berndt 1954, 1962; Peterson 1972; Keen 1977a, 1990, 2006; Bos 1988; Morphy 1984, 2009; Rudder 1993; Slotte 1997). Scholars agree, with some minor variation, about the Yolŋu collective belief in powerful ancestral creator beings called the warjarr (Keen 2003, 2004, 2006; Barber 2005; Morphy and Morphy 2006; Morphy 2007). Such heterogeneity is characteristic of Yolŋu socioreligious forms. Indeed, the heterogeneity of Yolŋu ontological perspectives permit the simultaneous widespread acceptance of Christian beliefs (Bos 1988; Harris 1990; Rudder 1993; Keen 1994; Slotte 1997; Kadiba 1998).63

Williams (1999) draws attention to a key dimension of the complexity of Aboriginal belief about the creative acts of the ancestors. She recognises that the physically transformative acts of the mythical ancestral beings are based on a logic of shared ancestral essence and linked to specific site ownership:

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63 For a fuller examination of a concurrent Yolŋu celebration of a Christian god ‘jesu’ while simultaneously celebrating the existence of the warjarr and rom, see Bos (1988), Rudder (1993), Keen (1994) and Slotte (1997).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

The acts of the spirit/ancestral/creator beings were transformative. Their acts of transforming the landscape, including leaving parts of themselves, imprints of themselves, procreative powers, languages – and names – imbued the human beings with their essence. Thus all conceivable aspects of the landscape (seascape) … are imbued with and share the same essence … These features, under the cumbersome rubrics of animism, consubstantiation, cosmology and ontology, have to be understood in order to understand Aboriginal ideas of ownership and use of resources (Williams 1999: 57).

The Yolŋu in general, and the Yan-nhaŋu in particular, can be regarded as fitting such general descriptions. However, as noted earlier, according to Yan-nhaŋu ontology and cosmology the distinctiveness of the Yan-nhaŋu can be understood as arising largely from the site-specific essence inherent in named ancestrally endowed sites in the marine environment. Ancestral wayarr-instituted law, revealed in site-specific stories about creation, provide the script for ritual action also deemed compulsory to revivify the ancestral powers inhering in people and sites.

Further to this dimension of law is the necessary performance of ritual. Ancestral law decrees the continuation of efficacious ritual action. Ritual is a fundamental dimension of, and necessary condition for, the continuation of this ancestral law. These same ancestral essences linking maŋayin to ancestors and people are conceived of as interpenetrating all aspects of the environment. The world view of the Yolŋu entails sympathetic connections or more manifestly consubstantial relationships between the parts of the world and all the beings, past, present and future. These relationships provide the crucial logics underlying the performance of the many ritual forms practised by the Yolŋu, including the procedures for sorcery. As mentioned, sorcery is an element of ritual property and therefore an emblem of social difference shared by Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu. It is therefore an important signifier of what is fundamentally shared and what is distinct. I now focus on some of the key aspects of a Yan-nhaŋu perspective on their distinctive customs following and flowing from this ancestral law.

The key concepts of Yan-nhaŋu ancestral law

The Yolŋu word rom can be practically translated as ‘ancestral law’. In every day usage the word is highly polysemic, capturing various interpretations. In the broadest sense Yolŋu people believe that the ancestors bestowed the ‘law’ – the precepts and
practices that shape human social life – on the humans that follow them (Keen 2004: 211). The ancestors (waŋarr) endowed the people and country with the law (rom), which is the foundation of the spiritual, social and cosmic order. This cosmological perspective delineates the moiety, estates, and the specific laws of each of the territories, languages, ceremonies and ritual paraphernalia of particular Yolŋu groups. The idea of following the law is encapsulated in the Yan-nhaŋu expression bayŋu rumrumthana garaywa dhurrukuŋu garana, which translated means ‘following in the footsteps (way/approach/doctrine) to recreate (reform/reinvigorate) ourselves in the knowledge (spirit/essence) of our ancestors’ (see Christie 1994: 32). The law imparts the script, or religious doctrine, necessary for the efficacious ritual revivification of consubstantial ancestral essences, essences understood to animate life itself.

According to the Yan-nhaŋu theory of existence, or ontology, the waŋarr created everything [creation] (bokmana). This act of creation instantiates the law, the order rom, and concurrently the animating force ma:rr, bringing to life the ancestors, spirits of the landscape and underlying the fertility of the world64 (see Berndt 1952: 1; Morphy 1977: 253; 1991: 78; Keen 1995: 243, 251). I illustrate the ontological principles of the Yan-nhaŋu theory of existence by way of a useful diagram by Bagshaw (2003: 53), amended to fit Yan-nhaŋu precepts. The following simple schema illustrates something of the parameters of this very complex system of Yan-nhaŋu belief.

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64 Ma:rr supernatural creative essences or power have a number of interpretations; Thomson (1975: 8) refers to it as power, Zorc (1986) describes it as a noun meaning strength, spiritual power, faith, personality, nature, emotional state (Zorc 1986: 219); Rudder (1993) equates aspects of ma:rr to emotions and feelings that connect a man with his sacred things in the notion of ancestral essences (Rudder 1993: 60).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Figure 3 Schematic representation of the basic parameters of Yan-nhanju ontology

**Wanjarr**

Self-existent supernatural beings

**Ma:rr**

Supernatural creative essences

**Rom: Law**

Site specific essences and law

**Wa:NGala**

Place/Home

**Mokuy-Malaqatj**

Spiritually linked phenomena/noumena

**Nuurnuuyakbo-Motj-Marrngitj-mali**

Site derived rituals, objects, dance, names and language

**Birrimbir/Mokuy**

Spirit of deceased

**Dilak**

Very wise old person

**Yolnu**

Adult human

**Maln thanaway/Ma:li**

Spirit child appears in dream to genitor

**Raiha**

Animating spirit manifest in human infants

Source: Adapted from Bagshaw (2003: 53).

The *wanjarr* are believed to have created all the phenomena and noumena including land, sky and the stars.\(^{65}\) *Wanjarr* created the sites whence the site-specific essences

\(^{65}\) For more complete treatment of the influence of Christianity on Yolnu metaphysics see Berndt (1976), Keen (1978), Bos (1988), Harris (1990), Rudder (1993), Slotte (1997) and Kadiba (1998).
emanate. The *waŋarr* endow possessory rights and obligations in property, custodianship, the granting of permission, and duty of care in the places (*wangala*) invested in the people’s ancestors. The *waŋarr* also gave religious icons (*rangga*) special names (*bundhurr*), and paintings (*minyijji*), altogether classed as a group’s *madayin* (Keen 1978: 41; Williams 1986: 37; Morphy 1984: 17). The *madayin* comprise the unique supernatural provenance of *Dhuwa* or *Yirritja* site-specific powers that define and signify a group’s identity. This *madayin*, and the group *waŋarr*, share and contain the spiritual power *maːrr* – a vital force that ensures the continuing fertility of the group’s sites, and the continued reproduction of the humans of the group (Morphy 1984: 17).

Throughout an individual’s life cycle, rituals mark the individudal’s spirit’s journey from birth to an eventual return to the spiritual homeland (*yirralka*). The link to the clan waterhole was first described by Warner in regard to the ‘Narra’ (*Nyara*) well (Warner 1937: 24). The spirit, animated by *maːrr* from a special site, and the person, and the site whence it came, and the *madayin* sharing this *waŋarr* essence, are linked in life’s journey. The spiritual journey of human beings themselves ends in the transformation, through death, to the noumenal state, described by Yolŋu as ‘turning’ (*bilyun*, or *nunggalalaway* in Yan-nhanj-). It is believed the reactivation of the invisible and powerful forces of the spirits (*maːrr*), contained in powerful places and objects in country, is possible and necessary, through the mechanism of ritual. It is a precept of ancestral law that requires the reactivation of these ancestral powers and the revivification of environmental fecundity through ritual. Rituals are at the core of man’s *rom*, a necessary part of his proper behaviour. Warner (1937) elaborates:

... things that are powerful and strong because of an extramundane quality are said to be *dal*, which means they have mana and possess spiritual power ... the two classes, that of the totem and of the dead, are but two varieties of one general type, for both of them belong to the world of the sacred. Their power is contagious and dangerous unless properly handled by ritual (Warner 1937: 236–40).

Ancestral law requires that people continue to practise ritual invigorating ancestral powers (*maːrr*). This ritual process of revivification is an aspect of the human

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66 Munn describes that, in general, any object created in any way by an ancestor is thought to contain something of himself within it, and the various creative modes all imply a consubstantial relationship between the ancestor and his objectifications (Munn 1970: 142).
recognition of, and in harmony with, the coeval processes of death and decay (Keen 2006: 527). Seasonal rebirth, flowering, and the cycle of birth and death are the physical signifiers reinforcing the imagined continuities with the coexistent powers of an ancestral past and the reproduction of ceremonial activities in the present. The complex ceremonial cycle of northeast Arnhem Land bears witness to ongoing belief in the efficacy of these ancestral powers. Of most consequence of these rituals is the Nja:rra or Madayin ceremony. Yolŋu people that I spoke to confirmed that the Nja:rra is still the most revered among Yolŋu rituals celebrating fecundity and the revivification of major site-specific ancestral essences in northeast Arnhem Land.

Djaŋ'kawu mythology and the Dhuwa Nja:rra

The Dhuwa Nja:rra ceremony is associated with the widely shared and highly revered regional myth of the Djaŋ'kawu sisters. The myth recounts the sisters’ journey from the eastern sunrise to the west at sunset, creating the people and the country. An analysis of this broad religious complex reveals significant differences in the nature, practices, and identity of the ancestral mythic beings. These variations are noteworthy within and between groups of both Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu, as well as others in the region participating in this ceremonial complex. The group-specific version of myths, madayin, linguistic type and wagarr names function as emblematic signifiers of group identification. After presenting two examples of non-Yan-nhaŋu accounts of the widely shared Djaŋ'kawu myth, I compare two Yan-nhaŋu versions of the story, to highlight group-specific criteria of ancestral identification.67 I begin by alluding to the importance of this mythological complex to Yolŋu and scholars by referring to the literature.

Warner (1937) devotes considerable attention to the ceremonies of ‘Murngin’ totemism linked to fecundity embodied in the ‘Narra’ (Nja:rra) (Warner 1937: 234). (The ceremony is also called Mardaian (madayin), meaning sacred or holy, and is performed right across Arnhem Land (Warner 1937; Berndt 1952; Elkin 1972; Keen 1978, 1990, 1994).) Warner (1937) speculates that the task of understanding these totemic myths and rituals demands ‘finally by analysis to ascertain what meanings lie implicitly in the thinking and religious activities of these people’ (Warner 1937: 235). He writes the Nja:rra is ‘saturated with social meaning and social value’, contending

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67 I include the journey of the sisters Djurrpiny and Gundjulu who create the Gamalanga island of Garuma and begin to speak the Yan-nhaŋu Gamalanga dialect but I do not explore this story.
that ‘within them (the Djan’kawu journeys) are the ultimate clues to the problem of Murngin social logic’ (Warner 1937: 10). Berndt (1952) declares that ‘the Djangawul [Djan’kawu] myth substantiates and gives traditional sanction to the performance of its relevant ritual, known as the dua nara’ (Dhuwa Njara) (Berndt 1952: xvii).68 He continues that it is ‘more important to the Aborigines themselves than other religious cults ... the Djangawul Brother and Sisters are by far the most important’ (Berndt 1952: xvii). Emphasising its believed role in the fecundation of the environment that Yolŋu are ‘apt to stress the importance of the sexual drive. “How else” they say “can we continue as a group? By what other means can we obtain food except by its natural increase?” ’ (Berndt 1952: 6; see also Morphy 2009). The potency of the Njara ritual is understood to make real and enhance ancestral power through ritual action (Berndt 1952: 7–11; Munn 1970; Keen 1978, 1990, 1994, 2006).69

Keen (1991) considers more closely the symbolism embedded in the Njara, affirming that the ritual reflects general principles and the conceptual schema that govern social life. Fundamental to this conceptual schema is the theme of fecundity, the recycling of spiritual power and the re-enactment of creative events in the ancestral past, of which he writes:

[the Ngara] ... re-enacts procreative acts of two female spirit ancestors (wanarr) called Djan’kawu ... images of conception and fecundity abound in the ceremony, associated with the movement of the year through end of the dry season ... to the monsoon rains ... [M]ixing of fresh and salt waters ... connote sexual connection and fertilization and spiritual conception (Keen 1991: 192–3).

Others have also drawn attention to this underlying logic and symbolism of renewal, rebirth and reaffirmation, in which the ceremonial participants are vitally involved (Warner 1937; Stanner 1962; Munn 1973; Williams 1986: 79; Bagshaw 1998; Magowan 2001; Keen 2006). Within the Njara ceremony local variations of the myth, arising from the particular provincial ancestral provenance of groups, are reproduced within the adaptable structure of the ceremony. Performance of the Njara is flexible

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68 Berndt (1952) provides “the myth itself, the song cycle, and a partial analysis ... but does not present the entire Milingimbi version (264 songs) of the song cycle with analysis, for this differs in several major points from the Yirrkala version of 166 songs” (Berndt 1952). Berndt’s observation suggests recognition of the locality-based nature of the myth although he makes no mention of the Yan-nhanu version.

69 Berndt (1951) explains that it was said that ‘the songs are the echo of this first sung by the Ancestral Beings: the spirit of the echo goes on through timeless space, and when we sing, we take up the echo and make sound’ (Berndt 1951b: VII).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

enough to allow for variation in perspectives, while mythological and metaphorical links continue to reiterate the overarching cosmological themes (Keen 1990, 1994).

The ancestral journeys of the Djan'kawu sisters form the basis of this widely shared regional religious form. The wajarr and their distinctive acts signify through the myths and songs of each group distinct religious identities. However, key ritual elements produce linkages with other groups forming a regional network, creating a context for the identification of similarity and difference. Keen (1978, 1991, 1994) shows how ambiguity provides a mechanism that allows agreements about proper names to be simultaneously illusory, ‘for the speakers might use names with an agreed sense but divergent reference’ (Keen 1994: 57), facilitating connectedness through the ‘polysemy of proper names’, as well as the distinction of outward forms that ‘elide the dissimilarity of inner content’ shared by a large number of groups (Keen 1994: 163–4). This polysemy is crucial to supporting ritual commensurability in the Na:rra.

The story of the Djan'kawu sisters recounts their travels westward following the rising sun along the coast onto the sunset. The sisters follow the coast of northeast Arnhem Land from an island in the east, creating the places and the people along the way in travels through the countries of many groups (see Warner 1937: 336; Berndt 1952; Keen 1978: 70–75; 1991:192–207; 1994: 57; 2006: 518; Rudder 1993: 45). The myth produces a contextually shared ancestral identity complex encompassing groups of both Dhuwa and Yirritja moiety (Keen 1994: 48–49; 1995: 515). It tells of how the Djan'kawu sisters created the lands of most Dhuwa moiety groups including the Rirratjiŋu, Njawmil, Daṯiwuy, Djambarpuyŋu, Liyadhalinmir, Liyagawumirr, Liyagalawumirr, Malarra/Gunbirritji, Manharrŋu, Gamalanga, Gurruyindi, Matai and other groups extending to the west towards the sunset70 (see also Warner 1937: 326; Berndt 1952; Keen 1978: 69–79; 1994: 48–61, 112–117). In each country the sisters created waterholes, gave birth to children, named the plants and animals they saw and transformed their bodies and possessions into the madayin endowed to the people they created.

The creation of salt and freshwater countries is a point that distinguishes different groups sharing the myth. The Djan'kawu are said to have made fresh waters (raypiny)

70 A large number of groups is recorded as part of the Djan'kawu complex but no comprehensive list of linked groups exists (see Warner 1937: 336; Berndt 1952: 26–48; Keen 1978: 72–3). Warner's list (1937: 326–7) demonstrates an agreed inventory of groups and places visited by the Djan'kawu from an 'Eastern' perspective including some Yan-nhangu references, but the text omits Yan-nhangu groups.
and salt water (*monuk*) (Toner 2001: 25; see also Morphy 1984: 67; Buku-Larrngay 1999: 9, 21; Barber 2005: 31).\(^71\) Warner (1937: 335) writes ‘the wells and ancestor are divided according to whether they are supposed to “belong to the ocean cycle of songs or the land cycle”’. Those places where salt waters mix with fresh water are not only ecologically important but are of great metaphorical significance to the reproductive themes of the *Djan’kawu* myth (Berndt 1952: 303; Keen 1991: 197–9), which abounds with reference to ‘the movement of the ocean tides and the floods of the rainy season’ (Warner 1937: 335). For the Yan-nhaçu the *Nyarrra* ritual celebrates the procreative powers of the sisters and their brother (note that not all groups agree as to the existence of a brother), with potent images in the ‘mixing of fresh and saltwater … [that] … connote sexual connection and fertilization and spiritual conception’ (Keen 1991: 193), powers of conception that are thought to live in the sea and in the people of the sea. Like the *Rirratjini* version, the Yan-nhaçu version of this myth features saltwater journeys from an island lying in the east and travelling west across the sea toward the setting sun (Berndt 1952; Elkin 1958: 127–141).\(^72\) This sea journey is a central criterion, although not the only one among a number of criteria, signifying Yan-nhaçu ritual distinctiveness while simultaneously alluding to common events.

Many of the chief procreative acts of *Djan’kawu* appear common to each group’s mythology and are couched as key episodes of ancestral action in their own country. Three events in particular are common to this pattern. First, the *Djan’kawu* created and named places and animals. Second, intra-moiety reproductive processes are said to produce the group’s ancestors and or *madayin*, and third, men acquire the sacred ‘dilly’ bag of ritual objects (Warner 1937: 336). However, there are important contrasts in different group versions that appear within this common framework. As mentioned, I describe such differences as arising from a parochial ontological perspective. For example, I present the following two non-Yan-nhaçu versions of the myth to demonstrate this similarity, and a concomitant uniqueness of local perspective. First, the *Rirratjini* myth tells of the brother named *Djanggawul* (*Djan’kawu*) and his sisters

\(^{71}\) Many writers have commented on the places where waters meet, particularly salt and fresh water, as sources of spiritual power and metaphorical links connecting different clans, such as at the confluence of rivers, of tides and at the seasonal interchange of fresh and salt water that flows into the seas in the wet season. For example, *ganna*, where fresh and salt water mix, is a process of making knowledge of one world available in another (Wunungmurra 1988; Marika et al. 1989; White et al. 1990; Buku Larrngay 1999; Magowan 2001; Barber 2005).

\(^{72}\) The Malarra (Mulara) and Gamalanga (Kamalanga) Manikay song series *djarrak* (seagull), *birrkhirrk* (lapwing plover) and *larratjatja* (barracuda) are performed by Yan-nhaçu men and transcribed by Elkin (1948). The songs and transcriptions name places on Galwinku and Marrungu islands. They accompany Rirratjini versions of *Banumbirr* (morning star) and *djarrak* (seagull) (songs 4682–4696 collected at Bamili and Mainoru by Elkin in the 1950s).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Bildjiwuraroiju (Birriwurwuy) and Mairalaidj (Maralaitj) (Berndt 1952: 63; Elkin 1958: 137; Keen 1994: 57). In the second account of the Liyagawumirr (Garrawurra), there is no mention of a brother; indeed, this group denies his existence as a matter of significant difference (Warner 1937; Berndt 1952; Keen 1978, 1994).73

The following two versions of the Djan’kawu myth belong to the Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr. The Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr versions recount sites visited and the maḏayin created in the Crocodile Islands. These two distinct versions are taken from Berndt (1952) and Keen (1978) respectively. The Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr versions mapped here illustrate substantial divergence in the routes taken in the two separate accounts (Map 4).

Map 4 Comparison of Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr Djan’kawu journeys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berndt version 1952 Rirratjiŋu</th>
<th>Keen version 1978 Liyagawumirr</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Map of Central Region" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Map of Arrafura Sea" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the dotted lines on these maps reveals that these versions of the Djan’kawu story are different. The Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr versions mapped here illustrate a very different path taken from the Yan-nhanju versions illustrated ahead in Map 5. Similarly, Warner (1937) recorded an unnamed group’s version in the 1920s that follows another course:

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73 Berndt reports that ‘The presence of the Djanggawul Brother is not mentioned by Warner (1937: 333–40), however he does describe intra-moiety relations.’ Keen declares Garrawurra do not celebrate the brother, nor do they use the yidaki (didgeridoo) in their version of the Nyarrpa, whereas the Rirratjiŋu brother ‘Bralbral’ is evident in Berndt’s (1952) exposition of the myth, as is the Yan-nhanju Majarra/Gugbirritji brother ‘Ruriya’ in the Crocodile Islands’ myths (McIntosh 2000: 43).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

By and by they [the Djaŋ’kawu] left their canoe and walked around looking for a place to leave a ranga. They left their god at ... They made all the islands along the north coast. They made Elcho Island and the English Company Islands and the Crocodile Islands (Warner 1937: 338).

Each group’s myth of the journey forges links of connection and points of distinct identity within a shared Djaŋ’kawu structure.74 Despite the similarity in form between the Rirratjiŋu and Liyagawumirr versions of the Djaŋ’kawu myth, it is the differences in each group’s journey, site names created, mādayin, and the particular names given to the Djaŋ’kawu sisters, that are significant criteria emblematic of a particular group’s distinctive identity.75 What we can see as important as similarities between Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu Djaŋ’kawu sisters’ stories is their putting down of names in Yan-nhaŋu (yakarra yirrpanaba) and their sea journeys between islands. I now turn to describe two of the three Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu Djaŋ’kawu sisters’ stories, to emphasise the significance of key differences in the names attributed to the sisters, sites and mādayin within the Yan-nhaŋu versions of the myth, as an example of fundamental ancestral distinctiveness between groups in the Crocodile Islands.

Two Yan-nhaŋu myths of the Djaŋ’kawu

These hitherto unrecorded Yan-nhaŋu versions of the Djaŋ’kawu myth illustrate a vastly different journeys. By following the lines the distinguishing features of these two closely related Yan-nhaŋu groups’ very different versions of the myth can be traced. By comparing the Gururrinyi Djaŋ’kawu story with the Malarrā/Guŋbirrriŋji versions the links between their saltwater estates become clear, as do the differences in their estates and interests. Map 5 illustrates the routes taken in the two different Djaŋ’kawu versions, placenames and sites.76

74 Keen (1994) observes that other versions of the story of the journey bring out different points related more specifically to the Ngarra (1994: 60), as does Warner in relation to spiritual cleansing (1937). Other transformations of the Djaŋ’kawu names can be found in Warner (1937: 336), Keen (1978: 72) and Rudder (1993: 211).
75 There are differences in these versions to those told by senior men (see Warner 1937: 336; Berndt 1952; Keen 1978: 70–75; 1991; 1994: 57; Rudder 1993: 45).
76 Both the Gururrinyi and Malarrā myths and associated songs and ritual actions contain an extraordinarily large body of work, each with over one hundred distinctive song items which are here grossly summarised for the purpose of this work.
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Map 5 Comparison of Gurryindi and Malarra Djaj’kawu myths

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Exegesis of the Gurryindi story of the Djaj’kawu journey

In the Gurryindi version, referring to the map above, the narrator starts by linking the Yan-nhaŋu story to a non-Yan-nhaŋu group called the Garrawura (*Liyagawumirr*) myth. The two Garrawura (*Liyagawumirr*) *Djaj’kawu* women’s names, *Ganyiti* (*Ganytingu*) and *Dalkuŋawuy* from the *Liyagawumirr* place at *Garriyakur*, foreshadow the transformation of their names and language consonant with ancestral law. When the sisters reach the Gamalanga island of Garuma they change their names to *Djirrpiny* and *Gundjulu* and begin to speak the Yan-nhaŋu Gamalanga dialect. As the sisters approach the Gurryindi islands they change their names to *Budabu* and *Djarrga*, speaking the Yan-nhaŋu Gurryindi dialect. Once again the narrator acknowledges elements common to other linked groups’ versions of the myth as, for example, the *Birritjama* (*Liyagalawumirr*) story of *Manyburryurr* and *Buliyarrwuy*.⁷⁷

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⁷⁷ The Gurryindi myth reflects the *Liyagawumirr* (Garrawura) myth reported in Chapter two, in which a common incident, the loss of the dilly bag, is used to affirm ancestral authority of men (Keen 1978: 72; 1994: 50; Rudder 1993: 211).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

The Gurryindi sisters Djarrga and Budaβu paddle from the easterly island of Garuma, creating and naming the people, maŋayin and country as they go. They create Djunadha, Matharrayanja, Rapuma and the reef Maypirrinya. The islands and the associated ensemble of ritual paraphernalia (maŋayin) referred to in this public version including clapsticks (bilma), digging stick (dhona), Malaysian arrowroot yuthulumu (Tacca leontopetaloides) and the accompanying songs, designs and dances, named in the Gurryindi language, are the bequest of the sisters Djarrga and Budaβu. (A more complete version of the Gurryindi myth appears in Appendix two.)

The Gurryindi Djanj'kawu myth exhibits key elements alluding to consubstantial identification between named Gurryindi Djanj'kawu waŋarr, named sites and associated maŋayin such as bilma, dhona and yuthulumu. In contrast, the details of the Malarra myth show a clearly distinct ancestral heritage between these two Yan-nhanju groups sharing similar but not identical Djanj'kawu mythology.

Exegesis of the Malarra/Guŋbirritji Djanj'kawu journey story

Malarra/Guŋbirritji land and sea ownership is understood to have derived from the journey of their Djanj'kawu. The Malarra/Guŋbirritji Djanj'kawu sisters Wanyankama and Ganytju and their brother Rruriya travel from Galiwin'ku to Murrunga, and then on to the sunset. The Malarra/Guŋbirritji Djanj'kawu paddle their canoe and create and name the places Njurruwurrunana point on Elcho Island, Dalmana (Abbot Island), Brul-brul – also called Djutu or floating island in English (North east Crocodile Island) – and places on Murrunga Island, and then on toward the sunset at Gudugaypal. As they travel they create and name the maŋayin of the Malarra ancestors. The sacred canoe (guluwurru), conical mat (ŋanmarra), sacred bag (ŋalka), baler shell (ŋalawili) (Melo umbilicatus) and flying fish (díkarr) (Cypselurus melanocercus) are among the ritual paraphernalia invested in the Malarra by the Djanj'kawu.

78 The technique (romi) for cooking the extremely poisonous yuthulumu root is owned specifically by the Gurryindi groups. The technique requires extensive masses of the root to be subject to overnight burning using the mangrove tree man'įjarr- (Ceriops sp.). However, the technique it is no longer possible at Murrunga due to an act of sorcery by the Yan-nhanju woman Dundirr, described at the end of this chapter.

79 Keen records the name Guluwurru as the proper name for the drone pipe (didgeridoo) during the kingfisher dance (djirrididi) at the liyagawumirr Garrawurra-inspired Ngarra in the 1970s. The name is synonymous with the Malarra/Guŋbirritji canoe and the trees (Pisonia grandis) that grow on North east Crocodile Island, djutu (paperbark raft) (Thomson 1952: 1–4) also Brul-brul, homophone for the Riratjiru Djaj'kawu brother.

- 135 -
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Three significant distinguishing features of ancestral endowment (ancestor names, mañayin and site names) associated with the Gurryindi and the Mañarra versions of the Djan’kawu myth are compared in Table 9.

**Table 9 Comparison of Mañarra and Gurryindi Djan’kawu ancestral endowments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Djan’kawu names</th>
<th>Mañayin</th>
<th>Site names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Djarraga</td>
<td>Sacred ‘dilly’ bag</td>
<td>Muwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buñalinu</td>
<td>Clap sticks</td>
<td>Bilma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digging sticks</td>
<td>Dhona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>Manikay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysian arrowroot</td>
<td>Ṭuthulumu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mañarra group myth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Djan’kawu names</th>
<th>Mañayin</th>
<th>Site names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ganytiŋu</td>
<td>Conical mat</td>
<td>Ṭŋmarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayanŋkama</td>
<td>Baler shell</td>
<td>Ṭŋlawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rurriya</td>
<td>Bark canoe</td>
<td>Guluwurruru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred ‘dilly’ bag</td>
<td>Ṭŋka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flying fish</td>
<td>Dikarr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant emblems of difference are the sisters names, different mañayin, and the sites created by the Djan’kawu sisters. The preceding Djan’kawu myths contain the key identifiers of difference, within the Djan’kawu mythology linking them to a network of shared ancestral provenance. To expand on this theme of ancestrally defined difference and similarity within shared socioreligious forms, I provide a comparative typology of Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu ancestral entities and ceremonial types.

---

Mañayin from a particular category signifying similarity and difference between groups may be very similar; for example, the Gurryindi sacred bag has the proper name of muwala, is similar in construction but with a distinct name separating it from the Mañarra -ŋalka, Gamalanga -mirdirr and the Liyagawumirr -gawilirr.

- 136 -
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Broad ranging similarity and difference in ancestral beliefs

Typology of common and distinct entities

There exist a great number of different wanyarr and spiritually linked noumena and phenomena emerging from Yolŋu cosmology. The vast array of totemic ancestral entities, spirits and emanations are not easily grouped into categories or classes. This is also true of the numerous ceremonial types attached to them, of which they form a part. It is difficult to characterise this aspect of Yolŋu belief given the variety of forms, multiple nomenclatures, and indefinite and uncertain criteria for categorisation, an aspect of northeast Arnhem Land cosmology recognised by other investigators (Warner 1937: 443–7; Thomson 1937, 2003: 140–3; Keen 1978: 42–5; Williams 1986: 33; Morphy 1991: 106, 200; Rudder 1993: 34, 78). Despite the problems of imposing categories onto Yolŋu arrangements this typological approach has the potential to illuminate differences and similarities between ancestral entities belonging to Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu Yolŋu groups. I begin with the primary ancestral entities.

Wanyarr, such as the Djaŋ'kawu, are primary cosmological ancestral entities. These types of wanyarr are shared by the Yan-nhaŋu. Their primacy emerges from their apparent ability to engender the ancestors of human groups, and to create the landscape and major madayin and languages. Named wanyarr entities with this capability include the Djaŋ'kawu, Wurdilagu, Barama, Nyapilingu, Lanytjung and Galparrimun (see Berndt 1952: 48; Keen 1978: 70; Morphy 1989:145; Sutton 1997: 301; McIntosh 2000: 43; Toner 2001: 71). Termed the ‘Kolo kulongo’ (gulu'kuluŋu) by Thomson (1937: 11), these totemic ancestors are associated with major sites (rapam) and (madayin) including songs, designs, ceremonies, restricted names and sacred objects (see Morphy 1991: 106–7, 280; Keen 1994: 45–6). A Yan-nhaŋu example can be seen in Map 5.

A shared subcategory of wanyarr ancestral beings is called the malagatj. Yan-nhaŋu names for these wanyarr are Gurmrirriŋu, Wuyu and Mukarr. These ancestral wanyarr are known to be dangerous madaŋkarritj appearing in human form and wearing markings that make them recognisable. Malagatj wanyarr are the coevals of, and interrelated with the, gulu'kuluŋu wanyarr, but produce less powerful supernatural phenomena, and are occasionally to be cross-referenced with mokuŋuy, the ghosts of the dead. Having said this, malagatj appear in a wide variety of physical shapes, occurring
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

as turtles, fish, sharks, yams, birds and butterflies, and in these guises can communicate with people. Like wayarr, named malagatj also have the attributes of human beings, in that they fight, hunt and make camps, leaving evidence of their actions inscribed on the physical and social environment, sharing their names with members of the owner group, names that may be bequeathed to linked groups.

Male malagatj are generally described as libidinous entities with enormous penises, causing the female malagatj with whom they interact to be tricked and coerced into sexual relations. For example, Dhuwa forest song series refer to malagatj and include some malagatj that are not Yan-nhaŋu with names such as Wuyal, Wodhal, Wurray, Nhulun and Warralawarrala. Non-Yan-nhaŋu Yirritja malagatj include Nyulmi'nyulmi, Murriyana, Mitjanja, Birrinydji, Walikurr and Djalŋaŋa. Those malagatj known and named by the Yan-nhaŋu are as follows: Dhuwa malagatj linked to the sea and islands are Bama-bama, Malawalalu, Ñarrawala, Marradhumbarama and Marragalbiyana. Marradhumbarama is associated with Gurriba Island (Gininygura (G 5)), whereas Malawalanu is from Murrunga (Daliŋa (Mu 74)) and Galiwin'ku (Duŋupu Gal 35)).

The term mokuy (syn: birrimbirr, yanuk) refers both to a dead body and to the ghost of a person who has died. Mokuy are said to have sometimes interacted with the wayarr in the distant past (bamanpirr), but are substantially different from wayarr. The ghosts of the dead (mokuy) are conceived of as trickster spirits in contrast to the birrimbirr spirit or soul, which is said to rejoin the wayarr ancestors through the clan waterhole (see Warner 1958: 444–447). People paint themselves with white clay (gupa yanamayun) to frighten away mokuy birrimbirr said to haunt the camp immediately after death. Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu believe that the smoking ritual (wany'tjirr) causes the mokuy birrimbirr to run away and inhabit thick forest country on a group’s land; for example, at Murrunga, Baniya (Mu 74) and Barrga (Mu 63). Here they may become little mischievous spirits whose laughter is often heard, appearing as birds, telling stories or playing the drone pipe (yidaki) at night. Birrimbirr, on the other hand, signify the benign aspects of the Yolŋu animating life force, now often referred to as the soul (Tamisari 1998: 58). The Yirritja Yan-nhaŋu birrimbirr is said to go to the island of Babuwa (syn: Yumaŋa, Bādū, Banđa, Mutliŋa), said to be past Gununba

- 138 -
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

North west Crocodile Reef (Re 1), where the clouds stand.\textsuperscript{81} Dhuwa souls of the Yan-nhaŋu are said to go to Burralku, the island of the morning star banumbirr (Venus), and the island from which the Djay’kawu originated.\textsuperscript{82} At the same time another part or aspect of the mokuy, the birrimbirr, simultaneously travels back to the group’s principal well to rejoin the wayarr. In more recent times Yan-nhaŋu people believe that this birrimbirr concurrently goes up to heaven as the soul.

Nyurrungenabu (syn: Nyurrungenagal, Bularkitj, Wängala ninju) refer to a widely shared category ‘old people’, ‘first ones’ and ‘forerunners’, those human beings of long ago, who may also sometimes be referred to as malagatj or cross-referred as mokuy. The Yan-nhaŋu nyurrungenabu may be entreated to intervene in the daily affairs of people; for example, Yan-nhaŋu invite their mari’mu nyurrungenabu to assist in hunting or in introductions to country. Nyurrungenabu, although distinct, are sometimes conflated with the ghosts of the dead, birrimbirr and mokuy. It is said that the nyurrungenabu appear on the night of the Nja:rra (see Warner 1937; Keen 1994). In 2002 I was told that the sound I could hear was the nyurrungenabu spirits. Yan-nhaŋu believe these nyurrungenabu spirits can be heard on the wind, reminding people how to behave captured in the expression, continue to follow the law’ (bayju rumrumthana garaywa dhurrukuŋu garana). For example, in the morning when senior people are considering which way to go hunting for that day, they commonly couch their decision in terms of an ancestral story (nyurrungenabu dhaŋany):

Watay bulthun napalama dhaŋany nyurrungenabu mana bulanŋitj-murrur dhukarr-murrur rom-murrur.

The wind tells us the story of our ancestors, of the right way/path, the correct law to follow (fieldnotes 1995 Murrunga).

The implication it is that every aspect of life is directed or informed by ancestral precedent and, moreover, watched over by a prescient environment conceived of as kin.

Motj (Muit, Warner 1937: 25) are a category of wayarr inhabiting waterholes and believed to be extremely dangerous, given to rising up and swallowing people, especially women and children. The influence of motj are invoked at different stages of

\textsuperscript{81} Yumana is said to be the Celebes; Bădu, Banda and Mutliŋa may be synonymous with islands in the Torres Strait (Berndt 1954: 49–55; Mcknight 1976; Keen 1994).

\textsuperscript{82} The Yan-nhaŋu Malarma/Gupbirritji share the island name Buralkur with the Riratjingu (see also Elkin 1958: 137), the island of the morning star, cf Turner (1974: 185–8), who reports Groote Island people referring to Braulgw as the island of evil spirits or hell.
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

regional ceremonies connected to the Wawilak mythology such as Mandayala, Gunapipi, Djunguwan and Nulmarrk (Berndt 1951: 23–24; 1952: 32). Believed to create thunder, clouds, lightning and rain, they may be invoked in acts of sorcery. At Milingimbi (M) waterhole the Yan-nhaŋu Walamaŋu motj, called variously Lambalpuma, Muŋanda and Duŋarrra, must be placated by placing a stone on a special cairn at the site Dham-dham (M 61) before using the fish trap there. The danger inherent in this motj continues to command special behaviours from turtle hunters around Murrunga and the reefs named Mirrarra (Re 35), Muŋanda (Re 36), Mundukulŋa (Re 39), Miŋkuda (Re 42), Kırkırira (Re 44) and Djatama (Re 45) (see Appendices six, seven and eight). To avoid the potential of lightning strike, loud noises are forbidden while passing such sites in a boat.

Mali or Marrngit (ma:rrnjitj) may be commonly used to mean shadow or reflection and is a type of supernatural entity like a ghost or a little bush spirit that is shared by all Yolŋu. At other times these spirits (mali) are said to transform into birds and little animals that carry stories of death and love. These sprites or ‘spirit familiars’ communicate with people and are responsible for the special powers attributable to sorcerers (galka, syn: ragalk, gal) and/or healers ma:rrnjitj (syn: marngiti mirror). The ma:rrnjitj has an animal or bird guide, warrakan, sometimes described as a spirit familiar, responsible for their powers (Thomson 1961: 98; Rudder 1993: 54).\(^{83}\) Thomson (1961) writes that the ‘Marrngitj is the medicine man and is distinct from the sorcerer’ (Thomson 1961: 98). These medicine men, he affirms, have been ‘initiated and adopted by spirit familiars called marrngit who help him in the practice of his cult’ (Thomson 1961: 98). These ma:rrnjitj essences are said to be like the spirits of unborn children.

The spirits of unborn children are shared by all Yolŋu and they believe that the spiritual essence (mali, syn: maly' thunaway or wnguli) of unborn children due to be born send a sign to the father telling him the mother is pregnant. These mali or djamarrkurli mali (children’s spirits) are understood to be ‘projections’ of the wajarr, some of which are said to be evident in significant species. Wilkins (1924) recounts that at Milingimbi ‘sometimes the man would see the spirit child in the wreathing (sic) bowels of a freshly butchered turtle’ (Wilkins 1924: 7) (see also Warner 1937: 22).

\(^{83}\) The Warrakan/Marrngitj described to Thomson by Wattiya are named Kanyiringo and Barratauwb, one Yan-nhaŋu Malarr/ Gunbirtji and one Garrawurrara (Liŋgalagi mirr) sister of the Djaŋ'kawu myth represented by the lapwing plover birrkbirrk'janj, describing strong links between primary wajarr and sorcery intimated by Wilkins (1924), Warner (1937), Thomson (1961) and Keen (2006).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

The preceding typology demonstrates the broad range of ancestral heritage shared by Yolŋu, some of which are particular to the Yan-nhaŋu. These ancestrally defined differences and similarities of ancestral forms within the more broadly shared Yolŋu socioreligious category demonstrate the ancestral basis for much of the distinction between Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu groups while also providing grounds for alliance in the construction of social boundaries. Ceremonial practices form polysemic categories that can be deployed in the same manner to mark similarity and difference. I begin by introducing common aspects of ceremonial practice before outlining a typology of shared and dissimilar forms.

Typology of ceremonial practices

Morphy (1997) reminds us that Yolŋu religion exhibits two themes: the cycling of spiritual power and the re-enactment of ancestral events. These themes are common in all ceremonial categories, and often clearly and beautifully expressed in mortuary rituals. The performance of ancestral rituals provides a forum for exchange of symbolic and physical resources, and as such provides the means for the maintenance of material, spiritual and social life. Ritual underscores the crucial link between the reproduction of sociopolitical groups and religious identities giving them continuing relevance.

As previously mentioned a typological approach to categorising this vast and heterogeneous aspect of Yolŋu belief is fraught with imprecise criteria, contextual contingency and overlapping functions and styles, making it a complex and imperfect tool. Nevertheless it provides a clear distinction of the themes of similarity and difference arising from ancestral provenance. I follow Keen's (1978) classification system of Yolŋu ceremonies into 'three genres – *garnja* ('public'), regional, and the Ngarra or Madayin ceremony' (Keen 1994: 137; see also Keen 1978). Of these he says 'categories were not discrete and incorporated elements from one genre into the ceremonies of another' (Keen 1994: 137). Nonetheless, Keen's schema provides an understanding of Yolŋu ritual, all of which are shared by Yan-nhaŋu groups.

For the Yan-nhaŋu I make the addition of site-specific incantations common to the Yan-nhaŋu ritual styles which I attach to the end of Keen's *garnja* category. These kinds of site-specific *garnja* incantations may hold secret aspects and so make a useful link to practices in common with sorcery-like ritual action important to Yan-nhaŋu
beliefs. That is, some secret aspects of site-specific incantations may also be used for the practice of some kinds of sorcery. For example, *burr'bu*, discussed further on, incorporated elements from a number of genres. The most common *garma* ceremonial activities in the Yolŋu region today are related to funerals, notwithstanding the fact that almost all Yolŋu rituals have a mortuary or commemorative component (Morphy 1997: 125).

Mortuary rituals are performed according to the circumstances of the death and the network of kin available to consecrate the proceedings.\(^4\) Many aspects of ceremonies are shared across ritual networks among Yan-nhanu and other Yolŋu groups (see also Thomson 1937; Peterson 1976: 102; Keen 1977: 158–176). Other aspects of the *garma* category linked to funerals are cleansing ceremonies, in Yan-nhanu called *guku wukundi*, purifying those spiritually linked to the deceased, and those who have handled the body. Other rituals linked to mortuary rites are sending off the spirit (*guluk djuyun*), smoke purification (*dada*), body painting (*guluk namathana*), and the burning of possessions like clothes (*many’ tjarr*); this may be carried out at the same time as the handing out of gifts from the body (Morphy 1997: 139), and body purification (*wadaŋa lup*) (lit: washing the head). Much less frequently than in the past, exhumations or hollow log second burial ceremonies such as the *Dhupun, Daymirr, Dembuka* and *Larratjatja* of the *Dhuwa* are practised, as are the *Lorrkun, Larrakiti, Djalambu* and *Mattiti* rituals of the *Yirritja*.

Circumcision ceremonies are among a number of rites of passage shared by Yolŋu groups in the Crocodile Islands and include the *dhapi* (lit: foreskin), a word that describes both the ritual and the initiate. The interment of the bones of a boy’s first hunting success and his release from prohibitions on the consumption of some foods are marked by small rituals. In Yan-nhanu smoking the newborn baby (*gothana yitjiwala*) and brief ritual seclusion linked to first menses (*milgırinŋ*) are still carried out by some people, as too, occasionally, is the ritual bestowal of a mother-in-law’s female children to her son-in-law, by the wiping on her navel of the boy’s nasal grease (*yinipi*) in the ritual called (*milmamirr*) once shared by all. These rituals, although minor, still have significance.

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Exchange ceremonies of the category *Marradjirri* are numerous and so I will refer only to some of the more well known in the genre; for example, *Guyalan*, *Banumbirr* (morning star), *Djurrun* (milky way) and *Marradjirri*, which may also be the name used to describe the whole genre (see Warner 1937; Elkin 1958; Peterson 1976: 104; Hiatt and Clunies Ross 1977; Borsboom 1978; Keen 1978: 187–336; Gurrmanamana 2002: 139). Each includes songs, dances, choruses and invocations relating to particular groups, as well as referring to wider regional combinations, including the Burarra (Keen 1978: 215; 1994: 141).

Smaller rituals may be performed by two or three individuals, such as the *gupa yamathama*, or in Yan-nhaŋu *guluk yamathanaba*, which may be glossed as a ‘make good’ ritual. Such rituals may be used for the treatment of a specific ailment or as a general enhancement to group and individual psychological equilibrium. For example, Warner (1937) reports that ‘women rub red ochre over their bodies because of an ailment, this being but an abbreviation of its use in the larger ceremonies’ (Warner 1937: 235; see also Keen 1978: 186). Small public rituals involving one or two people, although numerous, are often difficult to detect. Such domestic rituals in the Crocodile Islands are by and large practised by mobilising site-specific ancestral powers belonging to Yan-nhaŋu people, to increase such attributes as one’s fortune in love, health, hunting ability, and for protection from malevolent influences. Incantations specifically related to Yan-nhaŋu fish traps are described below as an example of site-specific ritual.

*Site-specific rituals*

Smaller, efficacious rituals sharing the same root logic as those of the larger ceremonies entail sympathetic relationships between part and whole. This theory of connections or ‘homeopathic’ relationships underlies the logic of site-based rituals. Generally, a site-specific rite importurnes the ancestor that created the site to respond to their kinship *gurrutu* obligations, or in response to a gift (*baka-bakmiyaru*), to provide protection or a counter-gift in the form of safe travel, or to attract a partner. People on the outer islands commonly make offerings to the *gurmirriŋu* for the increase of shellfish or fish and so cement their spiritual relations with country. Site-specific domestic rituals mobilising ancestral powers inherent in particular sites are one way that Yan-nhaŋu people continue to conceive of, and structure their relationships, with their marine environment. Through repetition they reproduce an important aspect of
their ritual property. Growing out of the same logic, that of sympathetic connections between ancestral powers and people, is the notion of the ability for people to make a magical attack on others from a distance.

Sorcery rituals share the same root logic as those of other ceremonies. They entail notions of sympathetic relationships between part and whole. Sorcery of this kind, characterised by *galka* and *ragalk*, like site-based ritual, is founded on the assumed essential link between people, places and things, such as one's footprint or hair being a part of one (Keen 2006). Ritual action takes place on things that look alike, images (*mali*), or things that were connected to one personally, like clothes (*gitti*). The widely held Yolŋu belief that humans can produce and cure illness and even cause death emerges from the assumption that humans have the capacity to control the power of these ancestral essences. Reid (1983) reports people’s fearfulness of malevolent attack (Reid 1983: 44–48, 53–54), and others report that certain acts can affect the ritual absorption of a victim’s power or *mAa:* *rr.* At Mirilingimi, according to Wilkins (1924), eating part of the victim is thought to confer hunting proficiency or *djangatj* to the eater. He writes:

... for preference the organs cut from a human body immediately after disablement ... [are] ... consumed without spoken formulae but the consumer must mentally desire to become a successful hunter (Wilkins 1924: 8).

On the other hand, sorcery may be deployed to create social equilibrium, harmonising relations between people and their physical and supernatural environment, as well as to punish breaches of obligations and sacred laws (see Wilkins 1924; Webb 1933; Warner 1937; Thomson 1961). Failure to observe the laws of behaviour governing the moral order are expected to be punished by sorcery (Williams 1987: 72–73; see also Stanner 1964; Munn 1970; Peterson 1975; Keen 2006).

Regional ceremonies include the *Mandayala, Gunapi*, *Djuguwan* and *Njulmarrk* and the *Yirritja* moiety *Yabuuguurwa.*\(^{85}\) The regional ceremonies are of *Dhuwa* moiety. Although the ceremonies are of *Dhuwa* moiety they are significant for all *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* people sharing multiple purposes (Keen 1978: 146). The *Mandayala* and *Djuguwan* are thought to have arrived in the region relatively recently (see Warner 1937: 452–453; Thomson 1937; Berndt 1951: 14–15; Peterson 1976: 104). Warner

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\(^{85}\) Keen (1978) confirms that the *Njulmarrk* is probably the same as the western Arnhem Land ceremony *Ubar* (*wubarr*), as the drum used in *Njulmarrk* uses the homophonous name *wubarr* (Keen 1978: 156).
gives a detailed account of the Wa:gilak sister’s myth and its relevance to the performance of regional ceremonies regularly performed in the Crocodile Islands. Within the secret domain of the Gunapipi initiates are still told, as they were told in the past, that they must not reveal the secret aspects of the Gunapipi to the uninitiated ‘or they will die by sorcery or the spear’ (Keen 1978: 169). Like all the regional ceremonies the Djunguwan contains aspects that may be performed in public. However, the ancestral powers involved in the Djunguwan are dangerous and must be controlled. Warner (1937) describes the affliction of the Yan-nhaŋu Walamaju woman, Dundirr, by spiritual powers after the Djunguwan ceremony on Rabuma:

Dundirr’s leg had two small infections about the size of a thumb nail. Her husband said she could not go hunting for grubs because she was ill. ‘She picked cotton off me over at Rabuma when we circumcised those young men ... it is the spirit in the blood that does this. It is the totem’ (Warner 1937: 235).

Warner (1937) also records the presence of Dundirr at Milingimbi before 1929, but after 1932 Dundirr changes the course of history at Murrunga, described later in this chapter.

The most revered ceremony of all is the Na:rra. The Na:rra or Maadays ceremony, as previously mentioned, is performed right across Arnhem Land (Warner 1937; Berndt 1952; Elkin 1972; Keen 1978, 1990, 1994). It is regarded as the most important ceremony connected to the revelation of the most sacred emblems. These emblems are linked to the most profoundly important of the group’s ancestors and their most powerful essences (Berndt 1952: 6; see also Morphy 2009). At the Na:rra ceremonies I attended the fundamental theme was fecundity and the recycling of spiritual power through the re-enactment of creative events in the ancestral past. The underlying logic and symbolism of renewal, rebirth and reaffirmation was evident at every stage (see also Berndt 1952: 7–11; Munn 1970; Keen 1978, 1990, 2006).

What we have seen in this typology is that all these major forms of Yolŋu ritual are shared by the Yan-nhaŋu. However, in some details these ceremonies are linked to the site-based particulars of each group. I want to give an example of how these particulars can be important in the smallest details. In the Crocodile Islands only a few larger eastern Yolŋu groups have the capacity to initiate Na:rra ceremonies of both Dhuwa

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86 Now less so the Djunguwan; see Berndt (1951: 31), Keen (1978: 158), (Gurrmanamana 2002: 31–40).
and *Yirrijja* moiety. This attribute may have given them substantial power in regard to ritual and social imperialism discussed in Chapter two. In the 2002 Yirrijja moiety *Nja:rra* called by the Gupapuyṟu, a senior Yan-nhaṉu Walamaṉu man told me that the revelation of songs and emblems was heavily weighted toward eastern perspectives in religious dogma. In the light of the overlapping functions and contents of ritual action he witnessed, he saw this as a clear example of eastern politico-religious imperialism. He translated the passing over of more indigenous Walamaṉu emblems as a strategy employed in ongoing struggle, to control ritual space. This is a topic mentioned before of some importance and I will return to this idea of eastern ritual control again later in regard to sites owned by the Yan-nhaṉu.

**Types of Yan-nhaṉu sorcery**

The rituals of sorcery are owned. I argue that the type of practices grouped by Yolŋu under the title ‘sorcery’ can be seen to be associated with the Yan-nhaṉu. As such, practices of these kinds owned by them may work to signify their specific site-based identities. I describe four named techniques known and used on Murrungga Island. These are, *Burro*, *Gwikthana'ba*, *Gatjiyyun* and *Gayanyaaway*. Bearing in mind that sorcery practices are held in awe and respect, and are not the subject of everyday discussion I have been fortunate in that Thompson (1937) has also recorded some of these types. In this discussion I have been able to omit any reference to living people by using examples of sorcery described by Thompson (1937), avoiding any reference to living people, while still describing rituals almost unchanged in every tiny detail, and used up until today on the island of Murrungga.

Thomson (1961) found that *ragalk* sorcery was among a number of magical practices known to the ‘Yanango of Mooroonga Island’ (Thomson 1961: 98). Warner (1937) in the 1920s writes of the notorious Yan-nhaṉu sorcerer ‘Laindjura from Marungga Island’ (Warner 1937: 197), observing that ‘the northeastern clans share a belief in magic but lack magical techniques and magicians … who have definite techniques for curing and for killing’ (Warner 1937: 223). The techniques of sorcery, and of healing, are skills still handed down from *marri'mu* (FF) to his *marratja* (mSC) in the ancestral line (*ba:purru*). Zorc (1986) defines the difference between the benign *marrŋgitj* or healer as distinct from the *ragalk* thus:
MARRNGITJ other forms: marrŋgitjku. N, Adj. doctor, Aboriginal healer, medicine man; sorcerer (for healing not evil); clever, able. Synonym: gilapa, galja-djamarrkuḻimirr(i), -guluŋmirr(i), -warrakamirr(i) Cf: marŋgi (know); Contrast: galka, ragalk (sorcerer) (Zorc 1986: 217 original emphasis).

People still refer to those possessing the healing powers of special individuals within the group as clever (gilapa).

Given the historical significance of conflict in northeast Arnhem Land and the Crocodile Islands it is not surprising that many Yolŋu groups owned ritual dances described as war dances. These dances invoked the destructive or dangerous (maŋkarritj) facets of the group’s ancestral waŋarr. Every Yolŋu group owned and practised maŋkarritj rituals, war songs and vengeance dances in conflicts as, for example, nyerra songs invoked by warriors preceding revenge or a Makarrata (Warner 1937: 144–147). The format of these procedures remains largely the same whether the projection was intended to be benign or aggressive. These dangerously powerful incantations are called burr’bu in Yan-nhaŋu.

Burr’bu

The term burr’bu means ‘spell’ and according to Zorc (1986: 54) the Dhuwalal/Dhuwal word burrpaŋ has the same meaning. Burr’bu, synonymous with the term for curse (nyerra, syn: nyera, wiyarriŋa’), means to sing magically or a magic song (Zorc 1986: 54). Burr’bu incantations take the form of a song which may be used for benevolent and/or lethal purposes: secret ragalk killing magic, or in the healing invocations of the marrngitj and kulong healers (Thomson 1961: 97). The power of the burr’bu is attributable to the invocation of particular waŋarr. Thomson (1961) recounts Wattiya’s depiction of Barratawuy (Barratauwoi) and Ganyitiŋu (Kanyiringo), two powerful waŋarr, one of the Garrawurra Liyagawumirr group and the other of the Yan-nhaŋu Maŋarra (Thomson 1961: 97). These Djaŋ’kawu waŋarr, appearing as birds, were said to impart magical powers to Wattiya (Thomson 1961: 95). Benign versions of burr’bu appear like the more public gudjiŋa and djarada love magic songs (Berndt 1952, 196a; Keen 1994: 273). The supposed ability to cause death through singing burr’bu may be passed down from mari’mu (FF) to the unborn child maratra (mSC), or gifted by a maternal kin, often in exchange for complicity in the act of killing. Ragalk, galka or gal is a profoundly grave matter and its practice is always denied. (For examples of sorcery as practised by Lanydjurr, see
Warner (1937: 237–244). A much more widely used method of incantation is the curse, guwikhana'ba.

**Gwikhana'ba**

**Gwikhana'ba** (syn: Guwikthun, Guykthun) incantations, or curses, are invocations linked to the idea of controlling ancestral powers by speaking special names or words. *Gwikthun* is described by Zorc as a transitive verb meaning spit (out) or spurt (water), or make (something or someone) sacred or taboo by saying magic words (Zorc 1986: 152, see also Tamisari 1998). Ancestral invocations may include using *bundhurr* names, talismans or *mali* (syn: *wuyluli* essence/image), such as images or sand sculptures, or parts of a person, or their properties, and may be transportable. For example, at Murrungga, Gamalanga men ritually remove *nakarrangal* (seaweed) from the green turtle site at Wudulpaña (Mu 32) and incant specific *bundhurr* (syn: *gunhurr, burrpa, likan*) words to *Wurrkuluma*, the green turtle *waŋarr*, to assist hunting and simultaneously increase turtle fertility. This kind of ceremony was recorded at Murrungga by Thomson (1937):

At N.W point of Moorooonga Island I found an important totem centre, or, better, an area dotted with totem centres. The island properly belongs to Yanängga *vann* of Malärra *bapuro* [Yan-nhaŋu language of the Malärra bapuru] but the totemic stones are associated in mythology with “culture heroes” of Kämmlängga [Gamalanga] (whose language is said to be Yanänga) on the east side of the lower Goyder river (estuary).

Ngai’yi Yolngu maritji ngämm’ ngämmaiyun. Munata*nān’ngo wängal: ‘Mirrinyu ni man’ngo wurrqurluma ni man’ngo ngärrai’in gurrupul, ngai’yi, wängär*Wonqerli ngai’yi mällä nirrpan mina – wurrqurluma. The màlli in the water is said to hear the incantations of the turtle hunter.

(Thomson Totemic Increase Rites File No. 10 fieldnotes August 1937 Moorooongga Island) [My italics]

I translate the meaning of this story thus: the man goes and makes good a sand sculpture and incantation: he incants to the *wurrqurluma* green turtle *waŋarr*, to whom he is kin, saying; ‘kinsman give me a green turtle’. He makes this incantation and draws the sand sculpture at the site said to be the essence/image of the turtle *wurrqurluma* green turtle *waŋarr* at Wudulpaña (Mu 32).

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87 Likan or ‘power’ names are sacred names, sometimes called out at important moments in ritual performance, which link concepts of people, places, and ancestors; *likan* means ‘elbow’, and these names are sometimes referred to as ‘elbow names’. Yan-nhaŋu people customarily use the world *bundhurr* instead of *likan* (Schebeck 1968: 45).
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

The incantation described by Thomson in 1937 is entirely recognisable to people at Murrunga today who perform a slightly modified version of this same guwikhana’ba to invoke the green turtle wanyarr Wurrungulma at the site Wudulpalnga (Mu 32). This is one of a number of pre-turtle hunting ceremonies that are routinely carried out by Gamalanga, Gurryindi and Malarrra men in turtle-hunting crews to ensure capture and attainment of prestige (djambatj).88

Gatipiyun

Gatipiyun is the solicitation of a specific wanyarr for assistance or for beneficence by the giving of a symbolic gift. It is usually a site-specific rite that importunes a malagatj, wanyarr or mokuy. This form of domestic spell is used to improve the efficacy of fish traps, ensure safe travel, smooth the waves, make islands come closer and to attract a partner. There is an assumed reciprocal relationship between the performer and the wanyarr or nurrugangabo solicited. The following example of gatipiyun recorded by Thomson (1937) is very similar to the ones I saw enacted at the same place some seventy years later. Gatipiyun (‘Kaitpu’yun ka wanga’) is an increase rite according to Thomson’s 1937 fieldnotes, and to some degree this is correct. The solicitor, here the Liyagalawumirr man Yikali, asks for a gift in the form of abundant spike rush corms, spoken in part in Yan-nhanu and partly in Djinaj at the site called Maluwa (Mu 33). Maluwa can be translated as ‘the place of the father’. People commonly make offerings to the Gurmirriju for the increase of shellfish, fish and other species and for increasing the productivity of the many fish traps on the island.89

I have included Thomson’s (1937) original transcription of Yikali’s importuning the Gamalanga and Gurryindi Gurmirriju at Maluwa (Mu 33). This Gurmirriju stands at the same place at Murrunga and similar incantations are made to him to produce many räkay (Eleocharis dulcis) corms at Murrunga:

Properly the rites are carried out at Moooroonga by Kämmalängga [Gamalanga] and also by Marlarrra [Malarra] – ‘suppose Kämmalängga no more then Marlarrra do it’ Yikali ‘Outside man, belong that county, him [wanyarr] listen because bunggaän ngai’yi nininngo smell it-him always there’ A small obviously man-made pile of stones, with a few pieces of

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88 The importance of the title Djambatj to the Yan-nhanu marine turtle exchange economy is discussed in detail in Chapter seven.
89 I found a number of other such sites belonging to non-Yan-nhanu people on islands belonging to Yirritja groups. For example, the Wubulkarra Marrawaka at Munathalapandalamirr, the Warrimirri Gurrurru at Naninburra and Birkil Walikurr at Lunggutija. Given their Yirritja moiety associations this may substantiate Thomson’s conjecture about Macassan influence (Thomson 1937).
coral limestone, like a shrine, standing in the centre of a cleared circular area. This saucer-like depression in the sand was 9'6" across and the pile of stones in the center was 1'11" height and was said to represent the *maalli* of *kor‘miringor*, *wängärr morkoi* [essence/image of the Malagatj or Gurmirriju]. This was situated on the dune area, just behind the actual low dunes. About 150 yards away on the edge of the water, and partially covered at high tide, was a reddish ironstone rock, said to represent mialk *kor‘miringor*.

* Bor’tjil’ila nänguruna guna bor’tji’ila ma’bi’a’lla
  Come plenty his give come plenty do not
* djau’yu ngärrak’ula gunera’yu ngärra kurku’mâna
  take away from me take away I I shall
* Lenn(benn) ngärra’kula räkai gunerai’yula ma’biälla dju’ju
  eat for me leave for me do not take away

nänguruna- his at Thomson Totemic Increase Rites File No. 10 fieldnotes August 1937 Mooroonnga Island

This example of the *gatjiSyun* rite is customarily performed by Yan-nhaŋu people but may also be practised by those from elsewhere having long association by residence with the site. This is because it is believed that the *Malagatj Gurmirriju* will recognise the smell of this person. The practitioner presents the *Gurmirriju* with the first ripened *ra:kay* (*Eleocharis dulcis*) bulbs for the season incanting the *gatjiSyun*—‘make plentiful the *ra:kay*, I will not take away those *ra:kay* belonging to you, I will leave yours here and go and eat those that you have provided for me’.

This kind of *gatjiSyun* with offering is commonly used to beseech the *Gurmirriju* at Maluwa (Mu 33) and to other incarnations of him on the other islands. This form of rite need not necessarily include a gift to the *waŋarr*, *malagatj* or *ŋurrunjangabo* importuned. Thomson says ‘it is a sacrificial rite not an increase rite’ (Thomson 1937: 12).

*Gayaŋaway*

‘Possessing’ or ‘having the thought’ exemplifies this style of silent and often therefore difficult to discern efficacious magical action: something like the idea of wishing, or perhaps as a creative visualisation. Such an attitude is manifested in many of the safe travel spells that may also include the silent incantations of clan songs. A vital Yan-nhaŋu invocation is the one to bring islands close or calm the wind and make the
waves flat, known as gayanja ganatjirri waparrar. These invocations are important to turtle hunters, who spend much time at sea. Another is the Walamanju Yirritja invocation of the North Wind (Lungurra) at the site Yakamanjarra (G 4), Gurriba Island (see Map 24 Appendix seven), shared by the Warramiri, Wubukarra and Yalukala people. This North Wind gayangawa entreaty is often associated with a sand sculpture. Songs and dances: the incantation calls the wind to blow the turtle hunters home from Gurriba to Murrunga and then Milingimbi in the early wet season, and is often passed on from father to son. A Dhuwa moiety version of the wind song, known as the West Wind (Barrra), is described by Thomson (1937):

The incantation is divided into two possible outcomes. One for the wind to upset the water and reduce fishing success for other groups. Two is for making the sea calm and good for turtle hunting thus.

Yulngu maritji ngorra yakurr liy’ maram wata ka wata baralje’ maram bare, ngai’yi wakku’ wall wongoli ngai’iyoj maritji mara ngoni bara. him think and that one marra belong him, he go to that wind

**Thomson’s translation**: man goes lies down sleeps day or night head with catches wind, west wind, head by catches wind, west wind he dream spirit he (it) goes picks up that one west wind (Thomson Totemic Increase Rites File No. 10 fieldnotes August 1937 Moorooranga Island).

It is believed that the thoughts and spirit travel to the land of the west wind over on Cape Stewart and bring back the west wind. There are two purposes for the Barrra incantation. The first is to help the turtle hunters and the second is the kind of incantation used to cause rough winds to disrupt the fishing activities of antagonistic groups throughout the islands. However, the west wind (ba:rra) that destroyed the Gadatha (Mu 45) estuary and mangroves at Murrunga in 1932 was attributed to an act of burr’bu performed by Dundirr at the green turtle weyarr place called Wudulplaŋa (Mu 32). This attribution of sorcery type may have more to do with the intensity of the effects of this particular westerly storm than with the ritual procedure enacted.

**Dundirr’s story**

Thomson observes that ‘many of the marrngit, the spirit familiaris themselves, were said by my informants to be females. Although women do not appear to become marrngitjimirri they do practise as rainmakers’ (Thomson 1961: 97). McKenzie (1976) says that in the wet season called Bärramirr (December/January) of 1932 the man called Yakarakalil (Kakarralili) of the Walamangu Yan-nhaŋu (Kokariar) group was speared by eastern Yolŋu (McKenzie 1976: 63). At this time there was a woman called
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

Dundirr of the same Yan-nhaŋu tribe living on the island of Murrungga. In the days before the mission the island of Murrungga was home to people for most of the year. It was a favoured environment because of the exceptional diversity of its marine resources, enhanced by the most diverse mollusc population in the Crocodile Islands. From my research it is clear that the people at Murrungga could easily identify 66 species of edible mollusc; however, all this changed in 1932 (see Chapter six Table 23 and Appendix four Tables 32, 33, 34, 35). A legendary storm came from the west. The Bureau of Meteorology in Darwin recorded an unnamed cyclone in January of that year, causing the wettest January for a decade with 459 points of rain, more than double the usual amount for that time of the year (Bureau of Meteorology Tropical Weather Services 2007). The catastrophic storm, known as Dundirr’s storm, said to be the result of burr’bu, almost submerged the islands.

One day in 1932 in the season of Dhuludur’ Dundirr came back from fishing at Gaŋartha (Mu 45) fish trap (Chapter six Plate 11 and 12 and Map 10). When she got back to the camp at Wadanga’gankiya (Mu 26) she found someone had been going through her personal bag. It is said that the bag contained the finger bone of her recently deceased brother Yakarakalil (Kakarralili). Furious she went that night under cover of darkness to Wudulpalŋa (Mu 32) and produced a burr’bu incantation. A west wind came to punish the people. As a result of this calamitous west wind all the estuarine ecological zones on Murrungga Island were destroyed, and many species of edible shellfish became extinct.
Those who still remember Dundirr’s storm recount a terrifying event in a place where violent storms are unexceptional. One person who was there describes it thus:

_Nhani gulkmiyanu rogu ga yarr’yarrrani Wudulpalŋa burr’ bu baŋ’ku._

She mixed Ipomoea sp. and Cassytha sp. at Wudulpalŋa (Mu 32) and made a spell incantation over there.

_Dhola lima mana nyina Bumha bathanamirringuli lumarranŋala nhakun bili yindi wata lupmiyanŋha._

Here we were sitting huddled hiding at Bumha bathanamirringuli (Mu 83) because of the big wind that had gathered.

_Yo, Bärany buma bal’nha, djini larrtha, warrpm, ga rągudha._

Yes, the east wind hit and killed everything, the mangroves, and the shellfish.

**Translation:** Dundirr went to the sea at Wudupalŋa and summoned a storm called Baːrra by mixing the plants rogu and yarr’yarrŋani. Here at the place Bumha bathanamirringuli in the middle of Murrungga we huddled to hide from the wind, which killed all the mangroves and all the shellfish, everything (Fieldnotes Murrungga, Bumha bathanamirringuli (Mu 83), 23/1/1994).

Sitting in the bush listening to this story and watching its rendition it was palpable that people had witnessed an unusually powerful weather event. Cut off from the sea, the estuarine environment was inundated by fresh water which eventually suffocated the rich mangroves. Once the mangroves died the lake at Gaŋŋa (Mu 45) became toxic and all the estuarine species of shellfish vanished. The shellfish scatters around Murrungga present an archaeological record of these events, and the daily round of shellfish gathering and deposition continue to demonstrate the effects of Dundirr’s storm. Map 6 shows the places named in the story and three categories of shell scatters or deposition types around Murrungga Island.
After 1932, with the previous ecological zones destroyed by the storm, shellfish collection concentrated on marine species, and consequently shellfish scatters deposited after 1932 no longer contained any estuarine species. Twenty-six species of shellfish became extinct and only those forty varieties found in the marine environment continue to be collected at this time. The ecological categories from which the different species of shellfish were gathered before and after 1932 are shown in Table 10.

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90 Methods and results of recent archaeological examinations on Murrunga Island appear in Appendix four.
Table 10 Murrunga shellfish species and categories pre and post-1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marine zones</th>
<th>Ecological category</th>
<th>No of species pre 1932</th>
<th>No of species post 1932</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outer reefs</td>
<td>Dhuŋapal wiŋaŋul</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhuŋapal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef flats</td>
<td>ṇaŋganabo</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner reef</td>
<td>Dhuŋapal djinigabo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounded shell grit</td>
<td>Barrala</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>Munatha</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estuarine zones</th>
<th>Ecological category</th>
<th>No of species pre 1932</th>
<th>No of species post 1932</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tidal anoxic muds</td>
<td>Djudum</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud flats</td>
<td>Nindjiya</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samphires</td>
<td>Mununj-mununj</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangroves</td>
<td>Larrtha</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of shellfish species present at Murrunga after 1932</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yan-nhaŋu are unequivocal about the cause of the storm that killed the estuarine shellfish of Murrunga. Dundirr’s sorcery is the reason given to explain this phenomenon and the story is very much a part of the ‘natural history’ of Murrunga. Notwithstanding what Yan-nhaŋu children are taught in school, they are sure about the ancestral causality of spectacular storm cells and their pyrotechnic lighting displays. Yan-nhaŋu children grow up to recognise a distinctive ensemble of mythological entities and ritual actions, linked to their particular ba:purru identity, so too they come to understand that they will participate in the multiple ritual actions possessed and practised by kin and linked to sites on their estates. To a large extent this knowledge will structure their social, economic, and ritual engagements with kin and their marine
environment into the future. Understandably, this preponderance of ritual linked to the marine environment is a signifier of marine identity.

There are a large number of shared entities and ritual practices collectively owned by Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu groups. So too, Yolŋu including Yan-nhaŋu practise a large number of customary ancestral doctrines. These ancestral doctrines have the attribute of linking, and also distinguishing, the specific ancestral endowment of groups, and as such are key identifiers of similarity or of social boundaries. These doctrines are deployed for many purposes: for economic advantage, accrual of political and social capital, in connubial competition, and within the ritual sphere as a signifier of social boundary maintenance, and as such spiritual doctrines are a crucial dimension knitting Yolŋu society together while simultaneously differentiating its parts.

Conclusion
This chapter has developed the three interpenetrating themes manifest in Yan-nhaŋu life: firstly in their physical, and secondly spiritual links to their land and sea country and thirdly in their similarity and difference from other Yolŋu groups. The overarching cosmological view held by Yan-nhaŋu and other Yolŋu groups permits differences in the local content of religious doctrines. An important aspect of Yan-nhaŋu ontology are the indissoluble spiritual links forged between Yan-nhaŋu ancestors, mądjan and significant sites in the sea and islands. The wńarr-instantiated law connects Yan-nhaŋu people to their religious property. This law, expressed in myths about the ancestral creation of people and places, also provides the script for the necessary ritual re-enactments required by ancestral law to revivify and reconstitute the ancestral dramas and ancestral powers associated with wńarr essences. The language of myth, stories, sites and religious property of the Yan-nhaŋu connects them, in particular, to the creation of sites in the sea, as beautifully described in the myth of the Djanj’kawu sisters.

Yan-nhaŋu versions of the Djanj’kawu story of the sisters and their brother’s journey of creation exemplify localised symbolism and identification of mądjan, ancestors and kin, linked to local estates. In the realm of difference Yan-nhaŋu versions of the Djanj’kawu songs and stories specifically refer to the creation of saltwater sites and phenomena in the sea and islands. Yan-nhaŋu ritual property arising from this endowment in the form of mądjan, design, music and metaphorical imagery, embodies a distinctively marine orientation, showing a pervasive influence of the sea
in Yan-nhaŋu identification. This local perspective structures Yan-nhaŋu obligations of ritual care and authority over sites with implications for the control of marine ecological environments and economic practices linked to the exploitation of saltwater resources.

At a more material level the mythology of the Djaŋ’kawu and the practice of ŋa:rra (in concert with the broader ritual system) are among other things a powerful socio-economic engine driving wider relations and religious practices across northeast Arnhem Land. Ritual practice provides a forum for contest and collaboration of sociopolitical groups for power and prestige and economic exchanges across contemporary Yolŋu communities. The ritual domain entails obligations and demands for goods and services, the accrual of religious knowledge, political capital and connubial rights. The enactment of service in regional ceremony, and the demands of circumcision, mortuary and site-based ceremonies provide valuable symbolic and social capital in the context of exchange within the domestic economy. Continuing demand for participation in these ritual networks reinvigorates local ritual practices. These practices, linked to sites and marine resources in the Crocodile Islands (for example in the turtle economy), further strengthen wider social and ritual interdependencies with profound implications for the trajectories of relatively autonomous cultural re/production.

Local ontological perspectives underlie the distinctive content of religious doctrines that differentiate social groups. These local perspectives, under an overarching and partially unifying cosmology, link and sustain the existence of different ritual constellations in a network connecting disparate sociopolitical groups. Local groups refer to their own versions of ancestral stories and symbols as a primary signifier of group identity. Thus specifically local ancestral emblems (rayga) may be deployed to mark social boundaries, and self-consciously constructed social identities are anchored in categories of ritual paraphernalia. A polysemy of meanings link Yolŋu groups sharing forms, metaphors and ma’dayin to reaffirm, through ritual, their distinct social identities. Such ritual and social behaviours reconfirm agreed rights over physical and symbolic resources, and provide for the means and impetus for the reproduction of practices and symbols of sociopolitical groups that comprise a Yan-nhaŋu marine identity.
Chapter Four: Sorcery, similarity and difference

The reputation and practice of sorcery is a comparatively well publicised aspect of the Yan-nhaŋu ritual repertoire linked in part to the particular historical circumstances of their engagement with the mission. Threat of violent conflict, marginalisation and restriction from mission resources is likely to have reinforced a pre-existing Yan-nhaŋu reputation for sorcery in the burgeoning public Yolŋu discourse of the emerging mission polity. As a Yan-nhaŋu defence strategy the threat of ensorcellment and withdrawal to the outer islands was effective. Sorcery deployed for revenge and later for advantage in competition both within and between kin, groups and communities, reaffirms its efficacy, both as a way of acting on and acting in society, and also redeploying widely shared beliefs about ancestral sites as conduits for powers. Site-based rituals continue to be a practical means to accrue social and political capital in exchange for goods and services. Sorcery still plays a valuable, if less obvious, role in the local community. Continuity in the tradition of the Yan-nhaŋu, including the enactment of what is called sorcery, indicates the persistent commitment of Yolŋu people to beliefs in ancestral powers. In line with themes of similarity and difference the cult of ragalk demonstrates variation from, and simultaneous correspondence with, a more widely shared body of Yolŋu doctrine. So too, the distinctiveness of Yan-nhaŋu linguistic types may be used to signify difference, the significance of which will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Five:

Yan-nhanju language identity: transformation and continuity

Mothers and children at Milingimbi

Circa 1940

Plate 7 Malmadharra (M 5)*

“I think the mission brought us here, and we stayed and had children, and we want to go back to our places, but seem unable to do so, because we would go and then long to come back to Milingimbi, that is because we would think ‘that is the place where we were born, and had our children’” (Djawa cited in the Milingimbi Community Education Centre Handbook 1999: 38).
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

Speakers of Yolŋu languages subscribe to the belief that language is an inheritance of the wayarr ancestors. Yan-nhaŋu embedded within the other Yolŋu language is a crucial signifier of Yan-nhaŋu identity. This chapter focuses on changes and continuities in the constitution, use, and role of Yan-nhaŋu language as sociolinguistic signifier of identity. In examining the characteristics of language as a tool for communication, and as an identity-marking device, the subtle impressure of ancestral beliefs become apparent. The themes of spiritual connection to place, and the ongoing significance of change and continuity are perfectly intertwined in the story of a transforming Yan-nhaŋu language. This powerful compact, at the point of articulation of place and time, is at the heart of the meaning of Yan-nhaŋu identity. Speakers of Yolŋu languages subscribe to the idea that language and words are inalienably connected to their ancestral origins, so that a place, the ancestors that created it, and their descendants share a common language. Continuing adherence to these traditional beliefs in ancestral laws, among other things works, as a force for some kinds of continuity in the rapidly changing social and linguistic contexts of northeast Arnhem Land.

A paradox exists in the relation between belief in an unchanging ancestral language on the one hand, and the transformation of linguistic styles through time, on the other: a paradox with powerful explanatory capacity to reveal continuities connected to site-based religious practices and changes to language use in living languages responding to novel contexts. Increasingly local, national and global pressures are shaping the communicative contexts of the region. For example, State policies now exclude bilingual or indigenous language from schools in the first four hours across the Northern Territory, diminishing opportunities for the expression of indigenous languages in new learning environments. This chapter takes a sociolinguistic approach and as such does not examine grammar or the minutiae of syntax and sentence structure but attends to language uses and classifications both from a Yolŋu perspective and from an autobiographical linguistic point of view. This approach reveals evidence of linguistic transformation moved by local, national and global factors as well as revealing significant Yan-nhaŋu linguistic and cultural continuities.

This chapter is structured in four parts. Parts one and two are concerned with elements of linguistic changes, whereas parts three and four are focused on aspects of continuity. Part one begins, after a brief introduction and literature review, to consider
the place of Yan-nhaŋu within Yolŋu languages by providing a context in which to understand these contemporary language varieties and affiliations. Part two reflects on historical and recent factors influencing transformations in Yan-nhaŋu language. These factors include the arrival of Macassans, the development of a mission lingua franca and the amalgamation of patrilectal forms into a modern day Yan-nhaŋu variety. Part three discusses elements that are a key source of continuity in Yan-nhaŋu linguistic identity and these include the unique spiritual connections of songs and naming practices linked to country. At a further level of refinement is possible to discern subtle internal distinctions between these linguistict types linked to characteristic and distinguishing site-based ontological perspectives. In part four concludes by considering the view that belief in ancestral essences maintains a contradictory ideology of linguistic immutability, linked as it is to a continuity of ancestral sites and sociolinguistic identities, even in the light of language transformations. The chapter emphasises the point that belief in ancestral law continues to anchor the meaning of names and sites in an overarching cosmology.

At the level of a spoken language Yan-nhaŋu differs from other Yolŋu languages mainly in that it has its own vocabulary and less so in its styles of pronunciation and grammar. Although it shares many cognate terms with other languages it is a distinct language with its own specific terms for naming the phenomena and places of the world. These linguistic differences are discussed in Schebeck (1968), Heath (1978), Waters (1989), James (2003) and Bowern (2007). Language types are recognisable by speakers of Yolŋu languages as belonging to place, and in this way language type may signify the place or country of the speaker, and so becomes a potential marker of social locatedness. In this linguistic system the Yan-nhaŋu language signifies the people of the Crocodile Islands. Examination of the nature of this key relationship between language and place, and its imputed immutability, is complicated by the question of changing language practice. Today most people in northeast Arnhem Land speak a Dhuwal lingua franca related to Djambarrpuyŋu and not their particular patrilineally inherited language. How people account for this paradox goes to the heart of understanding the broader meaning of Yan-nhaŋu language. Those Yan-nhaŋu language speakers and owners with patrilineal connections to the language, land, sea and madayin of the Crocodile Islands are shown in the following Table 11.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

Table 11 Yan-nhaŋu language group affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Patri-moicty</th>
<th>Linguistic affiliation</th>
<th>Full speakers</th>
<th>Partial speakers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yirrchinga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Burarra/Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirritja</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirrchinga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Burarra/Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yan-nhaŋu people are divided into six aforementioned groups associated with slightly variant versions of Yan-nhaŋu (see Chapter three). This table shows Yan-nhaŋu groups, their moiety and language affiliation as well as the number of people speaking Yan-nhaŋu (see also Bagshaw 1998:157). Some 61 full Yan-nhaŋu speakers in existence remain between the ages of 40 and 80 years. Of the approximately 265 people identifying as Yan-nhaŋu speakers some 125 are Dhuwa and a further 140 Yirritja, if we include the 116 Burarra-speaking Gamal, and of the 204 partial speakers of Yan-nhaŋu 101 are from Dhuwa and 103 are from Yirritja groups.

Table 11 shows that Yan-nhaŋu people identifying with the Burarra language linked to the Gamal group adds approximately 116 speakers to the number identifying as Yan-nhaŋu. The two smallest Yan-nhaŋu Yirritja groups Bindarrar and Nurruwulu, also identify as linguistically affiliated with Burarra. The Yirritja Yan-nhaŋu speakers of these two groups identify in this way because ancestral beings speaking both Burarra and Yan-nhaŋu created sites in the Crocodile Islands and so link the language affiliation of people in these groups. The basis for this versatility in sociolinguistic identification is discussed ahead in the section on transformation in Yan-nhaŋu linguistic varieties. Suffice to say that this self description is based on shared sites in
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

the seas assigned both Burarra and Yan-nhaŋu names. These shared names entail ceremonial connections that provide a basis for understanding shared linguistic affiliations.

From the perspective of a simple linguistic definition it can be stated that Yan-nhaŋu consists of six, formerly distinct, patrilectal (ba:purru) varieties now integrated into one language called Yan-nhaŋu and that Yan-nhaŋu people say that they speak. Yan-nhaŋu people report that they have always used this Yan-nhaŋu language, despite evidence of recent and historical transformations. In an attempt to describe and define this contemporary Yan-nhaŋu variety and account for its transformation and continuities I situate this analysis within a review of the literature on northeast Arnhem Land languages and Yan-nhaŋu in particular.

Review of literature on Yan-nhaŋu linguistics

Since the 1960s, a growing interest in the broader Yolŋu culture has produced a number of alternative ways of referring to Yolŋu languages. The terms ‘linguistic variety’ and ‘language’ are used here in a neutral manner to refer to what some linguists have called ‘dialect’. When making a particular reference to patrilineal group language or ba:purru variety I use the term patrilect. For example, I refer to the Maŋgurrvari variety as the Maŋgurrvari patrilect of the Yan-nhaŋu language, and Goŋpa as the Goŋpa patrilect of the Nhaŋu language, marked Goŋpa Nhaŋu. In the same way, I describe Liyadhaliŋmirr as a patrilect of the Dhuwał language and refer to it as Liyadhaliŋmirr Dhuwał. In analysing the literature on these Yolŋu linguistic types and their relations to Yan-nhaŋu patrilects, I have followed most closely research carried out by Schebeck (1968), Waters (1989) and Keen (1978, 1994), although the earliest reference to Yan-nhaŋu language starts with Warner (1937) which I discuss below.

Despite an enormous amount of research into the Yolŋu and their languages there has been scant research into the Yan-nhaŋu language since its first mention by Warner (1937: 9). Lloyd Warner (1937) gives the first indirect ethnographic description of the Yan-nhaŋu linguistic variance, sometimes collapsing ‘Yandjinung’ Djinaŋ and ‘Yaernungo’ Yan-nhaŋu and proposing that ‘the greatest divergence in dialect is among the Yaernungo’ (Warner 1937: 37). He also reports some homogeneity among some dialects and comments that ‘Linguistic ability is very marked among all these
people. It would be difficult to find a Murngin adult who could not speak three or four languages, and frequently men speak seven and eight’ (Warner 1937: 37).

During the late 1920s Lloyd Warner collected information on languages and spatial distribution of groups. Warner’s map (Map 7) indicates the distribution of Yan-nhaŋu (Yaernungo) speakers providing the first depiction of marine estates belonging to the Yan-nhaŋu, and some inkling of their marine orientation. More recently, the distribution of Yan-nhaŋu language speakers is understood to cover the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay area including the southerly parts of Galiwin’ku (Elcho Island), but not the entirety of the Wessel Islands, discussed later in regard to Nhaŋu linguistic forms (see also Appendix eight).

*Map 7 Warner’s 1937 map showing (Yaernungo) Yan-nhaŋu*


It can be seen at the top of this map that the northernmost islands of the ‘Yaernungo’ (Yan-nhaŋu) protrude from near shore coastal waters far into the Arafura Sea.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

However, most of those clans depicted by here by Warner, to the north-east of Elcho Island, were speakers of ‘Nhangu’ languages. Nhantu speakers use the proximal demonstrative Nhantu, also used by the speakers of Yan-nhaŋu languages. However, Nhantu speakers, of which Yan-nhaŋu is a western subgroup, maintain socially significant differences in lexicon and phonology and remark on their geographic separation to demarcate a distinct linguistic identity, on which I elaborate later.

In 1935 Thomson (1949) described a number of Yan-nhaŋu patri-groups such as the ‘Jarngango’(Yan-nhaŋu), ‘Wolamangu’ (Walamaŋu) and ‘Garmalangga’ (Gamalanga) in relation to economic themes; the interdependence of religious, social and resource domains in the reproduction of the ‘baburo’ (ba:purru). Thomson (1949) focused on ideas of exchange, material and religious resources, gift and ceremonial exchange and relations between groups that have implications for language change, although he had little to say about the language itself (Thomson 1949: 9–61).

During the 1940s, Capell (1941, 1942, n.d.) collected some 9000 words from approximately 40 Arnhem Land languages, including what he calls ‘janango’ (Yan-nhaŋu). Capell’s list of vocabulary contains only a few actual Yan-nhaŋu words with many cognate terms identified as originating from Nhaŋu-speaking groups including Gutjiway, Golpa, Bararrŋu and Bararparrarr. He was followed by Beulah Lowe (1951), a teacher at Milingimbi, who conducted the first substantial linguistic research on Milingimbi Island. Lowe, adopted by Gupapuyŋu people, compiled a Gupapuyŋu dictionary with over 4000 forms (1957, n.d). This undoubtedly influenced the choice of Gupapuyŋu as the language of the school bilingual program in 1974. Interest in this variety continues with contemporary Gupapuyŋu language courses offered remotely by Charles Darwin University.

Bernard Schebeck (1968, 2001) made a comprehensive analysis of Yolŋu language types in his discussion of dialect and social groupings. His discussion attempts to clarify the notional parallelism between social groups and linguistic varieties by addressing the division of speech varieties among regional ‘this’ (proximal demonstrative) types. He deploys ‘native terms’ in an attempt to arrive at an accurate analysis of social structures, and to correlate these with linguistic categories (Schebeck 1968: 27–38). In this way he demonstrates that there is no one-to-one relationship between matha (speech variety) and mala (‘group’), and/or ba:purr (patri-group). He links language-naming practices to social conventions, emphasising the locality-based
nature of language in this region (Schebeck 1968: 31–47, 59–60). Interestingly, he is the first to hypothesise that Yan-nhaŋu and other Nhaŋu dialects belong to a more ancient layer of linguistic diffusion in this region (Schebeck 1968: 61). As yet little has been done to investigate his contention, although it is mentioned in Heath (1978: 2–3).

In 1971 Barry Alpher produced a word list of 200 forms including some Nhaŋu and Yan-nhaŋu types (Alpher 1977). Alpher collected approximately three hours of tape from a senior Gamalanga informant, making it a comparatively substantial survey of vocabulary, sentences and narrative types. Soon after, Ray Wood collected approximately 300 Yan-nhaŋu (Gamalanga) words from the same informant (Wood 1972). This collection includes 30 sentences on two hours of tape. Although there is some overlap with Alpher’s list, it is nevertheless another substantial survey of Yan-nhaŋu up until this point in time.

Waters (1987) worked on the geographically and closely related Djinaŋ language. In this work he makes mention of the Yan-nhaŋu and other Nhaŋu language varieties in relation to social links, grammatical parallels, and the maintenance of linguistic boundaries (Waters 1987: 286–7). His observations on geographical boundaries, lexical and phonological merging and the antiquity of Nhaŋu provide insights into linguistic transformations. He examines relationships between closely related Djinaŋ, Djinba and Yan-nhaŋu dialect groups and records that although geographically close and related through features of an earlier ‘proto-Nhangu’ language base (cf. Schebeck 1968: 61), important divergences still exist in the forms of these languages.

In subsequent work Waters (1989) demonstrates geographical and genetic relations between languages. He reports that levels of intelligibility with surrounding varieties work as an instrument of social boundary maintenance. He speculates that speakers of Yan-nhaŋu varieties and surrounding non-Pama-Nyungan languages such as Burarra and Rembarraŋa may have emphasised linguistic difference to mark boundaries (Waters 1989: 286–7; cf. Schebeck 1968: 51–52).
Waters (1989) describes the geographical separation of these patrilects thus:

A major linguistic boundary occurs at the western border of Djinang territory, the languages to the west (Burarra), southwest (Rembarrnga) and south (Ngandi) being of the prefixing type, and genetically far removed from the Yolŋu languages. To the south east there is Djinba (actually one of a number of clans, each of which speaks closely related dialects – the most numerous one at present being Ganalbingu); To the east there are Dhuwala (Gupapuyngu) and Dhuwal (Liyagalawumirr) and to the north and north east Yan-nhaŋu. Djinang, Djinba, Dhuwal/Dhuwala and Yan-nhaŋu are all Yolŋu languages, and are not mutually intelligible. Yan-nhaŋu is spoken by people who are mostly island dwellers, and varieties of the Nhangu group of dialects (of which Yan-nhaŋu is one) are spoken from the Crocodile Islands in the west to the extremities of the Wessel Islands in the east. Yan-nhaŋu is spoken by the landowners of the Crocodile Islands, and is related (genetically) to both Djinang and Djinba. Very few Yan-nhaŋu speakers remain (Waters 1989: 248).

Waters' description of mutual unintelligibility in related Yolŋu languages demonstrates his claim of the potential for linguistic identity to work as a tool for social exclusion. Sociolinguistic identity then, like geographical and social boundaries, may regulate the membership of a particular community and by implication access to its resources; that is, language may be implicated in access to connubial relations and resource governance (White 1971: 89, 95–97).

Zorc (1986) produced the first multilingual dictionary of Yolŋu languages using texts and materials originating from various bilingual schools in Arnhem Land. It provides a useful device for identifying lexical diffusion and language shift in a wide variety of Yolŋu patrilects including Yan-nhaŋu. In 1992, Rita Gularbanga, daughter of the Gamalanga informant recorded by Alpher (1977) and Wood (1972) produced a 500-word Yan-nhaŋu dictionary. Developed with the help of the Yurrwui (Milingimbi) Bi-lingual Resources Development Unit (BRDU 1992), it became the first specifically Yan-nhaŋu document published.
Based on fieldwork at Murrunga in the early 1990s, my masters thesis (James 1999) deals with the linguistic implications of the Djambarrpuyŋu lingua franca and western educational norms for Yan-nhanju language maintenance (James 1999: 2). It proposes that residence on homelands is ‘re-emphasising autonomy and lifestyle, and providing significant socio-linguistic support for cultural continuity and language stability on Murrunga Island’ (James 1999: 2). This work led to the compilation of the 2003 Yan-nhanju dictionary (James et al. 2003) of some 2000 forms, later enlarged by Bowern (2007). More recent work on Yan-nhanju language revitalisation has been published by Bowern and James (2005; 2009).

Despite the paucity of research on Yan-nhanju language its speakers have encouraged more recent collaborations in research which have provided new insights into the patrilectal varieties, giving an enhanced understanding of the histories of these distinctive Nhanju varieties. Moreover, such research is sustaining a revitalisation of Yan-nhanju language. Before looking more closely at the themes of change and continuity, it is useful to locate Yan-nhanju in regard to other Yolŋu languages in the region.

Placing Yan-nhanju within Yolŋu languages

Yan-nhanju is a suffixing language of the Yolŋu (Yuulongu) (Heath 1981) or Murung family of languages (Yallop 1982: 53). Other names for this larger group include Wulamba (Berndt 1951) and Mi:wotj or Miwuyt (Shapiro 1968), labels that encompass the 60 or so varieties of Yolŋu languages. Yolŋu languages are spoken by a discrete linguistic community surrounded by people speaking prefixing (non-Pama-Nyungan) languages such as Nunggubuyu, Ngandi, Rembanganga and Burarra. Shared cultural and social practices have enhanced linguistic diffusion in those Yolŋu languages adjacent to the peripheries of the enclave. Within the Yolŋu linguistic enclave a range of mutual intelligibilities exists, frequently related to the intensity of interaction between groups (Keen 1994).

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Footnote: The Yan-nhanju dictionary 2003 was published and disseminated in order to attract interest and funding for continued linguistic research into the quickly disappearing languages of the Crocodile Islands. The dictionary project proposed to secure interest and support for projects in Yan-nhanju language, emphasising its role as a repository of and vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of distinctive Yan-nhanju sociocultural and ecological knowledge and highlighting links between biological and linguistic diversity. The project attempts to facilitate the reassertion of Yan-nhanju linguistic styles as part of a wider effort to reduce Yan-nhanju marginalisation and enhance their equity in intellectual and material resource governance.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

The description of Yolŋu languages has deployed a number of schemes. I follow three that most clearly triangulate the relationship between Yan-nhaŋu and other Yolŋu languages, including a distinctly Yolŋu reckoning of linguistic relations to place. I draw attention to changing naming conventions and changes to group names and spellings to bring them into line with contemporary practice and to indicate transformation over time. Schebeck (1968), as noted previously, is successful in deploying an explanation of language reckoning based on Yolŋu concepts. Schebeck describes a threefold ‘native theory’, deploying what he calls the ‘native term’ ‘matha’ for language. He suggests that the multivalent term ‘matha’ does not mean dialect, or language, or dialect group, but ‘refers to all these notions plus something else’. Matha is related to notions of social relations in some way, ‘but it is not a term properly belonging to the social structure’ (Schebeck 1968: 64–65). Schebeck analyses the Yolŋu ‘three part native theory’ thus:

One can say that there does not exist one single native theory, but three of them, all of which are used concurrently in daily life. Firstly one speaks of ‘Dhuwa language(s)’ and ‘Yirritja language(s)’ … Secondly, one indeed holds, that each mala (‘clan’) is associated with a different matha. This is quite rigidly hung onto, as the confusion of mala and matha names clearly shows … Thirdly, one has classed the mathas into several groups, after their respective near demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ … Thus one obtains the dialect groups (Schebeck 1968: 7–8).

The demonstrative pronoun is translatable in English as ‘this’ or ‘here’. As people will often say, ‘I come from this place’, using the proximal demonstrative. As such this proximal demonstrative expresses the idea of the link between a group and their estate, assuming the centrality of locality in a consideration of the meaning of language. Languages using different words for ‘this’ are counted as different languages by Yolŋu. Those Yolŋu language groups sharing the same ‘this’ word, called by Schebeck ‘dialect groups’, provide a solid basis for understanding and catagorising relations between and among Yolŋu language varieties.

Later, Keen (1994) refines the analysis of the relations between these ‘dialect groups’, renaming them ‘this groups’, and reminding us that these ‘this groups’ are not sociological groups but include patrilineal groups of both moieties, with the exception of Dhuwala and Dhuwal speaking patri-groups (Keen 1994: 76). In addition, he writes, the countries of up to ten of these ‘this groups’ are contiguous with the exception of
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

Djaju, Dhuwal and Dhuwala groups (Keen 1994: 76). Each of these ‘this group’ or ‘dialect group’ languages is spoken by a number of different ba:purru groups. For example, Table 12 shows nine ‘dialect groups’ and four examples of ba:purru groups speaking that language.
Table 12 Yolŋu proximal demonstratives and baːpurru groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This</th>
<th>Yolŋu groups using the same this word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Djambarrpuyŋu Liyagawumirr Marraŋu  Marrakulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gupapuyŋu Wubulkarra Munyuku Maďarrpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wunuŋmurra Gumana Wawilak Ritharrŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Warramiri Lamamirri Girrikirri Barraparra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wangurri Rirratiŋu Golumala Gaːlpu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wulaki Man-nharrŋu Murrupŋu Dadiwitji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gaaŋalbiŋu Daːbi Walmapuy Mandjalpuyŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Golpa Barraŋu Yaluŋal Gutjiŋway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Walamanŋu Maŋarra Gamalanga Gurryindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the above table there is more than one baːpurru speaking any language as defined by the proximal demonstrative. The widespread geographical separation between different groups using the same ‘this’ word has implications for why Yan-nhaŋu-speaking people consider themselves to be close to, but different from, people speaking Nhaŋu varieties living in the Wessel Islands. I will discuss this geographical separation using an example from a Djambarrpuyŋu Dhuwal speaker. This example shows how separate baːpurru using a particular dialect, originating from discrete estates, characterise their way of speaking as their own particular baːpurru language, from a particular place. This schema of Yolŋu organisation was, with minor variation, widely held, in that they had their own language related to place.

The following Yolŋu schema for talking about language and place by Dhuwal-speaking Djambarrpuyŋu is recorded by Rrikawuku Yunupiŋu in a chapter entitled ‘Looking at Language in a Yolŋu Way’ (Yunupiŋu in Christie 2001: 49). Here Gumatj-speaking Rrikawuku gives the following Djambarrpuyŋu perspective on the relationship between dialect group and estate:
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

I am going to explain the different dialects in the traditional way, what these different dialects are called and who speaks them and where they come from. These are the different kinds of Djambarrpuynu:

1. Liya-Wolmamirr Djambarrpuynu and Liya-Dhalinymirr Djambarrpuynu are one dialect … spoken by the Guyula branch of the Djambarrpuynu clan which comes from a place called Badaypagay and Dhamiyaka

2. Gundaypu Djambarrpuynu … whose homeland is at Garrata

3. Wutjarra Djambarrpuynu … whose homeland is Ṣurruyurrurrurr

4. Lungurrpu Djambarrpuynu … from a place called Djarraya

5. Liyagawumirr is not a Djambarrpuynu clan, but its language is very close … from Garriyak.

Number 2, 3 & 4 are not different from each other, but they are put into separate categories because they are identified with different homelands (Yunupiñu in Christie 2001: 49).

Links described here between dialects of Djambarrpuynu and the particular estate they signify reflect the significance attributed to country. The identity of the estate group is crucial to a more nuanced understanding of linguistic identity. With this dimension of language identity firmly in mind it is easy to appreciate the significance of place in the way that Yan-nhaŋu class themselves as different from other groups using the Nhaŋu proximal demonstrative. In order to clarify this difference I focus firstly on the work of two earlier writers in Warner (1937) and Schebeck (1968) and then on emic perspectives for establishing difference and drawing connections interpreted by Keen (1994).

Geographic and linguistic difference in Nhaŋu languages

Emic categories and self ascription in language identity are often not good guides of language-type in the work of linguists and anthropologists. Yan-nhaŋu has been classed as a category of the northerly ‘Nhaŋu’ group spoken from the Crocodile Islands in the west to the extremities of the Wessel Islands and the English Company Islands in the north east (Schebeck 1968: 10–11; see also Waters 1986; Zorc 1986).
Schebeck (1968: 11) classes Yan-nhaŋu patrilectal varieties with the central and southern subgroup of the Nhaŋu language thus:

V. Nhangu  (NN):
   a) Northern subgroup II (Gutji subgroup):
      22. Bararrpararr (Bp)  (Dhuwa)
      23. Bararrngu  (Bn) (Dhuwa)
   c) Central and southern subgroups:
      24. Yalukal  (Yk)  (Yirritja)
      25. Yann(h)angu  (Yn) (Dhuwa)
      26. Gurryindi  (Gr) (Dhuwa)
      27. Walamangu  (Wl)  (Yirritja)
      28. Gamalangga(Km) (Dhuwa)(Schebeck 1968: 11)

Two things are significant. First, today these last four groups, numbers 25–28, are ba:purrŋu that consider themselves Yan-nhaŋu-speaking groups. This classification of Yan-nhaŋu in the central and southern subgroup of this most northerly Yolŋu linguistic category is by their own account why their language is different. The westerly geographical distribution of Yan-nhaŋu groups, situated on the most westerly edge of the Yolŋu block, on the Crocodile Islands, is the reason why they say their language is different from that of other Nhaŋu-speaking groups living in the Wessel Islands. As described above the word nhaŋu means ‘this’, or ‘here’ (proximal demonstrative) ‘this/here’. It is the particular form of nhaŋu used by the Yan-nhaŋu that signifies the seas and Crocodile Islands, Yan-nhaŋu estates. The next point is of less importance to Yan-nhaŋu people per se, but has implications for the contemporary classification of Yan-nhaŋu language styles.

Second, Schebeck (1968) groups number 25, Yann(h)angu (Yn) [Maŋarra patrilect], as a separate language ‘dialect’ from 28, Gamalangga (Km) [Gamalanga patrilect], 27, Walamangu (Wl) [Walamanja patrilect] and 26, Gurryindi (Gr) [Gurryindi patrilect]. Significantly, Schebeck’s Yann(h)angu (Yn) clan (ba:purrŋu) call themselves the Maŋarra or Maŋarra/Gunjbirritji patri-group. The Maŋarra/Gunjbirritji, like the other Yan-nhaŋu ba:purrŋu say they speak Yan-nhaŋu. Schebeck has not categorised Yan-nhaŋu as a language, but refers to it as a patrilect name, reflecting usage by Warner at
an earlier period. This may also be an example of language change. Table 13 shows equivalence between Warner’s (1937) groups and Schebeck’s (1968) schema with my own data.

Table 13 Comparison of Yan-nhanju and Nhanju ba:purruru classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Warner’s Yaernungu</th>
<th>Schebeck’s Nhangu</th>
<th>Yan-nhanju &amp; Nhanju ba:purruru</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yan-nhanju</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marungun 3/11M</td>
<td>25 Yann(h)angu</td>
<td>Malarra/Gunbirritji</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmalanga 6</td>
<td>28 Gamalangga</td>
<td>Gamalangga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 Gurryindi</td>
<td>Gurryindi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dhuwa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yan-nhanju</strong></td>
<td>Wallamungo</td>
<td>27 Walamangu</td>
<td>Walamangu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yandjinung</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurruwulu Bindjarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yirritja</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Warner (1937) and Schebeck (1968).

Here Warner (1937), has called the Malarra/Gunbirritji the Marungun. Schebeck (1968), on the other hand, has called the Malarra/Gunbirritji the Yann(h)angu. This labelling has lead to much confusion. Schebeck’s ‘dialect groups’ has Yan-nhanju classified as a ‘clan’ language or ‘dialect group’ of ‘Nhangu’. Warner categorises three Yan-nhanju clans as speaking a number of different languages; the Kamalangga

---

92 My own data confirms that the name Murrungun refers to an alliance of groups sharing *Bagumbirr* (morning star complex) including Yan-nhanju Malarra/Gunbirritji, Djinang-speaking Wulaki and Wugiganydjarr, and Dhuwalmirr-speaking Top Djaru. There has been some speculation in the past as to the exact meaning of the word Murrungun. Warner (1937: 50) named the people of Murrunga and Etcho Islands ‘Marungun’. Schebeck (1968: 71) records it as a name for ‘Yan-nhanju, Djinang and Top Djaru’ (Schebeck 1968: 71). Most recently Zorc (1986) has defined Murrungun as a clan name for Djinang and Nhangu. [Capel (1942) Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, n.d. Circa 1950] (Bernard Schebeck, 1968: 75) says Murrungun is synonymous with two other groups sharing the *Bagumbirr* (morning star complex): Bagshaw says Murrungun include Djinang and Murrungun Top Djaru (Geoffrey Bagshaw pers. com.). Borsboom (1978) identifies a Djinang-speaking Wulaki group connected to Wugiganydjarr through the *Murratjirri* (exchange ceremony) as Murrungun. Borsboom (1975: 235) and Vander Leeden (1975) identify Murrungun as a sub-moieties. Berndt (1976) refers to Yan-nhanju-speaking groups as Murrungun.
(Gamalaŋga) and the Wallamungo (Walamunu) are said to be Yan-djinung (Djinaŋ speakers), although he also places the Wallamungo (Walamunu) in the Burera (Burarra) tribe (Warner 1937: 34). Warner (1937:40) describes the Marungun (Maŋarra/Guŋbirritji) living on Murrunga and Galiwin’ku islands as counted among the Djambarrpuyŋu (Dhuwal speakers). Today the name formerly designated to the Maŋarra/Guŋbirritji patrilect by Warner and Schebeck is deemed by all Yan-nhaŋu people to be the name of the tongue (yan) spoken by all Yan-nhaŋu people.

Harking back to an earlier discussion of the significance of place in language identification draws attention to the ancestral basis of place and language in identifications. Following logic of language ascription interpreted by Keen (1994), and deployed by Yolŋu people, it demonstrates a key point by showing how Yolŋu groups draw connections and differences between each other by juxtaposing two names denoting contrasting attributes. Keen (1994) describes it in this way:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{x matha, y mala} & \quad (\text{x tongue, y group})
\text{x mala, y ba:purrur} & \quad (\text{x group, y ba:purrur}) \quad (\text{Keen 1994: 75}).
\end{align*}
\]

This model of Yolŋu triangulation of three domains to locate and signify different kinds of identities including ba:purrur (estate-holding group), mala (collective group) and matha (language), signals a particular patrilect as a key way of locating individuals and groups in social space. Both the ba:purrur (estate-holding group), and the matha (language), are linked by ancestral essence to the estate. This is why Berndt (1954) posited the mala-matha pair. Ultimately this logic explains how Yan-nhaŋu use the Nhaŋu proximal demonstrative, but consider themselves to be of a different language group than the Nhaŋu speakers. So it is, that the Yan-nhaŋu collective (mala) of subgroups (ba:purrur) from particular estates, use the language (matha), or in this case (yan), belived to be given by the ancestors, to refer to themselves, and are referred to by others as the Yan-nhaŋu.

Most Yan-nhaŋu speakers are only familiar with the contemporary blend of patri-language varieties now called Yan-nhaŋu. When they are speaking Yan-nhaŋu they generally use this amalgamated form. At present approximately 20 per cent of Yan-nhaŋu people speak the Yan-nhaŋu language fluently, but fewer speak their patrilect with confidence. Despite this, Yan-nhaŋu people refer to themselves and their
language as Yan-nhaŋu. Current Yan-nhaŋu groups and their linguistic affiliations are shown in Table 14.

*Table 14 Yan-nhaŋu groups and linguistic affiliations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Patri-moiety</th>
<th>Linguistic affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Yirritja</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yirritja</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu/Burarra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yirritja</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu/Burarra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dhuwa</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dhuwa</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dhuwa</em></td>
<td>Yan-nhaŋu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This contemporary depiction of Yan-nhaŋu language affiliation includes the close linguistic relationship of the Biŋdarrar and Njuruwulu peoples with kin and country on the Burarra side of the mainland to the west of the Crocodile Islands.

The Yan-nhaŋu language and its affiliations appear to have undergone a number of transformations since first recorded by Warner (1937). These differences are attributable in some degree to residence by Walamaŋu, Biŋdarrar and Njuruwulu on the mainland at Maningrida and a number of the slightly different schema employed by linguists for organising categories of language, but transformation in language use has also been a characteristic of linguistic practice at Milingimbi; for example, the aforementioned rise of a *Dhuwal* lingua franca and recent Yan-nhaŋu patri-linguistic merging.

Most Yan-nhaŋu children now spend only intermittent periods on the outer islands, and consequently are only occasionally immersed in Yan-nhaŋu language and therefore usually communicate in the lingua franca. These transformations in language use are, I argue, the outcome of a number of influences at local, national and global levels. In addition, they are highly significant in accounting for contemporary Yan-nhaŋu language practice, and the relations of change and continuity in sociolinguistic identity. It is within this context that I want to explore language change, while keeping in mind the paradoxical ideology of *waŋarr*-constituted immutable patrilects and the
world view from which this paradox arises. I begin with a brief history of Yan-nhanu language change.

Transformations in Yan-nhanu languages

A number of significant influences have over the years shaped language use in the Crocodile Islands, making contemporary linguistic forms the product of generations of change. I follow Waters' (1984) suggestion that in this western edge of the Yolnu block Yan-nhanu along with Djinaŋ and Djinba forms, are western descendents of the same proto-Nhanu parent language. The idea of a proto-Yolnu form has, as previously mentioned, been put forward by Schebeck (1968) (see also White 1971; 1995; 1997:72; Heath 1978: 1–2 and Waters 1989: 29). Following the outlines of their hypothesis I have put together a possible historical scenario for the divergence of Yan-nhanu forms sketched below. Figure 4 shows a hypothetical timeline of transformations in a parent proto Yolnu and proto Nhanu variety, and divergence into more recent Yan-nhanu patrelects.

Figure 4 Hypothesis of Yan-nhanu linguistic diversification
This diagram follows most closely the contours of White’s (1971; 1995; 1997: 72) hypothesis of a proto-Yolŋu period of language diversification. He suggests a proto-Yolŋu language linked to patrilineal groups of Pama-Nyungan-speaking people arriving in the area approximately when sea levels stabilised around 5000–6000 years ago (Woodroffe et al. 1987: 200; Grindrod et al. 1999: 465). This proto-Nhaŋu period characterised by Schebeck (1967b; 1969) and Waters (1989: 146) is contemporaneous with archaeological evidence of occupation at Milingimbi from 2445 +/- 80 BP (Mulvaney 1965 in Mitchell 1994: 36). This Nhaŋu parent form is proposed to have diverged into distinct Nhaŋu, Djinaŋ, Djinba and Yan-nhaŋu-like varieties.

Transformations of language around this time may well have been influenced by increased ‘social interaction between northern and central regional Aboriginal groups in the last 500 to 1000 years’ (Allen 1997: 375). Others report the spread of cultural phenomena, intensification of trade and ceremonies, initiation rites and kinship systems associated with ‘fertility cult’ religious activity (Warner 1937; Stanner 1933: 384–445; Berndt 1980: 17, 20–21; Berndt and Berndt 1964: 139; McConvell 1997: 205–235). The influence of religious and economic exchanges on language diversifications within continental dwellers seems to have been augmented in northern coastal regions by visitation from overseas.

Berndt and Berndt (1964) concluded that new cultural influences and trade in exotic items followed the arrival of the Macassans (Berndt and Berndt 1964: 424; see also Warner 1937; Thomson 1949; McKnight 1976; Walker and Zorc 1981; Urry and Walsh 1982; Evans 1997: 237–261). Trade in material and ideas along established trade routes are thought to have increased markedly during the period of Macassan voyaging. Urry and Walsh (1982) argue that:

> Widely shared practices such as regional ceremonies, and long distance leaps by means of exchange ceremonies, gave people a common if limited language and matrix for sociality beyond the everyday range, extended further perhaps during the last few hundred years by a lingua franca derived from transaction with the Macassans on their annual visits (Urry and Walsh 1982).

Warner (1937) earlier proposed the development of a coastal trading system based on Macassan influences with the development of a mutually intelligible coastal lingua
franca inclusive of Macassan-derived loan words (Warner 1937:287) Linguistic exchanges with Macassans are evidenced by some 700 Macassan loan words that have become part of the Yolŋu vocabulary (Zorc 1986; see also Warner 1937: 287, 375, 420; Berndt 1954; Thompson 1949; McKnight 1976). Warner (1937) also posits that the coastal geography of Yolŋu country and the introduction of the wooden dugout canoe (lipa-lipa) helped increase trade in Macassan materials and words (Warner 1937 (1969): 385; see also Thomson 1949). Archaeological and cultural evidence confer grounds to suspect that coastal peoples, such as the Yan-nhaŋu, may have altered their seasonal patterns of inter-island travel to coincide with the annual arrival of the Macassan voyagers, and through their contacts may have hypothetically transformed their ways of speaking in response to new cultural and material circumstances (McKnight1976; Walker and Zorc 1981; Evans 1997: 237–261; Falkner 2007).

However, transformations in language were not uniform across geographically contiguous linguistic areas. Yan-nhaŋu varieties demonstrate resistance to influences that led to changes in Djinaŋ and Djinba. For example, there has been no merger of lamino-dental phonemes in Yan-nhaŋu commensurate with closely related Djinaŋ. This difference persists despite the fact that the Batjamurrŋu estate of the Yirritja Djinaŋ-speaking group abuts Yan-nhaŋu estates at Milingimbi. Waters (1989) demonstrates lamino-dental (th, dh, nh) merger in modern Djinaŋ (and Djinba), in contrast with their viability elsewhere, as an example of strong boundary maintenance. He records that ‘Djinaŋ and Djinba are both closely related to Yan-nhaŋu ... [which] has the lamino-dental series’ (Waters 1989: 48). Small group size and connubial competition may have encouraged some linguistic boundedness, but these circumstances were to change dramatically with the coming of the Methodist Overseas Mission.

Rise of a mission lingua franca

As indicated in Chapter two, the mission period caused significant changes to the way Yolŋu people interacted with each other. The transformations of language styles created by these events are of a magnitude linguists call language shift. Linguists define a language shift as the loss of functional choices between two languages leading to the replacement of one over the other (Devlin 1986; Schmidt 1990; Amery 1993). The factors that cause such shifts are usually multiple but may include ‘economic, social, educational, political, cultural, religious, familial and personal factors’ (Devlin
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

1986: 24–25). Although hard to define exactly the proximal factors for a move away from Yan-nhaŋu speaking in the Crocodile Islands they are circumscribed by the conditions of the mission, its emerging polity, and its public and secular discourses.

The development of a common language or lingua franca is a crucial dimension of the way communication in the newly emerging mission population was to take shape. People from many groups living together for the first time in such close permanent residence needed a way of communicating so that they could understand each other, this was especially so given the tensions that existed at the time among some of these exceedingly adversarial groups. The development of a sphere of public Yolŋu discourse reflecting the communication needs of the new polity became a crucial arena for the contest of public ideologies. According to some Yan-nhaŋu speakers, people at Milingimbi stopped speaking Yan-nhaŋu by the time of the Second World War. By the end of the war at least two generations of children born at the mission were speaking a common language. By the 1950s–1960s the lingua franca had become the code of choice and these circumstances were the cause of Yan-nhaŋu be coming ‘assimilated’ as a linguistic minority language in the new Milingimbi mission polity.

The characteristics of new residential conditions and the regimes of mission life, produced the circumstances that shaped the transition to a Dhuwal lingua franca at Milingimbi. The lingua franca was made up of a number of forms, and so this common language was described as a Dhuwala Gupapuyŋu by Beulah Lowe (1957, nd), and as a predominantly Dhuwal Djambarrpuynu derivative by Schebeck (1968: 61). It seems reasonable to suggest that the new lingua franca coming into daily use during this period was made up of a number of forms combining parts and modes from each of these Dhuwal/Dhuwala languages, and a number of others. Given the high level of multilingualism present in the new community the language shift to an evolving lingua franca at the mission was in large part shaped by the new sociopolitical needs of the community. Previously I have suggested that:

resettlement and rationing increased the size of social groups in daily contact ... Shift to Djambarrpuynu from Yan-nhaŋu is an index of an adaptive socio-linguistic strategy ... in response to changed socio-political, ethno-linguistic and environmental conditions derived from the mission experience (James 1999: 64–65).
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

A major dimension of this linguistic transformation was a dramatic change in the pattern of language transmission from parents to children giving rise to a children’s peer group language. The children’s language learning patterns moved away from the widely practised convention of children learning their father’s patriline after their mother’s language. This arrangement of mother’s language first followed by father’s, previously the norm, diminished in importance due to new residence patterns inside the mission. The majority of people living in the new Milingimbi mission were women speaking Djambarrpuyŋu or closely related Dhuwal languages, consequently, that is the language most children grew up learning to speak.

Devlin (1976) demonstrated the decline of children going on to learn their father’s clan language at Galiwin’ku. Linked to this was the rise of peer group languages as powerful influences in enclave speech communities. Describing both Milingimbi, and later Galiwin’ku, as enclavistic speech communities, he recognised that contemporary linguistic conventions tended toward a widely understood, yet not homogenised, linguistic variety derived from Dhuwala/Dhuwal languages. Peer group language conventions among children resonate with Sansom’s (1980) observation that it was not done to speak ‘in language’ in the homogenising camps around Darwin in the 1970s (Sansom 1980: 22). Given the contentious history and violent conflict of the mission period the choice of the lingua franca as a code of communication depicts a leaning toward social harmony and a shared perspective. As described in Chapter two conflicts between eastern and Yan-nhaŋu groups raged for decades. Yan-nhaŋu people began to use the lingua franca as a politically neutral language choice.

Out-migrations by people from Yirritja Yan-nhaŋu patri-groups away from Milingimbi to kin on the western mainland was another factor in reducing the number of Yan-nhaŋu speakers in the core community of Milingimbi. People of the Walamanji, Bing̱darrar and Njurruvuwal groups said that they began to shift their residential focus away from Milingimbi starting as early as the 1930s; pressed by hostilities they accomplished an almost complete transition into residence with kin on the nearby mainland (Milingimbi Mission Statement Report 1949, F1 1953: 266 in Keen 1994: 26). A survey of linguistic affiliations in the 1950s by welfare officers reports a number of Yan-nhaŋu speakers at Maningrida (Long 1992). Diminution of a Yan-nhaŋu-speaking population at the mission was another factor in the interruption of the intergenerational use and transmission of Yan-nhaŋu patrilinects.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

*Lingua franca promotes patrilect shift*

The same factors that gave rise to the lingua franca at the Milingimbi Mission also shaped the coalescence of Yan-nhaŋu patrilects. The six patrilectal varieties of the Yan-nhaŋu language of both *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* Yan-nhaŋu patri-groups have undergone what is described by linguists as a sociolectal shift (Fishman 1990) The characteristics of community residence, and the novel contexts these changing residence patterns have served over time to enhance lexical, phonological and morphosyntactical diffusion between Yan-nhaŋu patrilects. Mission residence created a more cohesive variety of Yan-nhaŋu by causing a decline of separately socially conceived (sociolectal) linguistic difference, and thus gave rise to a more homogenous register. More recently changing community linguistic environment provides diminished opportunity for the use, and therefore intergenerational transmission, of the Yan-nhaŋu patrilectal varieties (see Rigsby 1980; Fishman 1990). However, people can still signify difference when necessary, notwithstanding the characteristics of contemporary community residence.

State policies create powerful influences that shape language change, but the outcomes of these policies may not be straightforward, and may have unintended consequences. State policies creating sedentariness provided the contexts that influenced the transformation of multiple Yan-nhaŋu patrilects into a single form and the development of a lingua franca. These outcomes were undermined to some extent by life on the islands away from the larger communities. Residence on homelands has been a significant factor in the revival of Yan-nhaŋu language as a code in everyday use at the homelands. Recent reverses in the direction of language and patrilectal shift is sponsored in part by this continued occupation of homelands. The homelands movement, *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* (1976) and some of the policies of the self-determination era supported new economic, social and linguistic opportunities arising from the revivification of traditional economic practices and renewed links with country (Altman 1987: xiii; Morphy 2005; Merlan 2006: 85). Homelands provide remnant linguistic communities with opportunities for assisting transmission to the next generation of specific knowledge associated with sites and linguistic varieties. In 2007 support for outstations and bilingual programs has vanished. This policy is consistent with a tacit monolingual bias evident in the attitudes and policies of the Settler State.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

Looking back over a history of language change it can be seen that living languages have always undergone change (Pinker 1994). Yan-nhaŋu language changes have eventuated in response to local, national and international pressures, but this change includes a paradox. On the one hand, Yan-nhaŋu people subscribe to a public ideology of linguistic immutability, yet on the other, Yan-nhaŋu language use has clearly changed. Despite overwhelming evidence of linguistic transformations there remains a remarkable continuity in the belief of language as an aspect of ancestral endowment. For this reason Yan-nhaŋu language remains a crucial dimension of Yan-nhaŋu sociolinguistic identity. This is a fact of tremendous significance to the Yan-nhaŋu. I want to turn now to an examination of the factors that have worked to enhance continuities of Yan-nhaŋu sociolinguistic identity by focusing on the nature of ongoing beliefs in the spiritual connection between language and sites in the sea.

Continuity in songs, sites and names

In the Yolŋu context links to country are a conservative element in language change. To explore the nature of connections between Yan-nhaŋu sea country, and language, three essential aspects of Yolŋu language use come into focus: naming, names in the language of songs, and ceremonially significant words called bundhurr. After a brief explanation of the significance of naming, bundhurr and ancestral essences linked to sites some brief examples are provided. First, I reveal some public aspects of Yan-nhaŋu songs, bundhurr and Yan-nhaŋu names to show how continuities in ancestral practices lend continuity to a Yan-nhaŋu identity, both as a sociolinguistic identifier, and as an imperilled but living linguistic practice. In particular continuities can be seen to emerge from those names with the strongest ancestral links to country. These foundational ancestral links in names continue to structure links to country, and the identities of estate owners signified in the lexicon related to sites.

Yolŋu songs, sites, words and names are understood to be part of the legacy of wayarr creation. As such, these wayarr endowed in their creation possessory rights in a group’s madayin, religious icons (raŋga), paintings (minyti), songs (manikay), dances (bungul), names (yakarra), and ritually significant names (bundhurr) (see Keen 1978: 41; Williams 1986: 37; Morphy 1984: 17). Crucially, the ownership of a group’s language (yan) is also believed to be endowed by the wayarr ancestors. What links these aspects of a group’s property is not only their putative bequest by their particular
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

wayarr, but the underlying notion of shared ancestral essences. It is at this level we can understand the underlying logic of language as an emblem of group identity.

For the Yan-nhaŋu, identification with a particular wayarr, expressed in terms of (among other things) yakarra, bundhurr and language (yan), establishes the collective rights of Yan-nhaŋu patri-groups to their land and sea. Yan-nhaŋu language and names are thought to be derived from, and are in effect embodiments of the ancestral beings, and the actions that these words represent: words contain ancestral essence (Munn 1973; Keen 1978: 183, 185–6; Morphy 1991: 103). Keen (1978) has described the notion that language ‘reveals the footsteps of the ancestors’; bestowing a ‘direct contact’ with ancestral powers (Keen 1978: 183), arising from an ideational system predicated on a belief in shared ancestral essences. Consequently, a connection between a particular language variety and place is conceived of in fundamentally spiritual links.

The mechanism of this linguistic endowment is described by Williams (1999):

The spirit beings/ancestral beings/creator beings vested land in particular groups of people in a time long past. Both the beings and the time are locally distinctive, as are the acts of vesting. They all, however, include descriptions of flora and fauna as well as topographical features of the particular land and sea, and most importantly they gave names to them. Usually the language in which these acts are done is also distinctive and pertains to the specific locality. All names convey particular relationships and those given to the features of the landscape, including flora and fauna, convey ownership. It has a name ergo it is owned (Williams 1999: 57).

By identifying acts of creation vested in a distinctive language Williams makes transparent the underlying Yolŋu notion of consubstantial relations between the names of sites, people and groups manifest in ancestral essences. This pattern of linguistic and land affiliation has been the subject of extended study (see Keen 1978, 1994; Morphy 1983: 26; Williams 1986: 57–72; Toner 2001; 2006). A pivotal element is the strength of this link believed to rest in the idea of bundhurr words, as connected with ancestral essences. Keen (1994), has described how these bundhurr (likan) names are incanted at important moments in ritual performance, linking concepts of people, ‘place, group and attributes of a wayarr ancestor’ (Keen 1994: 305). Yan-nhaŋu people use the term bundhurr much more than likan to describe these powerfully
significant ritual names and I shall follow this convention by referring to them as *bundhurr*. 93

Williams (1986) reminds us that names are a group’s most important non-corporeal property, embodying the close links between names, country, and language (Williams 1986: 42). Turner (1967) describes the dense meaning of verbal symbols saying, ‘verbal elements of ritual share with non-verbal symbols the qualities of condensation … and the implication of several distinct levels of the social order (Turner 1967: 8). *Bundhurr* are just such condensed verbal symbols associated with images in the performance of songs about the ancestral world that link significant sites to a group’s ancestral identity.

Song texts often consist of a large number of names for a single place and some of these names have a restricted nature (Toner 2001; Magowan 2001). Important among these names are *bundhurr* names associated with *wagarr* and their features, and connected with images and events in the stories of their creation journeys. Some site names are *bundhurr* names. To depict something of the complex geographical interrelationships of *bundhurr* names, songs and their links to sites in the sea, I have mapped the geographical distribution of some non-restricted Yan-nhaŋu songs and their sites in the sea. In this way it is possible to see how sites, names, events and *wagarr* are mapped onto the land and seascape.

The *Dhuwa* Yan-nhaŋu group Malarra/Gunjirritji sing some 30 songs divided into a number of series as part of their public *garma* endowment. Map 8 illustrates a number of these song subjects associated with major sites in their marine estates.

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93 *Bundhurr* (syn: *likan*, *gunbhurr*, *burrpa*) words are sacred/ritually significant names comprising a key aspect of group identity.
Map 8 Malarra songs and associated sites in the Crocodile Islands

Malarra Songs & Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malarra Animals</th>
<th>English Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barracuda</td>
<td>Larrajarja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>Booday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porpeya</td>
<td>Nyanubal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying fish</td>
<td>Dikarr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bark Canoe</td>
<td>Gulawurr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea water</td>
<td>Marnamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapwing plover</td>
<td>Birrkabirka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea eagle</td>
<td>Dhamala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black ibis</td>
<td>Garra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar glider</td>
<td>Barndudji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning star</td>
<td>Barrayribirr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Malawalanu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long tom</td>
<td>Guywarinya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef</td>
<td>Gukuda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

North West Crocodile Reef

North East Crocodile Is

Cape Stewart

Crocodile Is

Rapuna Is

Milingimbi Is

Murrunga Is

Elcho Is

Dalmana Is

Garuna Is

Lajarra Is

This map shows places in the sea, and on islands referred to in songs about particular Malarra wayarr. These sites, and their names are part of an intricate identity complex embedded in songs. Sites, wayarr actions and special names bundhurr associated with wayarr, are understood to share ancestral essence. Songs describe the journey of the particular ancestral animal, plant, being or phenomena in its form that the wayarr takes at that time. The journeys of the wayarr tell of creation events at the places they travel.
These travels link ancestral sites, songs, events and names that make up song subjects. The song subjects and the identity complexes they refer to in the songs may link a number of groups. Performers from various groups understand their relationship to these complex aspects of songs in the idiom of kinship relations. The musical recreation of these wagarr journeys is believed to revivify the essential ancestral power connecting all these parts of the identity complex in a process in which spiritual potency is regenerated in the noumenal sphere (Magowan 2001: 22, see Chapter four).

The poetic function of songs and bundhurr names in song texts has been considered by Toner (2001, 2006). He writes that song texts often consist of a wide variety of names for a single place, ancestral being, or feature of the landscape (Toner 2006: 175). He contends that such names evoke place through visual, auditory and tactile imagery giving the performance a deep emotional force (Toner 2006: 176). In addition, powerful feelings are evoked by the incantation of bundhurr, which may also be the names of dead kin. Such connections may provoke multiple layers of reference. Connecting names, and in particular bundhurr names, linked to the action of an ancestor at a particular site, have the potential to stand for or refer to the people of the lineage responsible for the custodianship of the site, and simultaneously imply complex networks of relatedness with other groups based on these shared ancestral stories.

The performance of major ceremonies requires the participation of people sharing stories linked to one another in complex regional ceremonial systems. Recognition of the multiple shared rights in songs gives a sense of the interdependencies of underlying local networks and extended strings of kinship relations implied by these bundhurr (Keen 1995: 305). These systems, articulated through the kin network (gurrutu), underwrite the performance of the major ceremonies. Some of the songs sung at these ceremonies are shared with other groups, or more precisely their song subjects and song series are shared (Toner 2001).94 These shared aspects of ritual across linguistic boundaries at once signify the group’s indissoluble possession of the sites while concomitantly expressing ancestral links with other groups.

94 Toner (2001) explains that a song item is an individual performance of any version of a single song subject, generally lasting between 20 and 40 seconds. A song series is a complete assemblage of songs which describe ancestral activities, and events at particular places. A song subject is the specific subject matter of a sequence of songs, which describes a particular ancestor. A song version is any of a number of ways of performing the ‘same’ song subject, which may differ according to ritual context, or song text, but most commonly differ according to rhythmic patterns.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

Links between groups are signified in the performance of ceremonies in which shared aspects of identity complexes are implicated in songs (manikay). Songs of a particular estate, and group, may be performed in a language other than that of some of the performers, given that a number of groups may share songs. Garma or public ceremonies, regional and Nja:rra ceremonies, are centred around the performance of manikay. This is a genre of public ritual songs, accompanied by clapsticks (bilma) and drone pipe or didjeridu (yidaki). The exception is to this is the Liyagawumirr who do not use the yidaki. 95 Manikay tell the stories of the song subjects in a song series belonging to groups sharing wanjarr. These links between groups are emphatically demonstrated by reference to shared bundhurr or elbow (likan) names in songs signifying these wanjarr links between groups and countries. Religious affiliations implicated in shared song topics, dance (bungul), clapstick patterns (bilma), tunes (rriya), and words (yutungurr) crosscut language identity. The references to ancestral journeys crossing the landscape create extensive complex mental maps variously linking widely separated estates and groups. These extensive networks of ancestral connection have profound implications for the exchange of resources, women, and the continuity of sociopolitical groups.

Consequently, the ways in which songs are performed, and the songs that are left out of a performance, have political implications for the assertion of group rights and cooperation in singing (see Magowan 2001: 23). A number of groups and individuals have the potential to control what songs will be sung, and for that matter the language of the performance of such songs. In ritual settings the djungaya have a great deal of influence over the performance of their mother’s group’s songs. 96 In chapter two it was revealed how groups holding ringitij rights in the maďayin of their ma:ri mother’s mother, had rights in the performance of their ma:ri’s songs. Songs referring to ancestrally significant places, some of which exist as a small ‘embassy’ sites within another group’s country, are an important aspect of ritual property for groups living on the estates of groups they call ma:ri. This property including songs, words, and some

95 Liyagawumirr do not celebrate the Djan’kawu brother and also do not deploy the yidaki (drone pipe)
96 Djungaya is a Yolŋu category of ‘managers’ having certain rights and responsibilities toward the maďayin of their mother group, including rights in directing the production of ritual events. The relationship of djungay or children (wakú woman speaking), or sister’s children (man speaking) for individuals, and the people of the group called the wakupulu, are the opposite moiety to their mothers group called pa:muŋgiyukukulu (mother/child or yothu’yindi, MMM-wDDC), and dependent on them for the enactment of their ceremonies and the ritual consubstantiation of their maďayin.
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

*bundhurr*, of their *ma:ripulu* appear in their renditions of a song’s text, demonstrating the interdependencies of groups speaking a number of different languages.

The following excerpt from a song text in the Malarra Yan-nhañu patrilect, performed by senior Malarra custodians, express the complex interrelations in saltwater sites and moving bodies of water sung belonging to Malarra people. This extract from the Malarra song of the saltwater *wayarr* named ‘Ganatjirri Maramba’, relates the travels of the saltwater current *Maramba* through the islands and connecting with other bodies of salt water. I have emphasised *bundhurr* in the text bold type in order to demonstrate how these significant ritual names, belonging to both *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* moiety groups, appear in the text. Their proximity in performance, and in the text, is a signifier of their relationship to each other, again articulated and expressed in the idiom of kinship. The Malarra *wayarr* are implicated in the text.

Gundurrwirriyul dha:puluma dha:wurriyurruru Ruldjapa gapurrru
*Maramba-

Tides/returning collide/splash up, water going up and down *bundhurr* water *bundhurr*
-garrultja, Marrabirrkula, Nalkaŋa, Yakamangga Dhaliŋa, Bulgupulguŋa

-water talking, significant site names at Murrunga and the sea
-yarrkyarkthu nindipunuma gukulŋuguna *Rambala* bidiliyurruru, gulkariŋa

-going back mixing, baby/child, *gukulŋu* (wC/ZC) make *Yirritja bundhurr* names for saltwater *wayarr*

Gukuda baŋurrikbankurr dhawurriyurruru Ruldjapa gapurrru *Maramba

- *bundhurr* bubbling water foam up water going *bundhurr* water *bundhurr*

Translation: Malarra *Dhuwa* saltwater *Maramba* travels and mixes with *Yirritja* ancestral bodies of water, tides mixing (sexual metaphor referring to connubial relationships) producing children (baby/child, *gukulŋu* (wC/ZC) make), reflecting actual connubial relations between people (Fieldnotes Bulgupulugu (Mu 5) Murrunga 1999).

Yan-nhañu *bundhurr* cited here refer to links with the ancestor and sites from the perspective of the Yan-nhañu owners. The deployment of specific site, group, and language-specific *bundhurr* names signify rights and authority over sites, religious
connections, and linguistic identity. Simultaneously, performance is assumed to be effective in refurbishing connections to the spiritual powers of the place, its resources, ownership rights, and cosmological authority (see also Morphy 1995: 192; Perrett 1996: 61; Keen 2006). Concurrently, *Yirritja bundhurr* names present in the song refer to links with groups speaking *Yirritja* languages other than Yan-nhaŋu with whom the Malarra intermarry. These connections and sites they link can be mapped onto country. Map 9 illustrates some of the geographical relationships between and among the *bundhurr* names referred to in the above *Maramba* song text.

**Map 9 Sites, wayarr and bundhurr in Maramba song**

A significant number of proper names, place names, and *bundhurr* names in the songs of the islands and their seas signify the custodians of these songs and the wider network of relationships. It is also important that these names are performed in Yan-
Chapter Five: The language of the sea

nhaŋju language and that this is a demonstration of the continuity of the link between people, language, sites and ancestors. In addition these bundhurr, linked in performance, signify a fundamental relationship between Yan-nhaŋju speakers and others (in this case) Dhuwa moiety Malarra saltwater waŋarr and Yirritja moiety saltwater waŋarr belonging to other groups speaking Dhuwala languages. The relationship of mother and child (ŋaːmuŋul/gukulŋu mother/child or yothu/yindi, MMM-wDDC) demonstrated signifies the exchange of ancestral essences through a metaphor of procreation. ŋaːmuŋul/gukulŋu is a kinship relation that entails mutual responsibilities for care and protection. Songs signify such relationships crosscutting linguistic boundaries.

At the beginning of this chapter mention was made of Yan-nhaŋju Yirritja groups that also identify as Burarra speakers. It can now be seen how this sociolinguistic affiliation is linked to the ownership of shared sites in the seas with Burarra and Yan-nhaŋju names. These shared names and sites, at Milingimbi and Bunbuwa, entail ceremonial connections which entail linguistic affiliations. Ancestral journeys cross cutting linguistic boundaries link Burarra-speaking people and Yan-nhaŋju. Bagshaw (1998) interprets a shared song text, including the Burarra-speaking Gamal patri-group from Bunbuwa and the Yan-nhaŋju Walamaŋu (Baːpurru yindi Mandjiŋay)

(We are) Gulalay and Mandjiŋay, we are both Walamangu. (Our) rough waves heap beach shells in the Milingimbi area and the Bunbuwa areas, where my (i.e., the Bunbuwa area) waters terminate, breaking onto the shore (Bagshaw 1998: 165).

Religious links such as those interpreted here, subsume linguistic difference to form the basis of extended baːpurru groups with a shared identity. The crucial points, from the perspective of continuities in Yan-nhaŋju language use, are that shared images of cosmogonic action, ancestral journeys, and notions of ancestral essence reinforce continuities in the performance and uses of names, and naming in songs, despite the abbreviated grammar of songs, or the various languages in which the general text may be performed. Ritual performance reinvests relationships between people, groups, sites, names and ancestors with a renewed currency, conceived of in terms of ancestral essence, and this value underwrites the reproduction of these names. A lingua franca supports the articulation of ritual interdependencies enhancing the re/reproduction of identity complexes and a lexicon of names along cosmic lines. At base the Yan-nhaŋju ownership of estates, names, and madayin forms the foundation for continuities in their
sociolinguistic identity, despite evidence of changing language use. The stability of a lexicon of names at the level of sociocentric identity is matched by naming practices at the egocentric level. I will turn now to highlight ancestral connections between names, people and place.

**Ancestral connections, spirit and personal names**

As discussed, names are understood to have a direct connection to the ancestral essences of the things that they are intended to signify. Tamisari (2002) writes that Yolnu names speak of culturally shared images ‘whether of individuals, sacred sites and non sacred objects such as boats, and dogs’ being ‘associated with the group’s specific cosmogonic action and movement of Ancestral beings’ (Tamisari 2002: 88). Sites and names are linked by ancestral essences, so the names belonging to the group are indicative of group identity. Christie (1994) observes that ‘every place, tree, fish, and body of water had a number of names ... people could be referred to by a variety of different names in different contexts’ (Christie 1994: 26). Many Yan-nhaŋu names are derived from the attributes of saltwater *wajarr* or characteristics of the marine environment endowed by the ancestors. Fish names, names of tides and waves and winds and the endless variety of the forms of the sea make up much of the Yan-nhaŋu naming lexicon.

An ideology of spirit conception is current among Yan-nhaŋu people. This ideology holds that the unborn child’s spirit or baby spirit (*rratha mayili*) is an animating spirit that gives life to the baby. This spirit (*mayili*), occasionally glossed as shadow or image, is sometimes thought of as a little fish that emerges from the salt water to create/accompany the baby expressed as *ganatjirri malthunway* (lit: following the water). This little fish imparts *ma:rr*, the power of existence at conception described in the parameters of Yan-nhaŋu ontology as an outcome of creation (see Chapter four Figure 3). Yan-nhaŋu bodies of salt water containing named sites are themselves considered to be named *wajarr*. These salt waters are endowed with creative powers (*ma:rr*), that are visible in the movements of their waters, or as described by Bagshaw (1998), ‘deemed to be manifest in their movement, sound and changing form’ (Bagshaw 1998: 159; see also Tamisari 1997: 305; Magowan 2001: 25; Barber 2005). These unborn child spirits in salt water are believed to be the source of ancestral essence that animates the child’s spirit. Senior people are responsible for divining
appropriate names to be given to newborn children (*rratha dhawal gayaŋa*; lit: child site think). These names are often linked to significant sites intertwined with the spiritual origins of the child.

Yolŋu people are sometimes accorded highly specific and restricted ritual *bundhurr* names. These significant names are often, and typically, said to be held on the ‘inside’. Some of these restricted names may not be revealed to the uninitiated, so that, for example, women and children will not be aware of all of their names. Their very personal ‘inside’ names may consist of *bundhurr* names. As mentioned in Chapter four, the incantation of *bundhurr* names in ritual context depicts a process in which spiritual potency is regenerated in the noumenal sphere through ritual naming (Magowan 2001: 22). Christie and Perret (1996) describe these names as:

> Names which label and enable the linkages within Yolŋu reality ... connecting and articulating points within the complex web of relatedness in which stands every individual, group, totem, song, plant, animal and piece of land, and into which everyone and everything is born (Christie and Perrett 1996: 61).

Personal names are considered very personal and therefore powerful, not least of all because of their potential to evoke an essential connection with the *wayarr*. In addition to these ancestrally conceived links they may also convey a deep sense of sentimental connection with memories of kin and country. It is precisely for this reason that I do not give a discussion of living or deceased Yan-nhaŋu peoples names here, although I will discuss Yan-nhaŋu dog names to make the same points ahead.

The consubstantial element, or shared ancestral essence of a name, produces the potentially serious act of *dudakhana* (lit: to follow). The meaning of the metaphor *dudakhana* is one linking or invoking the spirit of the newly dead through the voicing of the ancestrally linked name. The idea of calling out to one who has ‘gone before’ and thus ‘follow’ is contained in the metaphor. As a precautionary convention Yolŋu often prefer to avoid using personal names in general, favouring a number of conventional alternatives in kinship terms, or nicknames. Yolŋu use subsection name (*malk*), kinship (*gurruŋu*) and nicknames (*wakal yakarra*) in everyday settings and in typical interactions as the proper form of address.

Nicknames are socially constructed ways of referring to someone that are often group specific, and may contain a characteristically comedic quality. In this way names
signify sites, and by extension *waŋarr* and the associated *ba:purru* links belonging to such names. Just as language evokes *ba:purru* identification, names refer to the groups that own them, and at the same time imply particular kinds of relationships. Senior people will often help children name dogs in an appropriate way, giving consideration to the child’s relationship to the dog and the dog’s characteristics and so forth. These actual dogs’ names, recognisable for their links to Yan-nhaŋu mythology, are also known to the people sharing residence where these dogs live. More so, Yan-nhaŋu dogs’ names are sometimes used as humorous nicknames for people (Table 15). This convention is common to all Yolŋu groups and is cause for much delight.

Table 15 Yan-nhaŋu names with special meanings for dogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Group ownership and meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sooty oyster catcher</td>
<td>Gamalangga, walks funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mouse</td>
<td>Malarr waku, little one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mudflats</td>
<td>Walamanu, bald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spot</td>
<td>Walamanu, chest marking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sacred bag</td>
<td>Walamanu, dear one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Owl</td>
<td>Gurryindi dhuwi, big eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Native cat</td>
<td>Malarr waku, funny one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Gamalangga, walks funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Long tom</td>
<td>Malarr, dear one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Frog</td>
<td>Malarr waku, funny one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dog named *Baga-paga* is, for example, said to remind one of the dance of the sooty oyster catcher belonging to the Gamalangga people. This bird is renowned for its funny walking style, a style that is also imitated in the associated dance. This Gamalangga bird name, commonly given to dogs, may also be used surreptitiously to tease people for comic effect. *Mayjapanra* is a funny name for Yan-nhaŋu dogs with no hair, denoting salt flats of the same name devoid of plant cover. Its comic effect comes from the fact that people commonly believed that baldness is caused by licentious behaviour, prompting its occasional use in card games to impute less than virtuous conduct to those with thinning hair. *Giywarrina* (Long tom), a Malarra *waŋarr* and *madayin*, denotes a relationship very dear or precious, a name characteristic of a most beloved dog. The same sorts of connections are made for the names of houses, cars, boats, and all manner of personal items. The effect of these all-encompassing interrelations of names, and reference produce immersion in the imagery of the
overarching mythology, a world in large part constituted in, and by language given by the ancestors.

Many of the conventions of everyday naming remain tacit. The links to networks of local and wider connection insinuated in these naming practices are not explicitly articulated, but simply assumed to exist in spoken and unspoken names. Some nicknames may seem a little unsympathetic in their depiction by European standards. People will call each other mokuy (ghost), bamabama (dull, will ful and licentious ancestor spirit), yalŋi (soft in the head, retarded or deformed), and boa’mirr (mad by spirit possession) in jest and in earnest. Crucially, what is at stake in these naming practices is the tacit recognition by people that the characteristics of the physical world, which are named, are at the most profound level an outward expression of an invisible ‘inner’ ancestral realm – names name a world of variations emanating from a fundamentally changeless realm of shared and differentiated Dhuwa and Yirritja ancestral essences. It is those names with the strongest foundational ancestral links to sites and the identities of estate owners that are most significant. Names, like bundhurr names, are owned and unchanging because they are considered to signify, and to ‘be’ (consubstantial) ancestral essence. This profoundly metaphysical perspective is implied in the re/construction of identities, estate ownership, and attitudes to sociolinguistic change.

Conclusion

A discussion of Yan-nhaŋu language, as a sociolinguistic identifier, and as a code for communication, engages themes of social distinction of similarity and difference, and the spiritual connection to place. Yolŋu languages are differentiated by their use of a ‘this/here’ category linked to their estates. Moreover, it provides a vivid illustration of key dimensions of continuity and transformation in Yan-nhaŋu identity linked to language. Focus on the spiritual connection of language to place helps to orient the Yan-nhaŋu within the social and linguistic fabric of Yolŋu society, and the geographical space of northeast Arnhem Land. Ritual networks create contexts for the reproduction of a lexicon of names and links to sites. In this way Yan-nhaŋu are distinguished from other groups using the same Nhaŋu proximal demonstrative by their socially agreed construction of linguistic and geographical difference, captured in the expression, the language of ‘here’, the language of the Crocodile Islands.
Today Yan-nhaŋu is classified by linguists as a distinct subset of the Nhaŋu group. This Yan-nhaŋu group is further divided into six patrilects belonging to six discrete Yan-nhaŋu ba:puuru. Yan-nhaŋu people at Milingimbi and Galwin’ku, like Yolŋu from many different ba:puuru groups, now commonly speak a Djambarrpuyŋu-like Dhuwal lingua franca stimulated by the circumstances of mission residence. The incidence of children’s peer group language factors, modified conventions of language use and interrupted intergenerational transmission of the Yan-nhaŋu patrilects, among other things, has contributed to the development of contemporary amalgamated Yan-nhaŋu. At present Yan-nhaŋu speaking is undergoing a slight resurgence. This resurgence is sponsored by residence on homelands, and by increasing interest in partnerships with outside researchers and groups and, in part, in response to its significance as a signifier of primary spiritual responsibility for sea country under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act (1976). Let me reiterate that Yan-nhaŋu continue to sing in Yan-nhaŋu in the ritual sphere but it is much less the language of everyday now.

Language continues to be an important signifier of ancestral rights, and difference. This is so on one level, in light of the fact that language affiliations are not cancelled by a failure to learn a language (Sutton 1980: 30; see also Merlan 1981: 144; Trigger 1987; Rumsey 1993). Moreover, transformations of linguistic variety under the influence of historical, geographical, social and religious factors form part of an evolving culture in communities where Yolŋu of many linguistic affiliations and their neighbours reside, travel and intermarry. Collective practices in changing social and historical contexts promote linguistic realignments reflecting agreed communicative practice. Such practices permit language deployment as an instrument of contrast or alliance. Social closeness and boundaries, perceived by speakers on notions of putative linguistic alignment, continue to be markers of particular kinds of association for varying purposes. Sociolinguistic alignment may be deployed in discourse for the development of social capital within the multiple shifting intersubjective space of a contemporary Yolŋu sociality. Despite continuing to subscribe to the notion of language immutability, young Yan-nhaŋu for the most part communicate in Burarra or the Dhuwal lingua franca in their daily interactions in communities. The fact that they only occasionally and imperfectly use Yan-nhaŋu creates no conflict with their identification with it.
The fact that Yolŋu people continue to publicly subscribe to this ideology of linguistic immutability indicates persistent conformity with traditional cosmological views and Yolŋu religious orthodoxy. Disjuncture between the notional variety and the actual language used, both as a device for individual and group definition, and as a tool for communication, is maintained by a pervasive cultural bedrock of belief in the wayarr. Yolŋu belief holds that each individual and group’s perspective is a distinct instance of cosmic creation. Ceremonies, songs, bundhurr and names maintain links between sites, ancestors and people that are a force for continuity in linguistic practices. This notion of ancestral essence embedded in the words of a language and being the strongest in these foundational names, provides a platform for linguistic stability, in the light of powerful pressures for change in Yan-nhanu language use. These fundamental ancestral links to placenames are a key aspect of Yan-nhanu association with their homelands, functioning as linguistic remnant communities, as refuges where the lexicon of sites, names, and histories are reproduced everyday. The intergenerational transmission of this lexicon and, the local knowledge of the sea is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Six:

Yan-nhaju knowledge of the marine environment

Djinibu lolo. Mud fish trap at Milingimbi

Plate 8 Gurruwa (M 59)*

The ultimate value is freedom of movement. Basically the largest factor contributing to this value is the shifting food supply which necessitates change of location; but the feeling for change of location permeates the whole society and has become the most positive motivating factor in the thinking of any Australian aborigine including the Murngin (Warner 1937: 148).
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Keeping in mind the metaphysical relations of Yan-nhaŋu people to the sea the following chapters shift emphasis towards a more broadly ecological and economic focus on factors influencing relationships and identification with the environment. Attending to the symbolic and practical knowledge of the Yan-nhaŋu marine economy, I investigate the themes of physical connection to place, and spiritual connection evident in ecological and economic relations with kin and with sea country. The data in this chapter, and to a large extent the next on marine turtles, reveals cosmologically inscribed ancestral laws articulating key dimensions of culture, in self-reflexive adaptation with the natural environment. Local ontological perspectives and the observance of religious doctrine govern the social, ritual and material control of access to land and saltwater resources. Ecological and social relations entailed in the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of the material means of life provide a window through which to see the fundamental dimensions of life on the islands. Focusing on these ecological relations demonstrates an intimate knowledge of local ecological conditions, categories of sea space, the character of seasons and tides informing the deployment of technologies, patterns of mobility and diet in delicate balance with the marine environment. It is the intimacy and intricateness of this engagement with the many moods of the sea that is indicative of a Yan-nhaŋu marine identity.

This chapter is organised around three arenas of Yan-nhaŋu expertise and practice. First, I discuss how the seasons govern patterns of inter-island travel, marine subsistence, and issues of access to the particular ecological resources of the marine environment. Second, I demonstrate how local knowledge of ecological categories articulates with systems of naming and logics coordinating the design and practice of fishing and hunting arrangements. Third, I depict an elaborate knowledge of saltwater technologies, integrating seasons, winds, tides, timing of fish behaviours and all manner of ecological particularities of the marine environment. The configuration of knowledge and practices, resources and timing are evident in the arrangement and construction of a number of different styles of fish traps existent throughout the Crocodile Islands. Evidence of this local knowledge, and the symbolic significance of these practices linked to seasonal inter-island travel are confirmation of an intimate cultural adaptation to the sea.
Cultural adaptations are evident in the quotidian practices on the islands. Sitting on the beach under the Casuarina trees at Murun̄ga waiting for the fish traps to fill up with fish old and young keep a lazy eye on the sea. The approach of a turtle, or crocodile, or the glint of a bow wave telling of the return of the turtle hunters causes a shout of excitement and a call to immediate action. The Yan-nhaŋu experience their marine identity in the material and economic practices, and ecological adaptations of everyday life, and is significantly mediated by the symbolic archetypes of their cultural heritage. By illuminating the more imperceptible links of this hitherto undocumented marine economy, I observe the significance of practical ecological behaviours.

Some writers have speculated on the invisibility and fragility of indigenous systems of marine tenure (Palmer 1988; Peterson and Rigsby 1998: 3). Others have remarked on the enormous potential of indigenous systems to support biosecurity, economic and ecological values on the indigenous estate. This is a view highly relevant in regard to the conspicuous incapacity of the State to provide such services in remote areas (Hviding 1996; Altman 2001). Both approaches are valuable in considering future opportunities available to the customary economies of coastal indigenous communities and homelands and of particular relevance to the Yan-nhaŋu. In this case the geographical distribution, knowledge, and spiritual commitment to sea country demonstrated by the Yan-nhaŋu appear an overwhelming case in support of their desire to live on their island homelands and continue to enhance their marine resources. The intergenerational transmission of this specifically Yan-nhaŋu cultural assemblage, including language, is a key concern of Yan-nhaŋu people. I begin by defining some key concepts useful to a deeper understanding of local knowledge in the Crocodile Islands.

**Local knowledge defined**

A more holistic scientific approach to ‘traditional’ or ‘local knowledge’ is rooted in the pioneering work of Harold Conklin, who worked with the Hanunoo of the Philippines (Conklin 1957). A parallel literature in ecological anthropology, biological ethnoarchaeology and linguistic ecology all bear the philosophical hallmarks of Conklin’s ideas (Charlton et al 1992; Inglis 1993; Berkes et al 2000).

Indigenous local knowledge is one of several ways of defining similar research interests in the field, otherwise labelled ‘traditional knowledge’ or ‘traditional
ecological knowledge'. More recently these designations have become problematic; for example, the term 'traditional' is said to draw attention to the agglomerative aspects of knowledge and so obscure the dynamism and adaptability of such knowledge. So too, 'indigenous knowledge' is said to emphasise attachment to indigenous interests, but its application may exclude other populations perhaps not recognised as indigenous (Berkes et al 2000). The concept of indigenous may be regarded as ambiguous in itself. Nevertheless, the term 'indigenous local knowledge' most appropriately defines the concepts under consideration.

A holistic definition of local knowledge must account for the ecological dimensions and environmental effects on human culture and society, and also the reciprocal influence of humans on their physical environment. All organisms affect their environments, but the uniquely human conscious construction of meaning in the interaction with environments produces a culture of relations. An analysis of such relations seeks to untangle the complex interconnectivity of key elements in a culturally defined world in which humans reside. To quote Roy Ellen, 'people's perceptions produce the actual physical behaviour by which ecological relations are directly manipulated ... and because we see nature in terms of cultural images, and because it is to these that we respond, that a proper understanding of indigenous knowledge is theoretically crucial to the analysis of ecological relations' (Ellen 1982: 206). The practices and symbols developed by local groups have extensive histories and sophisticated models of interpretation of their ecosystems, and so they intersect in complex ways with other aspects of culture such as language, classification systems, technology, rituals and world views.

International research surrounding marine ethnoscience following Conklin's pioneering work has been dominated by Johannes (1978). Johannes and Ruddle (1985) have provided insights into the demise of traditional conservation methods in Oceania (Ruddle and Johannes 1985). A more recent contribution on maritime local knowledge, and the politics of tenure in the Solomon Islands, is described in detail by Hviting (1996). These studies focus on traditional knowledge of marine species including habitat, behaviour, spawning and migration. They describe in great detail local knowledge encompassing the management, categorisation, and development of technologies for accessing such marine resources, including canoes and fish traps, which is of particular relevance to this work.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

In the Australian context many have written on the local knowledge of Aboriginal people but the two most notable authors on early Australian Aboriginal marine adaptations are Thomson (1934, 1948, 1956) and Tindale (1925, 1926). More recent ecological research in the coastal Australian context includes the work of Peterson (1976), Meehan (1977, 1982), Sutton (1978), Chase (1981), Rose (1987) and Trigger (1987). These researchers have looked in detail at various aspects of the relationship between Aboriginal people and their environments. Central to such studies have been seasonality and its causal link to resource availability. Resources and their availability establish patterns of movement and modes of subsistence that are reflected in, and in large degree govern, laws of control of access to land and water. Most recently Keen (2003) has described the complex ecological interactions of pre-contact Aboriginal society under the rubric of economic relations. By placing ecological concerns within the matrix of social relations he engages ideas of social production as well as the production and distribution of material resources. Crucial to this socially situated economics is the recognition of cosmological and ancestral beliefs in indigenous models, beliefs that in turn impart a profound insight into the logics of local systems. Socially constructed meanings inscribed in local knowledge continue to provide a basis for understanding decision making about the countless minutiae of day-to-day life.

In the Crocodile Islands local knowledge has a decidedly marine orientation. This local knowledge includes decisions about hunting, fishing and gathering and the cooking and distribution of food, reflecting local mythology and the physical characteristics of life on the islands – a view of island life that has hitherto not been visible from the mainland and/or outside researchers working with groups hailing from the mainland. Today, aluminium dinghies have taken the place of bark and wooden canoes, but it is apparent that the shipboard roles of crew members engaged in inter-island travel, and their specific relations to the sea country, have not changed in any substantial way.

Travel in the islands means knowing the dangers of the seas. Those involved in the everyday interpretation of the tides, waves, winds and travel between the islands must be alert because the sea changes so quickly. Stories of the ancestors who crossed the seas and made the reefs and islands tell of the dangers of the sea. Ancestral precedent

97 The influence of seasonality on subsistence behaviour has been described in detail by Thomson (1939), Peterson (1973) and Chase (1980). For a focus on resources of the marine environment see Meehan (1977, 1982), Smith (1987), Bradley (1997) and Rouja (1999).
underlies local knowledge of the seas around the Crocodile Islands. The mythology of
the sea, the people and places, and exchanges between humans and the invisible and
visible agents of the sea are expressed in the idiom of kinship relations. The Crocodile
Islands are surrounded by site-specific marine mythology, that links people to the sites
and seasons of the sea manifest in every wind; everyone shares kinship with the winds
that cross the seas of the Crocodile Islands.98

The influences of seasonal cycles on island life

The mapping of seasonal patterns has been significant in accounts of people’s
subsistence economies for anthropologists throughout Australia, particularly in the
north. In 1939 Thomson reconstructed contemporary seasonal factors in Wik Mungkan
life, reporting:

... the seasons are recognised by the aborigines themselves, and stressed
by the fact that they have classified the types of country, as accurately and
as scientifically as any ecologist, giving to each a name, and associating it
with specific resources, with its animal and vegetable foods, and its
 technological products (Thomson 1939: 211).

Jones (1980), says the flow of the seasons dominates Gidjingali (Burarra) life in such a
way that ‘it governs the foods eaten, the plans for the hunt, the location of camps, and
the timing of ceremonies’ (Jones 1980: 111). Yan-nhaŋu and Gidjingali-Burarra share
borders on Cape Stewart Peninsula (see Appendix eight). As mentioned in Chapter
four, their adjacent geographical location, and similar seasonal environmental
circumstances facilitate longstanding connubial and ritual links between these groups
(see also Thomson, fieldnotes 4/3/1937; Hiatt 1965, 2001; McKenzie 1980;
Gurrumanamana 2003). As noted in Chapter two, it is to these kin that Yirritja Yan-
nhaŋu people turned in the face of conflicts engendered by the coming of the mission
to Milingimbi in the 1920s. Today, Yan-nhaŋu people living at Maningrida and
surrounding outstations visit their Burarra kin to participate in the seasonal collection
of shellfish (Meehan 1977, 1982). The Yan-nhaŋu and Burarra distinguish seasons in
the daily round of resource collection without recourse to calendar or clock, in ways
that reflect regional models of seasonal variation.

Barber (2005), presents evidence of seven distinct seasons belonging to the
Dolupuyngu (lit: people of the mud) from the Blue Mud Bay locality. The Yolŋu

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98 Cosmological underpinnings of natural resource ownership are discussed in detail by Williams (1982,
people of the Blue Mud Bay region share a number of similar perspectives on seasonal phenomena with the Yan-nhaŋu despite their geographical distance from the Crocodile Islands. The sheer number of accounts in the literature referring to seasons reflects the significance of this aspect of the environment to the people of northeast Arnhem Land (see also Thomson 1949; Peterson 1971; Rudder 1977, 2001; Jones 1980; Davis 1982: 71, 1984; Gallagher et al. 1987: 41–60). Table 16 shows a representation of the six annual seasons of the calendar year similar to these used at Shepperdson College at Elcho Island Mission in the early 1990s.

**Table 16 Six Yan-nhaŋu seasons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Wind direction</th>
<th>Wind name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Midawarr</td>
<td>Gentle south-east</td>
<td>Djalatyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dharratharramirr</td>
<td>Strong east</td>
<td>Bulwunu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rarrandharr</td>
<td>North-west</td>
<td>Ba:rra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dhuludur’</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Lungurrma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ba:rramirr</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Ba:rra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mayalatha</td>
<td>Gentle north east</td>
<td>Lirra ɲanka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have numbered this Yolŋu seasonal pattern for easier reference in this section to depict the complex Yan-nhaŋu intercalation of seasons and phenomena of the sea. These particular seasonal categories and their names are widely shared across the Yolŋu-speaking region of northeast Arnhem Land. They are understood across the region largely because of the similarity of seasonal variations in temperature, winds and rainfall. Similarly, the Yan-nhaŋu share the concept of the cardinal points with other Yolŋu. These cardinal points were taken from the Macassans who visited northeast Arnhem Land. The Macassan names for the cardinal points therefore share some homophonic attributes with Yolŋu names. For example, south is called selatang by the Makassarese and a closely homophonous – djalatang, by the Yolŋu. North in Makassarese is utara, said lungurrma in Yan-nhaŋu; west is barrat in Makassarese and barra in Yolŋu languages. Lastly, east is timor in Makassarese and -
dimurr in Yolŋu matha. Seasonal wind names are also common across northeast Arnhem Land. Yan-nhaŋu children learn a number of regional and local rituals clustered around the idea of returning winds. These comparatively dependable seasonal wind directions and their daily variability are of critical importance to inter-island travel. Consequently a good deal of attention is paid to the intergenerational transmission of this knowledge to a younger generation by older people.

The seasons of inter-island travel

The six seasons structure the yearly cycle of inter-island travel. This travel was conducted on the sea but now some of it can be done by plane. Collectively, the Yan-nhaŋu possess approximately 10,000 km², most of which is sea country. This sea country includes 27 islands, between which they continue to travel. The great myths of the Yan-nhaŋu include ancestral journeys by canoe between the islands. The Djay'kawu myth follows the sea and many of the sites on the islands refer to canoes; for instance, Ba[dawarratjirra (Mu 47) means ‘broken back of the canoe’. For the Yan-nhaŋu an elaborate knowledge of inter-island travel marks a point of departure from the knowledge of mainland Yolŋu groups. It is precisely the local knowledge of the sea, and the intersection of seasonal winds, tides and currents, that permits the inter-island voyaging necessary to access the marine resources of the islands. Local knowledge accordingly reveals an emphasis on the exploitation of marine resources of islands and a corresponding lore on inter-island travel. Yan-nhaŋu marine expertise is symbolised in part by a highly developed canoe technology. Thomson (1937) reports the construction of massive Murrunga bark canoes carrying ten people at a time. These were named the dirrka (Yirritja) made of sewn bark and in length up to 4 metres long, sometimes with a sail (layarra). There was also a small Yan-nhaŋu bark canoe, gal-gal (Dhuwa). These two types of bark canoe are quite distinct from the dug-out lipa-lipa of Makassan origin. Thomson (1937) writes of their surprising seaworthiness and speed over rough water:

99 Older Yan-nhaŋu were said to visit the Nhaŋu of the Wessel Islands, covering enormous distances and were known to routinely make remarkable ocean crossings on bark rafts and single logs.

100 The na'ku or gal-gal bark canoe made of the bark of gadayka – (Eucalyptus tetradonta) – is a distinct design very different from the lipalipa (syn: ragan) or dugout canoe of Macassan design. The na'ku bark canoe or ba:rr' wan (syn: dirrka, buykj, djiiu, wurmarra), and paddles of many kinds are no longer made on the islands.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

... the biggest of all are made at Moorooma [Murrungga] (yanaŋgo matta, Yiritja, and Mandjikai malla) of two sheets of bark sewn together and in these the natives make journeys to Rabuma [Rapuma] and other islands of the Crocodile group, as well as to the mainland (Thomson 7/1/1937 File No. 115).

Travel between the islands is a way of life that requires an accurate understanding and a highly intuitive capacity for the accurate judgement of the timing of seasonal winds and tides. The Yan-nhaŋu seafarers of today, as they were in the past, are finely attuned to the changing seasonal winds and the shifting phenomena of the sea, often recognising almost imperceptible signs in the landscape, seascape and sky. The environment is filled with advertisements for the coming attractions in the seasonal ecological storehouse, signalling in many ways the fatness and ripeness approaching in local resources. Moreover, such signs are often extremely locality specific.

The six Yolŋu seasons of northeast Arnhem Land have markedly variable local qualities when transposed onto conditions on the islands. One way of explaining the differences in local systems is by identifying the local characteristics and calendar plants that people use to distinguish the seasons. The core of this concept of calendar plants is the idea of mangutji bulthanaway (lit: quality of telling the eye) (see also Christie 1994). Mangutji bulthanaway describes how environmental attributes such as the flowering times of certain trees come to characterise the season. For example, when the red-flowering kurrajong tree balgurru (Brachychiton paradoxus) begins to flower, Gamalangga people travel to Gurriba (North east Crocodile Island), 60 kilometres seaward, to gather crested tern djarrak (Sterna bergii) eggs on the beach at Balawarrga (G 1). Small signs like a change in wind direction or the sight of a significant bird may be said to herald the arrival of a new season, and by implication new resources. These time-telling attributes and their significances are intertwined with local mythology.

The natural rhythms of life on the islands and their seasonal characteristics therefore are a central concern to island life and the subject of many myths and much intensive intergenerational discussion. I have enumerated the seasons into an appending table as the numbered seasons correspond to the availability of food types from a number of important categories around the Crocodile Islands discussed ahead. Figure 5 indicates
something of the subtle way in which these stories of the seasons are linked
characteristic aspects of island life.

Figure 5 Six seasons of the outer Crocodile Islands

1
Midawarr wapunarr'yirri banyu ganjirri. Diltji'-bu muru ritjil banyu girr'ya n mudathu.
Middle dry becoming calm always water. Bush-from food tuber always arrive Olive turtles

Midawarr, flat water time, bush tubers are abundant, olive ridley turtles return to the
outer islands in this time of sea travel.

2
Dharratharramirri garriwa'-ku ga:ku. Bulunu banyu bilyan barra'irriba, ga walkalunj yindi
Late mid dry flat back turtles from eggs East/wind always turns westerly and dew big

Dharratharramirri and flat back turtle eggs arrive when the east wind turns westerly
and the morning dew appears.

3
Rarrandharr gulkurungu rrarrathar yata muryarr-aŋu gurr'djirryan banyu yindi rrarratharr.
Late dry small south-east wind leg hot becoming start always big south-east wind

Rarrandharr and the north-east wind of the late dry burns your feet and the snakes lay
their eggs.

4
Dhułudur' nhaŋku ralka manapang yarrada djinthawal, ga wata banyu dhułhun walima'-yu walirr'-yu, ga
wet season this not many fires now, and wind habitually blows different time, and

Dhułudur' now and there are not many fires, the wind blows at different times
during the day, and there is a lot of thunder.

5
Ba:rra'mirri Yindi dhuku galka binwanha dhuku'yu banyu gungayan ganydjarr'yu mulmul'nha.
Late wet big rain close from this rain always helps quickly grass

In Ba:rra'mirri, the late wet, heavy rain falls almost everyday encouraging quick growth.

6
Mayaltha walirr banyu bami parra ga nyirnyir banyu dhuku dhułhun.
Early dry sun always standing and intermittent always rain fall

Mayaltha, sunny days now with an occasional shower. Bush food is in short supply.

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midawarr</td>
<td>March/April</td>
<td>Dharratharramirri</td>
<td>Rarrandharr</td>
<td>Dhułudur′</td>
<td>Ba:rra'mirri</td>
<td>Mayaltha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April/May</td>
<td>August/September</td>
<td>October/November</td>
<td>December/January</td>
<td>February/March</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These stories of the seasons are still told to children today. What is assumed but not articulated is the significant contextual knowledge of seasonal changes and relationships that frame these simple tales. A vast implicit knowledge exists in the unspoken and tacit information, shared by island people, about the relations of the seasons, plants, winds and animals to each other. For example, it is assumed that all Yan-nhaŋu people know that the thunder time (dhuludur‘) is a time of abundant fish and that, similarly, the growing time (ba:rramirr) includes the time of burrugumirr (shark hunting). Because ‘everybody knows’ it is not necessary to mention it explicitly. It is in the silences that understanding is grounded, in the tacit understandings in this encompassing body of knowledge, understanding is grounded – in the mental mapping of places and timings. These tacit understandings are integrated into everyday decisions about travel and hunting that underlie the appearance of serendipity in hunting success. It all looks so easy, and people are always able to get food, but it is not an accident. The location and availability of fish at a particular time of the year, month, day and tide is of singular interest for the people of the islands and a constant source of conversation. Conversations often pregnant with silent suppositions about a vast shared and implicit encyclopaedia of assumed local understanding. Understandings that are now becoming the focus of Yan-nhaŋu projects to enhance the intergenerational transmission of such local knowledge.

Categories and seasonal availability of marine resources

The ways people prepare, consider and classify their food provides an important window into understanding people’s relationship to their environment. Yan-nhaŋu food categories and marine and terrestrial resource classifications are sensitive to seasonal availability. There are a number of food types in the Yan-nhaŋu reckoning. I will begin by looking broadly at the types of resources available in the whole environment and then narrowing focus to particular aspects of the diet. Table 17 outlines the Yan-nhaŋu categories of food type and examples of those types seasonally available. The numbered columns indicate the seasons and a shaded area denotes availability of each food item in the Crocodile Islands.
**Table 17 Resource types and numbered seasonal availability**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Midawarr</strong></td>
<td>March/April</td>
<td>Dharratharramirr</td>
<td>Rarrandharr</td>
<td>Dhu`lludur</td>
<td>Ba:rr amirr</td>
<td>Mayalthe</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Six annual seasons and the corresponding months</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bambitj</strong></td>
<td>Large woody perennials</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Planchonia careya</td>
<td>dhanggi</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Terminalia sp</td>
<td>Ṙan’Ṙa</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Livingstonia hamils</td>
<td>wujarra</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ritjaj</strong></td>
<td>Herbaceous annuals</td>
<td>Vegetable</td>
<td>Cayratia trifolia</td>
<td>djirambilk/galu</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dioscorea bulbifera</td>
<td>rintjaju/djitjama</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vigna vexillata</td>
<td>yukudi/galun</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ligiligi</strong></td>
<td>Terrestrial animals and birds</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Gras rubincundus</td>
<td>gudurku</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anseranas semiplamata</td>
<td>gurrumatji</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dendrocygn a arcuata</td>
<td>gutilji</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bural</strong></td>
<td>Marine reptiles and mammals</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Natator depressa</td>
<td>garriwa</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chelonia midas</td>
<td>wulugurrluma</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eremochely s imnircata</td>
<td>guwartji</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carcharhinus spallazani</td>
<td>balkbalkṘanṘi</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Larrana</strong></td>
<td>Cartilaginous fish</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Gymnura australis</td>
<td>mithirri</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Astobatus narinari</td>
<td>marraykala</td>
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<td>Chorodon cyanus</td>
<td>Ġalu</td>
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<td>Caranx melpygus</td>
<td>gurbumbal</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sphryraenell a barracuda</td>
<td>marraya</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Guyi</strong></td>
<td>Boney fish</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Malleus albus</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gafarium tumidum</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asaphis deflorata*</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Waynaka</strong></td>
<td>Molluscs</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Natator depressa</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sterna dougali</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dendrocygn a arcuata</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

209
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

A number of noteworthy seasonal geographic and biological interrelations are indicated in this table, but what is most significant is that four out of the five categories of protein foods available are derived from the sea – the sea provides the most significant part of the diet. Further, sea-sourced protein foods demonstrate a strong seasonal consistency.

Following 10 years of participation in the hunting and gathering routines of the islands, it can be estimated with considerable certainty, that 80 per cent of the protein intake in the diet at Murrungga Island comes from marine resources. Eggs of different types are available each year; some of these from birds and others from turtles. Birds’ eggs characteristically occur in brief seasonal episodes, in contrast to turtle eggs. Of the five species of turtles depositing eggs on the Crocodile Islands, three show very high levels of uniformity in availability across the seasons (see Chapter seven, Figure 11). This dependability on environmentally derived marine proteins in the diet is firstly a characteristic of, and secondly a crucial support for continued residence on remote islands. The remaining protein requirements in the diet come from resources gathered from the terrestrial environments of the islands.

Virtually no shop-derived proteins were consumed at Murrungga during the research period. The availability of marine-based protein in the diet is considerably higher than that recorded for shellfishing by the neighbouring Gidjingali in Meehan (1982: 159). This seafood-rich diet is a recognised symbol of life on the outer islands. Seafood-derived dietary protein on the outer islands is complemented by carbohydrate foods drawn from the environment, although to a lesser degree today than in the past.

Since the coming of the mission there has been a change in the way people use and collect carbohydrate-rich foods both in communities and on the outstations. In the past this crucial aspect of the diet was provided chiefly by women’s labour in the form of tubers, nuts and fruits. Nowadays, the bulk of carbohydrate is purchased from the store at Milingimbi in the form of flour, sugar and rice. These foods now form the carbohydrate staples in the Murrungga diet (Meehan 1977).

In contrast to homelands on the islands, transformations in the diets of northeast Arnhem Land people living on larger communities has been comparatively similar to those documented for larger community centres throughout the Northern Territory.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

The National Health and Medical Research Council (2000) found a decrease in availability of traditional foods following settlement:

Flour, sugar and rice were the staple ration foods at the settlements and missions, with supplementary and irregular quantities of fruit and vegetables from the local garden.

Rations were not adequate either in quality or quantity.

Communal feeding at settlements and missions during the middle of the century meant that responsibility to share food resources declined and a breakdown in the well-defined food distribution pattern was observed.

Recourse to bush foods occurred at all communities whenever rationing was inadequate (National Health and Medical Research Council 2000).

This describes the situation at Milingimbi during the mission period. Yan-nhańu women say they continued to access carbohydrate foods from the surrounding environments during mission times. Rhys Jones (1980) comments that the advent of flour and sugar had the effect of reducing women’s work by a considerable extent. He reports that the ‘spare time’ created by this change in diet is now taken up by the task of bearing more children (Jones 1980: 134). Whether or not this is a key population growth factor, it remains true to say that the time women spend in subsistence activities is greatly reduced. Meehan (1977) indicates that the contribution of sugar and flour to the 1972–73 diet reduced women’s working days to two weeks per month, from everyday work for all active women (Meehan 1977: 504 in Jones 1980: 134). She observes that women’s responsibilities for the provision of carbohydrates have not changed but have been made easier.101 Men and women continue to gather traditional vegetable food, but it is limited to highly prized varieties and for special occasions in these post-mission times. Table 18 represents the gender division in food gathering observed across the 15 major classes of food groups at Murrunga Island.

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101 On the relative contribution of animal and vegetable material to the indigenous diet in northeast Arnhem Land see also McArthur (1960), Hiatt (1967, 1970), Peterson (1973); Meehan (1977, 1982).
Table 18 Division of labour for subsistence resources at Murrunga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Food type</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Large woody perennials</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrubs &amp; climbers</td>
<td>Herbaceous annuals and perennials</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasses</td>
<td>Low monocotyledonous herbaceous perennials</td>
<td>Seeds, leaves</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds and lizards</td>
<td>Terrestrial animal &amp; bird protein</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snakes</td>
<td>Legless reptiles</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>some#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turtles</td>
<td>Marine reptiles &amp; mammals</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some*</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stingrays</td>
<td>Cartilaginous fish</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>some#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Bony fish</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shellfish</td>
<td>Molluscals</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>some#</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bee products</td>
<td>Apoidea, hymenopterous</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>male##</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ant products</td>
<td>Formicidia, hymenopterous</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White ant products</td>
<td>Formicidia, isopterus</td>
<td>Nests</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frogs</td>
<td>Amphibia</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Reptile, bird</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycads</td>
<td>Cycads</td>
<td>Flour</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only the harpooning of marine turtles is prohibited to women, otherwise they contribute to every kind of food collection across all of the Yan-nhaŋu resource categories. However, it has been noted that the attenuation of vegetable gathering has reduced the intergenerational transmission of local knowledge in regard to plant foods (Meehan 1977; Jones 1980). Among older men and women a complete knowledge of the pattern of ripening fruits and returning fish is retained. Much of this information is stored in the form of little songs. Diminution in the collection of vegetable material has reduced opportunities for transmission of key skills in the procurement of indigenous carbohydrate sources, in particular cycad palm (Cycas media), nut bread (nyathu) and the very unusual Yan-nhaŋu (Gurryindi) ceremonial bread baked from the poisonous

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102 This Table 18, indicates food available in the wider Crocodile Islands area. *Dependent on technique, e.g. men harpoon turtles, women may upend them on the beach when they are laying but rarely do. #Dependent on situation, women present, type of shellfish or season. ## Explicit and implied sanctions from the religious sphere restrict the use of some products and animals throughout the life cycle.
tubers of the Malaysian arrowroot named *nythumu* (*Tacca leontopetaloides*). Paradoxically, recognition of this lack of opportunity has lead to renewed efforts to teach children the daily skills of island foraging. An older generation of women familiar with the timing and strategies for collecting, preparing and cooking vegetables continue to take children hunting to pass on this knowledge. In order to forward such work people on the outer islands are starting up a IEK data base and linked on-line pictorial encyclopaedia connected to the Yan-nhaŋu dictionary project to enhance this intergenerational transfer.

From the data I collected during fieldwork are extracted some ecological categories and vegetable resources shown or explained to children and linked to the seasonal cycle of foraging (see Table 18). This information corresponds well with other accounts of the vegetable resources of northeast Arnhem Land (see also McArthur 1960; Peterson 1973: 182; Meehan 1977a, 1977b, 1982; Wightman 1989). Although many of these foods are still gathered and prepared, the actual amounts and frequency of collection is at best occasional and mostly for teaching purposes.
Table 19 Vegetable resources and seasonal availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Habitat</th>
<th>Yan-nhanu name</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rain forest</td>
<td>Retjaway</td>
<td>Cayratia trifolia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>djirambilk/galun</td>
<td>Dioscorea bulbifera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rintjagu/djita</td>
<td>Vigna vexillata</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yu. dgi/galun</td>
<td>Vigna radiata</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rti. ngurri</td>
<td>Ampelocissus acetosa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gu. pui</td>
<td>Amorphophallus sp.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lu. ypa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>open forest</td>
<td>Diljiway</td>
<td>Dioscorea transversa</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ba. waq</td>
<td>Caurculigo ensifolia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>du. yh. duw.</td>
<td>Vigna vexillata</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dj. pju</td>
<td>Abelmoschus mochatus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yu. dgi/galun</td>
<td>Taccia leontopetaloides</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>miljwa/guthu</td>
<td>Coelospermum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>war. ga</td>
<td>Cycas media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dj. buk</td>
<td>Vigna lanceolata</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>but. b. b. mo.</td>
<td>Microstemma tuberosa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fresh lakes</td>
<td>Gulunway</td>
<td>Thysanotus tuberosus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dh. nj. nj.</td>
<td>Nymphaea gigantum</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dj. tam</td>
<td>Nymphaea violacea</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dh. daw</td>
<td>Nymphaeoides indica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dh. ra. w. w.</td>
<td>Acrostichum speciosum</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>djirpu</td>
<td>Eleocharis dulcis</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above indicates the types of resources available in three terrestrial ecological categories across the seasons. Table 19 parallels seasonal and ecological categories with other northeast Arnhem groups with similar foraging practices who inhabit terrestrial estates in close proximity to the Crocodile Islands (see also McCarthy et al 1960; Peterson 1973; Meehan 1982; Davis 1984; Rudder 1993).
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

In contrast to the preceding data exhibiting correspondence in seasonal terrestrial resources, it is important to draw attention to the marine-based seasonality of resources at Murrunga. Table 20 shows a pattern of yearly seasonal resource occurrences with 10 years of data drawn exclusively from Murrunga Island. It is around these major episodes that the main hunting activities are organised each year. Occasionally storms beach shellfish or bring unusual fish or crab spawning events that are attributed to the wayarr. Although these occasional phenomena are important they are an unpredictable feature of the yearly round of hunting and gathering and hence not included in Table 20. These data show only the yearly cycle of predictable subsistence events at Murrunga Island and the season and ecological zone in which they occur.
Table 20 Murrunga seasonal resources, ecological zones and availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasonal resource</th>
<th>Ecological zone</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yan-nhanju</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunugali</td>
<td>Close tidal reef</td>
<td>Djinigabo reef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyapunu</td>
<td>Open sea</td>
<td>Ganatjirri Mundaka</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaku</td>
<td>Fore dunes</td>
<td>Munathaga Dalkgarr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalu</td>
<td>Shoreside water</td>
<td>Ganatjirri Dha:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maypal</td>
<td>All tidal reef</td>
<td>Maranil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djarrak gaku</td>
<td>Fore dunes</td>
<td>Munathaga Dalkgarr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrakan</td>
<td>Freshwater r swamp</td>
<td>Gulunway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutjiji gaku</td>
<td>Freshwater r swamp</td>
<td>Gulunway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrakan</td>
<td>Freshwater r swamp</td>
<td>Gulunway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratjuk</td>
<td>Tidal reef</td>
<td>Yarrapanya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marandjalk</td>
<td>Shoreside water</td>
<td>Ganatjirri Dha:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrugu</td>
<td>Shoreside water</td>
<td>Ganatjirri Dha:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine out of 12 predictable seasonal resources in the Murrunga calendar are derived from marine ecological zones. These data support my observation that a large percentage of protein in the diet comes from the sea. For example, Table 20 shows that in the season of Ba:rramirr (December/January), traditionally the hungry time, few seasonal vegetables are available, but many significant marine-based proteins are available.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

As mentioned, an intricate knowledge of the capricious wind and its directions and changes are a key part of the seasonal ensemble of island intuitions about the weather. The wind is a crucial factor in sea voyaging and its unpredictability and sometimes fatal ferocity are legendary (see Dundirr’s storm, Chapter four). Numerous rituals performed by Yan-nhaŋu people and associated with the sea are symbolic of Yan-nhaŋu attachment to their sea country. So too, are practices like seasonal voyages to Gununba (Northwest Crocodile Reef), some 80 km from the mainland coast, to harpoon marine turtles for feasts. These behaviours, linked to marine resource economy, presuppose a system of nautical local knowledge, and a system of classification of marine ecosystems. The categorising of saltwater space is dependent on the attributes of such bodies of water, and named with regard to the overarching system of ancestral reference.

Customary ecological categories

The way people classify their environment has profound implications for how they use it. The Yan-nhaŋu have developed a sophisticated conceptual picture of ecological categories within the varied marine environments they inhabit. Frequent ocean voyaging between islands in order to obtain marine resources requires a detailed and specific knowledge of the sea space and associated ecological categories.

Some ecological catagories are based on the sounds that the sea makes as people often say the ‘sea speaks Yan-nhaŋu’. Bodies of moving sea water and recognisable currents are named, significantly these names refer to the particular characteristics of these bodies, and/or the ritual characteristics of the sites and bodies of saltwater. The non-secret names of bodies of water often relate to the sounds that these waters produce and/or use anatomical referents characteristic of Yolŋu and Burarra schemes of metaphorical naming (see also Keen 1994: 37; Bagshaw 1998: 159). The sea is revered and many superstitions are connected with it. It is customary, for example, to communicate your relationship and intentions to the sea whenever you travel on it. The safety and productivity of the journey is thought to be ensured by filling the mouth with saltwater and spitting or spurting out an incantation (gwikthana), reciting your relationship (gurrutu) to the sea and intentions (mali), and so harmonising relations with the sea spirits.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

The two largest bodies of salt water are referred to as Dhuwa and Yirritja waters, and it is these two bodies of water that separate the inner and outer islands. Figure 6 presents a transection of saltwater and island ecosystems following an arbitrary line starting in the outer islands and finishing in the Yirritja waters of the inner Crocodile Islands.

Figure 6 Yan-nhaŋu marine ecological categories

![Diagram of marine ecological zones]

This figure depicts a transection of the sea and islands from the far side of the island Djutu or Brulbrul (North east Crocodile Island), and across Murrunga to the other side into the Yirritja saltwater ganatjirri dhulway. The religious significance of bodies of saltwater has here been de-emphasised to highlight the Yan-nhaŋu ecological
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

categories of more practical significance to ocean voyaging and hunting. Despite an inevitable simplification of multifaceted local knowledge of the sea and its categories, it is impossible to completely separate the complex of mundane and religious elements in regard to the naming of sea space.

Each body of water has its own behaviour, its rom. The turtle hunters and their crews must become familiar with the rom of the sea. For example, in Figure 6 above, ecological zone number one is named ganatjirri mundaka, and is conceived of as the far ocean, that part of the ocean that makes the sound described as the background sound of life on the islands, the named rumbling in the distance, the sound of the sea speaking (ganatjirri djingamurriyun). All are said to be warned by this sound and not to approach this part of the sea for its reputation as dangerous (madakarritj). However, ganatjirri gulun, the middle or 'tummy' of the ocean tide and the sound of its movements (yarrk'yarrrthun) is known for its characteristic generosity. The near-shore ocean is dha:, or the mouth, which spits out the sounds yatjana or guykthana, and can be changeable. In traversing these parts of the ocean while hunting for turtle, dugong or shark, people must continually talk rriya wa:ya to the spirits of the sea Maramba and Dhulway, to ensure against mishap and enhance success (see also Bagshaw 1998: 159). Resources that can be obtained in Yan-nhanju ecological zones in the sea and islands are presented in Table 21.
### Table 21 Marine ecological zones and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological zone</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Example species</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>manatjirri mundaka</td>
<td>turtles</td>
<td>Chelonia midas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ganajirri gulun</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Caranx melopygus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ganajirri dha</td>
<td>sharks</td>
<td>Carcharhinus spallazani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>munubili</td>
<td>pelagic</td>
<td>Sphyraena barracuda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>djewul</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Mugil cephalus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>dhuŋapal maranil</td>
<td>rays</td>
<td>Amphotistius kuhlii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>wiŋŋul</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Melo uniculatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ḷaŋŋaŋabo</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Asaphis deflorata*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>djinigabo</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Malleus albus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>gadarra</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Nerita polita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>batpa</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Latona cuneata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>runu gulkarruŋu</td>
<td>seagull eggs</td>
<td>Slerna dougalii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>ganajirri burrraŋa</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Choerodon cyanodus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>munathaya gabalarraŋu</td>
<td>bivalves</td>
<td>Gafarium tumidum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>munathaya daŋŋyarr</td>
<td>eggs</td>
<td>Chelonia depressa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>wadaŋga</td>
<td>eggs</td>
<td>Dendrocygna arcuata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ḷaŋjaŋa</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Scylla serrata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>larraŋha</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Nerita lineata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>djidum</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Anadara granosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>muŋumungun</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Telescopium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>nyndjaŋa</td>
<td>shellfish</td>
<td>Volegaliawardiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>ynika</td>
<td>grasses</td>
<td>Cyperus conicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>baŋŋarr</td>
<td>grasses</td>
<td>Heteropogon contortus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>gulun</td>
<td>eggs, roots</td>
<td>Dendrocygna arcuata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>retja</td>
<td>fruits, roots</td>
<td>Vigna radiata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>ditji</td>
<td>fruits, roots</td>
<td>Caeruligo estfolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>wagawu</td>
<td>grasses</td>
<td>Spinefex hirsutis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>djirrimol</td>
<td>rocks</td>
<td>Lateritic rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>barrala</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Amphotistius kuhlii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>gap̣daŋ .gnu.</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Caranx melpygus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>galkiny̱yamaŋa</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Sphyraena barracuda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>ganajirri wirripaŋhapa</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>Apogon cookii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table demonstrates the high level of specifically marine ecological zones in the Yan-nhaŋu conception of their sea country. These segments of saltwater country have many names.

Other categories of sea space are named largely on the basis of their characteristics; the seasonal coral spawn (munubili) is one example. This coral spawn causes pelagic fish ‘surface dwellers’ (garnjiyabo), to become easy to spear as it is said they become drunk on the strong and fishy aroma of the coral spawn. The djewul, seaweed, is a place for fishing with both spear and line. Also, the special seaweed named rawu (a
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Gamalanga *madayin* can be used to create a fish fence for herding fish into easy spearing range. Children, shown how to do this by older people, use it themselves to catch fish when playing by the sea on the flat rocks (*maranil*). Rocks (*dhunjupal*) or the big name *maranil*, given to the flat reef environment surrounding the outer Crocodile Islands, provides areas of abundant marine life. The *maranil* is divided into three parts, corresponding to three degrees of distance from the shore: most distant outside (*wiyangul*), middle (*yaangabu*), and inside reefs (*djinigabo*). These areas are divided into corals (*gaadarru*) and sandbars (*batpu*) that house the four fish classes of the sea. On the island Gurriba the *maranil* takes you a kilometre out to the sea when the tide is low at the site called Gadarra ga ńorra (G 1) where octopus are plentiful. Surface-dwelling fish (*garangiyabo*) are not generally caught in fish traps on the island except for mullet, but bottom dwellers (*goybo*) and rock dwellers (*duunjupalbu*) are common in the fish traps of Murrunga Island (see Table 22).

An ecological system unique in this region is *runu gulkanuru* (small island). The island of Djutu or Brulbrul (see Appendix eight) is one of only three tiny coral cays in the Northern Territory where grow in some number a tree variety found nowhere else. On this island (created by the Djaŋ'kawu during their mythological travel toward the sunset) is the Solomon Island cabbage tree (*guluvurru* or *lumbi lumbi, Pisonia grandis*). The edible leaves and water storing capacity of this tree add to its significance, as it is considered an important ancestral endowment, especially because of its meaning as an ancestral canoe. This island is also the home of thousands of *gitgit* terns (*Sterna albifrons*). Between Djutu (Brul-brul) and Murrunga is the water called *ganatjirr burraňa*, meaning middle water, which is known for its abundant turtle. Arising from these middle waters are the sand bars and beaches of *munathaŋa gabalarrangkunj* where crabs and shellfish are collected. In close proximity to the island of Watjpirppir (see Appendix 8 Map 36) is the particularly dangerous body of unpredictable water called *Nanjununwa*. This water is said to be influenced by the Yirritja turtle *waŋar Garun* or loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and is avoided at all costs by turtle hunters and travellers because of its dangers.

In the dry sand, *munuthaŋa dhalkgarr*, turtle and bird eggs are found. Coastal hills, *wadangga*, make perfect sites for people to sit up in the shade of trees watching over the sea while waiting for the tides to fill the fish traps and gravid turtles to return to the beach. Freshwater creeks, *mayanga*, run into mangroves, *jartha*, and the associated
mud zone, *djudum*, that is the home of mud crabs and crocodiles. Samphires, *muqun-muqun*, populated by low salt-tolerant genera such as *Atriplex* and *Arthrochenaenas*, border the salt flats, *nydjiya*, and are home to various gastropods, most of which make an easy meal. *Muqun-muqun* and the *nydjiya* are in turn bordered by grasslands, *yinika*, that merge into freshwater paperbark stands, *badarr*, and this ecozone marks the freshwater edge of the salt country.

The paperbark stands and swamp country associated with them are commonly known as *gulun*, also meaning stomach, tummy, or middle. Where the fresh water meets and mixes with the sea water is *gamak ganu gulkmiyamana*. The environmental blending found here forms the basis for the widely used Yolŋu metaphor *ganna*, describing sameness and difference, and this envionment is also a breeding area for many species. Linked to the rushing intertidal waters of *galinydjil* are the deeper swirling currents of *ganatjirr wirripanhaba* where pelagic fish can be found hunting. The relationship of these different but linked ecological categories to each other, and to the resources they contain, is just a small part of a more complex understanding of the environment.

On a practical level, knowledge of ecological categories is used to map refer to, and locate in dialogue the different kinds of resources available over time in the planning of hunting excursions. One of the most important kinds of resource in the daily round is shellfish. The Yan-nhaŋu mental map encodes a large number of sites that are ecologically specific and contain kinds of shellfish. In contrast to Jones’ (1980) proposition, that all Yolŋu hunting exists on a continuum of littoral to savannah types, the Yan-nhaŋu recognise the importance of shellfish of the sea. Meehan (1975, 1977) has documented in detail the patterns of consumption of some 30 species of shellfish. She writes that the significance of shellfish, as described in her work with the culturally close Anbarra, comes from the continuity and availability of these dependable resources. This dependability derives from an intimate understanding of where these shellfish live, and when they might be collected.

The giant shell middens of Garrki (M 8) at Milingimbi are evidence of how significant shellfish have been in times past in the Crocodile Islands. Because of the large and diverse ecosystems in the islands the Yan-nhaŋu map contains some 70 types of shellfish available for seasonal exploitation throughout the year. They are divided into two major categories; those associated with the salt water and open sea, and those associated with estuarine waters. As mentioned in Chapter four, Dundirr’s 1932 storm
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

wiped out all 22 varieties of estuarine shellfish on Murrunga Island. Nevertheless, this catastrophe did not affect shellfish species associated with the inner Crocodile Islands. Today at Murrunga shellfishing is still an everyday practice, linked to fishing by line, trap and spear, and despite the lack of estuarine species nary a day goes by that shellfish (maypal) is not in the bag.

Local knowledge about shellfish collection is similar to, but different from that described for the Anbarra (Gidjingali) by Meehan (1977). Shellfish provide up to one third of the daily protein requirements of the Murrunga population at various times of the year. What is of further significance is the way that shellfish collection is classified and governed by categories of marine and estuarine environment shown in Table 22.

Table 22 Ecological categories relating to marine and estuarine zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological category</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  distant reefs</td>
<td>wryangulbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  mid distance reefs</td>
<td>ḥangabu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  close reefs</td>
<td>djinagaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  sand and beach</td>
<td>munathabu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  sandbars</td>
<td>barralabu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  deep mud</td>
<td>djudumbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  semi tidal mud</td>
<td>mun-mun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  mangroves</td>
<td>larritha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  samphites</td>
<td>ninydiya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Yan-nhaŋu system of classifying these environmental zones into nine ecological categories, or ecozones, provides a shorthand for types of shellfish in conversations about shellfishing. All nine ecozones contain shellfish, and are commonly referred to in the Crocodile Islands by their Yan-nhaŋu names. The ecozones are numbered as per Table 22 to show how Yan-nhaŋu refer to or classify types of shellfish by referencing ecological categories in the next Table 23. In discussions, for example, people will say 'shellfish from the mud' (maypal djudumbu), or 'from the sand' (munathabu), or ‘from the sandbar’ (barralabu).
### Table 23 Nine ecological categories of shellfish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nanhu</th>
<th>Lineatus</th>
<th>Ecological category (see Table 16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shell fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turbo cinereus, petholatus, Sabinella</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asaphis deflorata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arca coralllica, curciata, multilloso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cardita semioberculata, Stavelia horrida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Piniculaa chemnitzii, maxima, sugillate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gafarium tumidum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nerita polita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nerita linearis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maleus albus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metapeneaus bennettae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collisellina parposis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syrinx arn anus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trochus obeliscus, maculatus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latona cuneata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charybdis cruciata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physopolax kuraidai, Acanthopleura</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Litorina scabra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xanthomelon pachystylum, janellel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thias kieni, trignon, Macinella exhinate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turritella serebra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acanthopleura spinosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placuna, Placula placentas*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crassostrea amana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pinna menkei</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tridona squamosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neverita didinas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scylla serrata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melo umbilicatus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regozara flavia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tapas, Paphia hiantina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gari togata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gelonia coxans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tellina linguafelis*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modiolis microperpus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anadara granosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modiolis proslivis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telescopium telescopium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terebralia pelustris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cassidula angulifera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modiolis cf vagina suaviter, proslivis*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uca spp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volegatea wardiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monodonta labio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monodolius microperpus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economically, one of the most important ecological categories included in Table 23 is the mangrove forests (lardha category 8 in Table 22) of the inner islands, especially for the people living on Rapuma and Milingimbi islands. People on these islands can be found in the lardha every day, hunting shellfish, fish and mud crabs. These species still provide an important supporting role in the diet, evidenced by the ubiquitous shellfish, shell and bone scatters, wiliirr, deposited around the islands.

Shellfish detritus (wiliirr) is common on the beaches and sand dunes of the islands. Shellfish detritus and associated camp fires provide abundant evidence of day camps, and smaller lunchtime camps, marking highly visible exploitation of shellfish stocks over time that are very much an ongoing part of contemporary life in the Crocodile Islands. Permanent camps, on the other hand, tell the story of a more mobile way of life linked to subsistence behaviours preceding the sedentary lifestyle associated with the mission. Analysis of these permanent camps demonstrates an extraordinarily high level of ecological integration between shellfishing sites, freshwater wells, major fishing areas and tidal fish traps. On the homelands the collection of shellfish is a continuing daily task.

The intergenerational transmission of information about types of environments and the kinds of resources that can be found there are a valuable part of island life. This information is learned largely through the daily participation in activities shaped by seasons, and the laws that regulate ownership and access. For children this kind of experience of the islands has a great continuity with the past. Fish are still the largest part of the diet but the method of catching them has changed over time. Nowadays, fishing lines and spears produce the bulk of the catch, but occasionally the fish traps will be set.

Time, tides and fish trap technology

Deploying tidal fish traps provides a practical demonstration of the harmonious synchronisation of a suite of strategies and natural resources in tune with time and tides. The practices of fish trap fishing hark back to an era when subsistence activity had the immediacy of a survival skill. The configuration of camping sites in close proximity to ecological zones rich with resources is the outcome of the shaping of the environment by people driven by necessity. Similarly the suite of technologies and practices for accessing marine-based resources are the result of millennia of trial and
error. Table 22 shows nine categories of ecological type of marine origin. Correspondingly, local knowledge exhibits techniques, strategies and technologies designed around an emblematic engagement with the marine environment.

In general, Yan-nhaŋu people remain focused on the sea as a provider of protein, and fish and fishing remain a key resource. At the outstation of Murrungga fish provide half of the 80 per cent of the marine based protein in their diet for most of the year. However, fish have seasonal and tidal patterns, and can be notoriously difficult to catch at different times of the year. Further, all these fish have rom, customs, behaviours and agency that are believed to be characteristic of their ancestral origins, and that explain why, for example, so many different types of fish live in different types of environments (see Table 25). An extraordinary range of techniques and clever (gilipa) strategies are brought to bear on the problem of capturing fish, including the invention of a great number of differently designed and purposefully executed traps.

An intimate knowledge of fish behaviours is demonstrated in the ingenuity of configuration and synchronisation of physical and temporal dimensions in the deployment of fish traps. Nevertheless, despite their practical significance, they are religious icons as much as they are key tools of fish collection. Each fish trap is named and associated with the wayarr attributed with its construction. For those types made on the spot, the techniques of production are the bequest of mythological beings. Not only is each one named, many of the larger, permanent ones have site-specific incantations associated with their use and wayarr provenance. Thomson (1937) refers to ancestral fish trap rites at Murrunga in his 1937 fieldnotes. The mythology of their creation, their naming and the rituals of their use continue to be of immense importance to the people of the islands (see Chapter four). He notes the many specialised types of fishing in the region including the Cape Stewart mainland and the important role of ancestral ghosts linked to this style of fishing (Thomson 2003). The articulation of rituals linked to fish traps and their invisible attributes are timed as one would expect with remarkable sensitivity for the timing of tidal movements, movements that are said to be an indication of the actions of the wayarr.

103 Totemic increases rites recorded by Thomson at Murrunga include the fish trap Maluwa Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36)(see Plate 13). He described Yilkari, (Dec Liygalalawumirr man, Kalbanuk, Birritjama senior man for Mirramina in 1937) telling him that the first lolo (fish trap) was made by ‘Djiwada, Dor’narra, Tarri’ illi’illi’ (Thomson File No. 10 1937). He describes that the man first made an image of the fish trap in the sand on the adjacent gravel plateau and then he made a real one in the water. This fish trap provided many fish. This story is still told for this place at Murrunga.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Time on the islands is measured without clock or calendar. Yearly time is calculated with reference to the seasons and the winds; month by the moon; and daily time is calculated by the movement of celestial bodies through the sky. Yan-nhaŋu do not consider the earth to spin, but see the sun and stars making their way through the sky from morning till night. When the sun goes below the horizon it turns into a king fish and swims back to the other side of the sea, and the morning star becomes a vibrant blue star fish. The Yan-nhaŋu conception of time is measured in parts that correspond closely to those for Yolŋu at Galiwin'ku described by Rudder (1993: 247-9) (see Table 24).

Table 24 Island time and the celestial bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approx Hrs</th>
<th>Celestial phenomena</th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.00 am</td>
<td>Sun coming up following overnight</td>
<td>Guku girriyana banjubal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 am</td>
<td>Sun hail upon morning</td>
<td>Munubi gabiyana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Sun sets underneath</td>
<td>Riya walirrway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00 pm</td>
<td>Sun haloway down the sky till dusk</td>
<td>Walirr rirrirruru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00 pm</td>
<td>Evening star the orange colour of</td>
<td>Wanbali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00 pm</td>
<td>Evening star emerges from the</td>
<td>Munuguba banumbirr girriyana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 pm</td>
<td>Evening star below the horizon</td>
<td>Dhampthun munuguba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Milky Way in the middle of the</td>
<td>Guyulan mitji gulun riway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 am</td>
<td>Milky Way decline</td>
<td>Djeda munuguba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00 am</td>
<td>Morning Star in decline</td>
<td>Banumbirr dhupthana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Rudder (1993).

These divisions of time may be further specified by adding suffixes equivalent to the European expressions ‘past’, as in ‘past the hour’ (banjubal), or ‘to’ (garrana). For the Yan-nhaŋu this past is used as in the time when the evening star emerges from the horizon, Munuguba banumbirr girriyana banjubal.104 Although clearly the Yan-nhaŋu do not calculate time in the idiom of hours; time and the elements of tides are fundamental to the employment of fish traps.

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104 The everyday pace of life for people on the islands means that time is not measured by parts of the hour, although having said this a younger generation is being schooled to the rhythm of modern times, and visiting Europeans bring clocks and a sense of the modern operational tempo with them.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

As the tides are controlled to the greatest extent by the movement of the moon, so are fish behaviours shaped by the celestial body known as *jalindi*. Close attention is paid to the association of the moon with tidal movements. Tidal intensity, low lows and high highs are governed by the full moon and new moon; traps are located and configured to take full advantage of many different tidal phases. In the Crocodile Islands the tide is always at its peak when the moon is one hour above the sea in the east (*dhawathun*) in the morning time, or 15 degrees past the horizon, then it begins returning (*yurruthirr*). It peaks again 12.5 hours later, 15 degrees below the horizon in the west (*warnba*) in the evening (*dhampthana*). This tide receding (*ranjithirr*) becomes low at one hour past moon zenith, and again 15 degrees past nadir, returning later each day (44 minutes). Consequently, the time of fishing is a little later each day in a cycle that returns each month.

The timing of fish trap preparation is also influenced by the fact that one of the two daily low tides is lower than the other. For six months from roughly October (*dhuludur*)' through March (*ba:rramirr*) the lower of these two tides occurs at night. From roughly April though to September this low low tide occurs during the day, consistent with the timing of foraging on the reef. The difference in height between a low tide and a high tide on a particular day is around one metre on average. Fish traps are customarily deployed in the daylight hours. When not in use they are decommissioned so they don’t catch fish accidentally. Fish trap deployment requires prediction of the daily and seasonal rhythms of fish behaviours as well as timing of the tides, and people employ a system of fish classification into categories based on fish behaviours elaborated above.

Fish traps fall into two larger categories linked to the moiety of the bodies of salt water from which the tide comes. The named *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* fish traps have distinct religious provenance. Those on the inner islands like Milingimbi catch fish from the *Yirritja* water, *Ganatjirri Dhulway*, and have a distinctive style owned by *Yirritja* Yan-nhañu people. As discussed earlier, the marine environments of the outer Crocodile Islands are quite different from those of the inner group. The fish traps of the outer islands are surrounded by *Dhuwa* salt water named *Ganatjirri Maramba* and have seen the development of a particular suite of specially named styles of stone and fibre fish trap. The fish traps of the *Yirritja Ganatjirri Dhulway* are no longer made but I have included them because of their consequence to this description of Yan-nhañu fish trap
technology. These marine technologies are linked by a sophisticated syncopation with surrounding environmental characteristics in both the outer and inner islands.

From an operative perspective these fish traps are located in accordance with the concrete and interconnecting demands of tide, materials, and fish types, near shore current, proximal ecological categories, freshwater, shade, food trees, camp sites, breeze-ways, look outs and the like. For example, the style of fish wall called *djinabu* made at Milingimbi, and no longer in use, was prepared extensively on the mudflats. Its walls were made of grass and mud, of which an abundant supply was to be found on the mud flats around the inner islands. *Djinabu* was designed to catch barramundi and other fish that poured onto the mudflats in the new moon and full moon floods of the early and late wet season.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Mud fish trap construction at Gurruwa at Milingimbi djinabu lolo

Plate 9 Gurruwa (M 59)*

The djinabu lolo here pictured at Gurruwa (M 59) was specifically created to catch the barramundi and smaller fish that came up onto the mud flats (nydjiya) each year at the king tides to feed, and at other times to breed. At three other sites at Milingimbi these djinabu lolo were made during the king tides of Rarrandarr (August and September), on the full and new moon times, and later in the season of Ba:rra'mirr (January to February) full moon and new moon periods. On the days before the tides people would go to the nydjiya at Bulmatjirra (M 40), Guđu ḏutji (M 42) and Gulanbaj (M 15) and set camp (see Appendixes six and seven).

105 These photos of djinabu lolo were taken by Webb, circa 1930s, at the Yan-nhaŋu Walamanu site Gunjinyŋa (M 59) (see Appendix six).
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Mud fish trap at Gurruwa at Milingimbi djinabu lolo No. 2

Plate 10 Gurruwa (M 59)*

This djinabu at Gurruwa (M 59) is built just behind the foredunes on the beach at Dham dham (M 61) at Milingimbi following the same design as others of this name. It is used to entrap fish that swim over the mudflats at the same king tides as other sites around Milingimbi, and two nydjiya sites on Rapuma at Malagudjina (R 24) and Malimirriqala (R 23). These are a type of Yirritja fish trap specific to the inner Crocodile Islands, and quite distinct from those of the distant outer islands.

Fish traps of Murrunga Island

Local knowledge about the seasons, winds, moon and tides and their effect on fish behaviour is crucial to the design, timing and use of traps. The development of fish trap technologies and their intelligent deployment among the many other demands of subsistence life are the product of ages of trial and error. Generations of people living
on the islands have contributed to the geographical positioning of fish traps in proximity to other resources necessary for life on the islands. The configuration of landscapes is shaped by a suite of practical human modifications to the environment. The proximity of fruit and shade trees and freshwater wells to permanent camping sites is clear. Map 10 shows the position of fish traps on the following plates and how these fish traps are located with regard to freshwater and permanent camp sites.

Map 10 Murrunga stone fish traps

Clearly, time and tide are critical to the deployment of fish traps, but many other spiritual and physical considerations converge in the deployment of this fishing technology. In terms of a broader categorisation two major types of Dhuwa fish traps are used on the outer Crocodile Islands (including Rapuma, Murrunga and Gurriba Islands). These are the lolo munathaya and lolo maranilha, designed to enclose particular species of fish. I draw attention to the fish traps Garlayamirrigulı Ma:luwa (Mu 36), and Gagatha (Mu 45) on the above map (Map 10). These photographs, taken by Thomson (1937) show Dhuwa fish traps of the type commonly called nanguwa lolo maranilha that are still in use today. Fifteen of the 27 fish traps at Murrunga are the
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

Dhuwa type nanduwa lolo maranilŋa (lit: fence on the reef surface), making it the most numerous of all the fish traps on the outer islands.

The stone fish trap or weir, nanduwa lolo maranilŋa, is made of a line of stones that prevent fish swimming back to the open water on the receding tide. The rock wall is made more effective by the addition of plant materials of a number of kinds depending on location. Rock walls may be topped with vines, such as the beach ipomoea rogu (Ipomoea tuba), or the striking orange filaments of the fibrous coastal mistletoe, yarr’yarrngani (Cassytha filiformis). To improve impenetrability, more elaborate constructions include fish traps topped with mats woven from mewana (Cyperus conicus), or ranya (Pandanus spiralis), like the one pictured below.
Plate 11 Gadatha (Mu 45)#

Plate 11 shows the fish trap at Gadatha (Mu 45) looking south towards Rapuma and Milingimbi Islands and the mainland. The more distant man is the Malarra man Burrundjiŋu, who is the senior manager (djungaya) of this, his mother’s place, at the Yirritja site Gadatha (Mu 45)(see also story beginning Chapter two). The closer man is the Wulbukarra man Baŋapat, from Howard Island, who stands in the maerri (MM) relation to the site. A view looking back to the north shows something of the flat terrain of the area.
Plate 12 Gađatha (Mu 45)\#

This picture is viewed by looking back to the north-northeast toward Garlayamirringuli Ma:luwa (Mu 36) (just out of frame to the left) and the fish trap at Burpula (Mu 41), visible as an isolated and indistinct patch of rocks on the beach to the left middle distance (see Map 10).

Nowadays, people may use nylon fishing nets discarded by trawlers to catch fish (see Ma:luwa Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36) fish trap plate 13 next page). Efficiency may be improved with the addition of a separate fish-holding enclosure at the lowest point in the shape of a large basket, made of fibre. Named \textit{angutchatjia} or \textit{dhaku}, this basket shape is also a significant religious icon. Another technique to increase the effectiveness is the addition of stupefactants. Such fish poisons include the crushed bodies of sea slugs – female holothurians called \textit{nyon} (distinguished from males by black spots) – that when mixed into the water cause fish to become intoxicated and disorientated, floating at the surface. Another important stupefactant available on the...
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

islands is the plant poison *muyungu* (*Tephrosia polzyga*), again crushed and mixed into the water. Both these poisons cause the fish to become dizzy, yet remain edible. However, one will invariably feel drowsy after eating fish procured in this manner.

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Plate 13 *Ma:luwa Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36) fish trap 1999*

Fish traps must be refurbished while the tide is out (*bangany*). First the rock wall is prepared: young women and children collect shellfish, and boys fish by spear on the reef flat (*maranil* – middle distance in above Plate 13); more senior people set up the fencing and netting parts of the trap. At this time the most senior persons remove to a secret site associated with the trap making the obligatory incantations *gayanaway* (see Chapter four). Thomson (1937) records the following account of the incantation (*gayanaway*) for the *Ma:luwa Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36)* fish trap pictured above. Although the incantation employed today is recited in Yan-nhaçu, the version recorded by Thomson was spoken by the Liyagalawumirr (Djinan) man Yilkari (Thomson’s

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106 Paleoarchaeologist R. Howlet surveys the use of discarded fishing trawler nets in this recombination of materials at the *Ma:luwa Garlayamirringuli (Mu 36)* fish trap in 1999. A number of other significant fish trap sites are visible in the distance.
informant at Murrunga) in a Dhuwal dialect. Despite language difference the intention is the same.


Translation: the Malarra person asks the named wagarr of the fish trap to make many the number of fish in the trap so that ‘I may eat my fill’.

Having made the incantation Gatpiyun, the elder (biriynarayu bubaitjway) and others retire to the permanent campsites as the tide comes in, to eat shellfish while they wait. At this time, as in the past, the sea is watched for the sparkle of a distant bow wave, or the return of gravid female turtles.

As previously mentioned fish trap deployment requires the clever prediction of the daily and seasonal rhythms of fish behaviours as well as timing of the tides. Yan-nhaŋu people employ a system of fish classifications grouping fish based on fish behaviours (Table 25). The ecological niche filled by fish of different types is significant to the deployment of all kinds of entrapment including fishing, spearing, fishing with lines, and fish traps as described above. Different fish behaviours are recognised by other Yolŋu at Milingimbi (see also Davis 1982). Based on Yan-nhaŋu observations many fish move from deep water rocks (wiyŋaŋul) up the reef slope and onto the reef flat (marani) to feed as the tide rises, while others come after the tide is full. Others, mainly bottom feeders, move from channels or depressions from the inside reef (ŋanganabo) onto the reef flat and reef pools (maranil) on a rising tide.
Table 25 Fish classes by ecological zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Habitat</th>
<th>Yan-nhana classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>fish that live near the surface</td>
<td>garŋgiyabu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>fish that live near the bottom</td>
<td>ɲoybu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>fish of the rocks and reefs</td>
<td>dhuŋupalbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>fish that live in the rivers</td>
<td>mayaŋbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>fish that live in freshwater</td>
<td>rirrikulbu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Davis (1981)

Fish that live on the surface are clearly more available for spearing than those that live on the bottom in deep water. Inshore bottom feeders are often caught in fish traps.

Fish characteristically caught in maranilha traps are schooling fish of the types that feed on the low tide. The fish trap Ma:luwa Garlayamirriŋguli (Mu 36) pictured above (Plate 13) is named after and designed specifically to catch garlaya, (Gnathanodon speciosus, Cranax sp.), but many other species with similar behaviours are caught; for instance, the ubiquitous mullet garkuwi (Valamugil seheli), wakun (Mugil cephalus, Valamugil georgii) and meyaŋa (Carangoides gymnostethus, C. chrysocephus). After these fish are trapped they are put into bags and taken to the shade for immediate cooking at the permanent camp site. Another way of collecting enclosed fish is to spear them; however, this style is more properly associated with lolo munathaŋa traps (lit: fence on the sand), due to the particular fish species that they enclose, and because these fish traps are named after the fact that they have a sandy floor.

Lolo munathaŋa are found predominantly on the sheltered side of Murringa Island facing towards Rapuma and the inner Crocodile Islands. Some of the long white beaches of the outer islands have low-lying lolo of varying depths that reach out into the lowest tide zones to trap the cartilaginous fish of many species favoured at different times of the year. Most lolo munathaŋa exhibit a deliberate corner calculated to hide a hunter’s presence. This corner provides a break in the fish’s line of sight thus enabling the hunter to secure the advantage of closeness for spearing. Cartilaginous fish species are predominantly taken in this kind of trap.
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

The flowering of the *balgur* tree (*Brachychiton paradoxus*) signifies that it is time for hunting sharks and rays. Cartilaginous fish, particularly young sharks (*burugu*) and sting rays (*marrandjalk*), are caught in the first weeks in August between Darratharramirr and Rarrandharr. These sharks, and especially the black tip reef shark (*Carcharhinus spallanzani*), become abundant in the season of baby sharks (*burruwyay*), for a few weeks in August. This time of the year is heralded by the gentle northeast wind (*lirra nanka*), bringing a number of species into the fish traps; such as for example, *mithirri* (*Gymnura australis*), eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari*), *gidiwak* (*Taeniura lymna*), blue-spotted ray *bambi* (*Dasyatis fluviorum*), *bandurrung* (shovel nose ray, *Dasyatis sephen*) and *barrangunha* (*Urolophus* sp.) (see also Davis 1982: 61–62). Fish traps are an effective way to provide a site from which to spear fish, and in general return ample resources for minimum energy outlay, notwithstanding the initial effort of construction and maintenance.

Some of the tidal sand plains like the one at Murruminya (Mu 5) have stone walled fish traps that stretch for 200 metres. The availability of suitable rock seems to have had some bearing on the choice of site, yet some fish traps are considerable distances from rock-bearing sites. Other factors such as wind direction, tide, season and fish variety have significant bearing on trap design. Ancestral precedent continues to affect rights to employ particular technologies and exchanges with the invisible actors of the environment are believed to affect the quantity and species of fish available. No consideration of interaction with the environment is complete without genuflection to the ancestors, audible in the sounds of the sea everywhere on the Crocodile Islands.

The two large bodies of *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* salt water separate inner and outer islands, and these bodies of water are known as *wayarr*. These powerful saltwater *wayarr* holding the potential spark of Yan-nhaqu life essence reflect the fundamental spiritual links that permeate life by the sea (see Chapter four). Spiritual understandings underpin and intersect with the logics of categorisation of environments, shellfish, fish classes, times and tides, and ways of talking about life on the islands. The dependency of people on the sea is demonstrated by the overwhelming percentage of dietary protein that is derived from nine ecological categories of a dozen with a marine origin. The harmonisation of physical and temporal dimensions of island life are visible in the modification of land and seascapes, signifying the complex interconnectivity of culture and ecology. Local knowledge, diet, mobility, technology and an underlying marine
Chapter Six: Symbols, practice, time and tide

mythology are practices symbolic of continuing strong spiritual and physical links to the sea emblematic of a Yan-nhaŋu marine identity.

Conclusion

The sea is a necessary condition for continued Yan-nhaŋu existence. Evidence of this is seen in the fish traps of Murrunga, signifying an ancient and profound body of knowledge, symbols and practices enacted by Yan-nhaŋu people in response to the ecological phenomena by which they are surrounded. Yan-nhaŋu local knowledge reflects the reciprocal influence of culture and society on environment. Humans acting on their physical space in a uniquely conscious way construct the meanings of their interaction with their environment. The evidence of this adaptation is substantial in law, myth, practices and materials. The ecological, economic and social relations of distribution, exchange, and of consumption of marine resources provide the foundation and wherewithal to sustain the biological necessities of human life. The provision of goods and services produced and exchanged sustain the demographic stability of sociopolitical groups in place and time. At Murrunga children continue to gather shellfish and turtle eggs and I elaborate on their social relations and patterns of exchange in the next chapter. More importantly the intergenerational transmission of this site-based knowledge remains relevant to the everyday.

The timing of inter-island travel, crucial to the access to marine resources, creates patterns of movement and habitation governed by the seasons. Today, residence on the outer islands is supported by the strategic arrangement of water wells, permanent camps, fish traps, shade trees, breezy hill top viewing platforms and close spatial proximity to other types of resources in the marine and terrestrial environments. Tacit assumptions about the logics of composition and harmonisation of these temporal and material dimensions of the environment is the very lifeblood of Yan-nhaŋu local knowledge, expressed in a characteristic preferences for seafood, suites of technologies, and songs, incantations and mythology related to the sea. These abstract and material effects of culture which are symbolic markers implicated and signified in the construction and recognition of similarity and difference may potentially be drawn from in the negotiation of specific and meaningful ‘similarities and differences’ of social identity linked to the sea. Signifiers apparent in naming systems, categories of ecological space, technologies, and resources and their intercalation with time and
tides. These are the material and symbolic currents that move and comprise aspects of Yan-nhaŋu marine identity.

Yan-nhaŋu epistemology, created in the image of the sea, is the outcome of millennia of association with the marine environment, the effect of complex cultural re/construction of a human system in reflexive relations with its ecology. Without invoking a simplistic environmental determinism, it is evident that the character of the sea circumscribes the development of mythologies, metaphors, categories, and a language to express them, that altogether give island life a characteristic perspective - a marine view. This view may lead to the conclusion that, because humans shape their ecology and 'interpret' their world through their own categories, people create their own reality. This is not the position being forwarded here; the emphasis here is on the Yan-nhaŋu world view. The Yan-nhaŋu world view links through time the historical and contemporary, symbols and practices of people into a seamless identification with the marine and coastal environments of the islands, evident in ongoing spiritual and physical links to place. Yan-nhaŋu continue to follow the injunctions of the wayarr with the practice of reciprocity through kinship with the sea. The modern appropriation of aluminium dinghies and nylon fishing nets melds with the intergenerational transmission of knowledge of time and tides and becomes part of this continuity. The contemporary imperative of this obligation is manifest in the demand by the Yan-nhaŋu to represent and control their ancestrally endowed marine estates and resources.

In the following chapter I will extend this examination of ownership of the sea to the exchange of turtle resources by coastal Yolŋu groups, an area of increasing interest in current debates about the exploitation of key marine resources, and the focus in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven:

The marine turtle economy

Plate 14 Dha:rububaŋa (R 35)*

A man who goes turtle harpooning usually takes three or four men with him to paddle the canoe. He is considered the leader, but helps with the paddling while looking for turtle. The canoe goes beyond the breakwater out into the open sea. Along the sand beaches a goodly number of these animals can be found swimming in to shore to lay their eggs (Warner 1937: 143).
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

This chapter describes a system of shared relations expressed through key exchanges of turtle meat and eggs. A key aspect of this system of shared relations is based on a collective Yolŋu acknowledgement of Yan-nhartu marine resource ownership. The laws underlying this acknowledgement influence all aspects of the hunting, collecting, cooking and distribution of turtle products in the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay.

I have recorded and analysed the social, seasonal, and material relations of the marine turtle economy. This anlysis reveals the underlying logics of Yan-nhartu connection to the sea and its resources, and most significantly its recognition by kin. The marine turtle economy has a powerful capacity to demonstrate the fundamentally metaphysical relationship underlying Yan-nhartu ownership of thier marine resources and its expression in the articulation of exchange with other Yolŋu. These relations are evident in the acknowledgement by Yolŋu kin of Yan-nhartu spiritual and physical connections to the sea expressed in the exchange of marine turtle resources. I argue that the turtle economy, although small, is a significant part of a wider marine economy at Milingimbi and beyond, and that this economy entails social relations of control and ownership with respect to the use of the marine environment based on underlying themes of spiritual and physical links to the sea. The ownership, control and exchange of resources of the marine estate are issues central to Yan-nhartu and non-Yan-nhartu interactions in the contemporary Milingimbi milieu. In this chapter a detailed examination of the marine turtle economy illustrates the crucial connections between Yan-nhartu people and the sea.

This chapter is organised into three parts. First, after a brief description of methods and relevant literature a comparison of key aspects of turtle hunting (harpooning) and egg harvest is made attending to the ancestral relations entailed in the system of exchanges, kin relations and links to specific marine and island sites. Secondly, in order to show the social and material relations of the marine turtle economy I present data on the seasonal hunting, cooking, and distribution of turtle meat. Thirdly, a description of the material and seasonal relations of the marine turtle egg harvest at Murrungga Island demonstrates continuities in Yan-nhartu relationships with their kin and country in the

Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Crocodile Islands. To begin I will briefly situate the marine turtle economy to provide a context for a more detailed discussion to follow.

Elements of the marine turtle economy

The turtle economy is a small part of the total marine economy. The marine resources economy as a whole produces valued goods and services of a number of kinds entailed in ritual, social and economic exchanges (Peterson and Rigsby 1998: 9; Peterson 2004: 14; Keen 2003). However, because of its multiple significance in the re-production of Yan-nhanju identity, and of the high status accorded to it more broadly in Yolnu society, the turtle economy eloquently illustrates fundamental relationships between people and the sea. The harpooning of turtle is the most esteemed hunting activity for men, and is a vehicle for the accumulation of social capital. The title (djamba-jji) signifies this hunter prestige which affords social value and kudos transferable to ritual contexts, and as such may be influential in the negotiation of conunbrial relations (Altman and Allen 1991: 80).\(^{108}\) The collection of turtle eggs, on the other hand, supports continued residence on the outer islands associated with the intergenerational transmission of local knowledge, lexicon, and the experiences of ancestral sites, in a remnant Yan-nhanju linguistic context. The marine economy produces a scheme of reciprocities as the central structuring factor in relations of circulation and exchange of resources at the heart of social life. These exchanges of turtle resources reflect broader continuities in customs linked to the sea that give advantage to Yan-nhanju resource owners. These advantages remain crucial to sustaining Yan-nhanju identity, estate ownership, and the cultural re-production of Yan-nhanju socio-political groups through time.

A search of the Australian literature on turtle hunting reveals only fragmentary quantitative material on turtle exchange (Nietztschmann 1985; Smith 1988; Bird and Bird 1997; Bradley 1997; Johannes and Macfarlane 1991; Rouja 1998; Barber 2005, cf Chase 1980). In order to explain and demonstrate the fundamental relations of Yan-nhanju to their estates it is necessary to provide detailed quantitative data of the capture, distributions, and material economic relations of turtle hunting. By mapping the material, economic, and the actual practices of turtle resource exchange, onto sites of spiritual significance, an underlying adherence to fundamentally cosmological

\(^{108}\) Bradley similarly refers to the symbolic significance of dugong and turtle hunting in relation to the Yanyuwa construction of 'self identity' expressed in an ideal male persona 'maranja' a 'turtle or dugong hunter of excellence' (Bradley 1997 11)
principles is revealed. Data on turtle capture numbers over four years is deployed to illustrate rights to hunt marine sea turtles on Yan-nhaŋu sea country, in particular the acknowledgment of distributory entitlements of non-Yan-nhaŋu and Yan-nhaŋu hunter groups, in regard to resources derived from Yan-nhaŋu owned marine environment. These data draw attention to the key significance of turtle resources in the Crocodile Islands, and underline the importance of the sea in the daily lives of Yan-nhaŋu people living on their islands.

Turtle hunting in the Crocodile Islands involves strict adherence to traditional practices and laws (*rom*). This *rom* governs the behaviour of Yolŋu and Yan-nhaŋu hunters on the Yan-nhaŋu estate. Adherence to the *rom* surrounding turtle hunting appears more robustly observed here than reported elsewhere in northeast Arnhem Land and abroad, and is perhaps consistent with the high status accorded this activity. (see also Smith 1984, 1987, 1990; Altman 1988; Bliege Bird 1997; Rouja 1998; Barber 2005:65). The celebrated capture of turtle may be fruitfully compared with the less glamorous, but equally important collection and distribution of turtle eggs. Turtle hunting and its articulation with marine resource ownership rights, the claims of hunters and crews, and the demands of kin, produce a complex social and material pattern. Added to this pattern are the interdependent roles and laws relating to the butchering, cooking and distribution of these highly sought after marine resources. It is through the analysis of the harpooning of marine turtle we can see into an integrated system of social, ritual and economic behaviours re/producing relations among groups living at Milingimbi.

Turtle egg harvesting, earlier mentioned, provides cultural and material support to a modified marine-based subsistence lifestyle at Murrunga outstation. The significance of this continued residence on the islands lies in its support for the intergenerational transmission of local knowledge and the lexicon of the Yan-nhaŋu. Here on the islands links with the language of the ancestors and experience of ancestral sites is expressed as ‘following in the footsteps of the ancestors’ (*dhurrukanu garana baynu rumrumthana garayw*). The turtle-egg harvest, as a discrete dimension of the customary marine turtle economy, exhibits different characteristics from turtle hunting, yet both are significant components of a marine turtle economy. The turtle and turtle egg resources originate almost exclusively from Yan-nhaŋu-owned land and sea estates. Ultimately the ownership of these significant marine resources has
implications for the cultural, linguistic, and economic survival of Yan-nhaŋu socio-political groups.

The hunting of free swimming marine turtles is a fundamentally seasonal activity. Quantitative data relating to marine turtle utilisation were obtained over four years, between 1/1/2000 and 1/1/2004. Information was collected on the numbers, species, gender, frequency of hunting and collecting, and the quantity of marine turtles and their eggs collected and exchanged in and around the wider Crocodile Islands area (see Appendix five). Data were gathered in the 40 weeks of the Australian Northern Territory school term each year, and some of the holidays: a total of 160 weeks. On average, I was absent from the islands for 4-5 weeks in December - January and 3-4 weeks in June - July. Additionally, I was not present on the Crocodile Islands for one week in April, and one week in August of each of the four years of the fieldwork. Whilst absent, I kept in contact with people and events by phone.

A brief comparison of the differences between egg collecting and turtle hunting demonstrates some key attributes of the harvest of eggs and the harvest of turtles. Table 26 shows some key differences between the two aspects of this economy.

**Table 26 Comparison of the characteristics of the turtle harvest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turtle egg harvest</th>
<th>Turtle harpoon harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Focused on Murrunga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No restriction on gender/age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Domestic rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>May be done in pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Simple tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Predictable results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Short distances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Simple rules of distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Four species involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between these two enterprises are great, yet they are linked in fundamental ways. Each of them requires the exploitation of turtle resources from the Yan-nhaŋu estate. The manpower and resources needed to mount turtle expeditions are great. Such journeys may require a round trip of 300, or more, nautical miles and are
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

dothereby of necessity launched from the large community of Milingimbi. The egg harvest practised at Murrunga, on the other hand, is a simple and daily occupation with predictable results and little organisation required. Notwithstanding their outward differences the conduct of each activity is shaped by an overarching reference to ancestral laws linked to the sea.

Before elaborating on turtle egg collection on the outer islands I will firstly examine the importance of ancestral law to the capture by harpoon (*lungu*) of (large free-swimming) male turtles. The rituals of turtle hunting on the sea are the preserve of senior men—generally, though not exclusively, Yan-nhaŋu men. The site most widely known for the practice of these rituals is *Wudulpalŋa* (Mu 32). This is also the site at Murrunga where Dundirr ensorcelled the east wind in 1932. By contrast, more simple domestic rituals surround turtle egg collection, such as filling in the turtle nest site after gathering and is done by children. People say that nests are filled in so that the returning female turtle will not see any signs indicating her eggs are missing and so she will be content to lay her eggs on this beach again. Underlying this public account is the myth that tells that if the nests are not filled in after the eggs are taken, a terrible wind will hit the islands. The egg harvest is a keystone of daily activity, a nutritious food giving a flavour to the diet and lifestyle characteristic of life on the outer Crocodile Islands.

Ancestral law is fundamental in reckoning access, rights and accounting for the hunting and distribution of marine resources integral to local economies in the Crocodile Islands. Cosmologies and cosmogonies underlie the powerful connections between group identity and doctrines of resource ownership, procurement and exchange expressed in ancestral law. Keen (2003) observes that these cosmologies and cosmogonies

\[
\ldots \text{framed regional orders of ‘law’ that provide the foundation of social order. Second, they were implicated in the ownership of and control of access to land and waters and their resources. Third, people believed, on the basis of these doctrines, that they could tap ancestral and magical powers to enhance the supply of resources and their power to acquire resources. And fourth, many economic rights, obligations, prerogatives and prohibitions were framed explicitly in terms of ancestral law (Keen 2003: 210).}
\]
Yolŋu groups living on Yan-nhaŋu estates continue to recognise the authority of traditional owners, by seeking permission before entering sea areas, by avoiding sacred sites and by visiting people living on the outer islands when travelling on their sea country. Shared belief in ancestral laws shapes the behaviours of people to each other, and to their environment on sea country. These concepts permeate the very texture of human and turtle relations, and are consequently mapped onto the marine environment. The following Map 11 demonstrates how completely the sea space is imbued with turtle mythology. Numerous turtle myths owned by Yan-nhaŋu groups and shared by other Yolŋu kin interpenetrate all aspects of the marine environment. To the knowlegable the evidence of ancestral turtle movements below the waters can be seen everywhere. The moving currents of the ocean, in the actions and sounds of the tide are signified the powers of ancestral turtles beneath the surface. Some are dangerous for example currents around Nanuguŋuwa and Nyalia (see Appendix eight) are renowned for taking life, while others are thought to be a source of life. 109

109 Breaking of the taboo on visiting the sacred reefs linked to claims for closed seas is believed to be the reason for the death of three senior Yan-nhaŋu law men in the last thirty years.
Map 11 Yan-nhaŋu turtle waŋarr tracks in the sea

The travels associated with turtle waŋarr identified in Map 11 are an indication of how widely and completely turtle mythology is interlinked into the physical land and seascapes of the Crocodile Islands.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

The harpooning of turtles at sea

In Yolŋu terms marine turtles follow their own set of behaviours related to the seasons described as turtle law (*miyapunu rom*). The seasonal movements of turtle are prime considerations in the yearly cycle of hunting and collecting, and so influence the turtle and egg harvest data (see Figures 7 and 10). I recorded 74 successful hunting trips of turtles in the study area in four years. Although unsuccessful hunting trips were not formally recorded, on average, I estimate that two out of every three hunting trips were successful. Clearly, seasonal factors are of enormous importance in the collection of turtle resources as ten times the number of turtles are caught in May as are caught in January, but there are many subtle influences at work as well.

During the peak season of hunting more than half the turtles caught are landed and cooked on the beach at Milingimbi; about once or twice a week. Groups of people gather to see the turtles in the boats where they are kept before being cooked. Invariably youngsters will yell out the number and types of turtle that had been caught, as they wend their way home, ‘How many, two greens and an olive ridley!’ (*Nhamunha, marrma dhalwatpu wangany muduthu!*). Commentators remark on the number of harpoon holes, and the general condition of turtles, identifying species, age and gender for neophytes looking on, and making and enjoying ribald commentary on turtle parts. (A number of sexual metaphors refer to turtle parts). Cooking is usually carried out at a turtle oven at a house nearby. The location of turtle cooking depends strongly on the crew who caught it. Cooking is a very social activity, and it was a prime time for me to find out details about the harpooner (*djambatji*), and record distribution data, and supplementary information on the condition of the turtles, and any unusual phenomena. The total number of turtles harvested each month over four years is recorded in Figure 7.

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{110} The role of the harpooner is signified by the term *djambatji*, however the meaning of the term has a wider usage including the celebration of sportsman, hunters and dancers. The feminine equivalent *ralpa* inhabit the semantic domain reflecting ideas of family support, complementarity and upholding the principles of a domestic moral economy.}\]
The monthly total of turtles caught over the study period demonstrates the seasonal nature of turtle capture. During the months November to February, turtle hunting comes to a virtual stand-still as the turtles migrate elsewhere, and turtle hunters are more fully involved in ceremonial activities.

The behaviour of turtles, and the timing of capture are capricious for any number of reasons, however, a seasonal pattern can still be detected. The yearly hunting season from March to July corresponds with two major factors: the mating of green and other turtles at Guđunba (North east Crocodile Reef see Appendix eight), and the seasons of gentle winds and flat seas from Mayaltha to Dharratharramirr (See Chapter six). The following Figure 8 shows the yearly break down of harpooned turtle catches each year.
On average ten turtles per month, per year, are taken in the Crocodile Islands. Each of these turtles represents an important physical, economic, spiritual, and social acquisition. The hunting of turtles takes place on well known, named tracts of sea country replete with myths about great hunters and the historical prowess of yester years *djambatj*. Turtle hunting is also a time of story telling. As mentioned the currents and wave formations, signs of ancestral *wajarr* turtles below the surface, are also part of the map of the sea, and tell where turtles may be feeding. Turtle hunters are very familiar with the sea country around the islands, spending long hours sitting in the boat. Because of this they are well aware of their position at sea when turtles are caught. For this reason accurate information was gathered about the sites from which turtles were captured during the four years of the survey are shown in Map 12.
This map shows that harpooning takes place on sea estates belonging almost exclusively to Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru. Furthermore it shows some correlation between capture sites at which turtles were harpooned, and the marine turtle wayarr tracks that penetrate the seas surrounding the Crocodile Islands. One important exception is the
highly restricted site, Naliya reef (See Appendix 8 Map 36) This important sacred site is known to be too dangerous to be approached. In effect this site functions as a turtle sanctuary.

Based on the data collected over four years, 80 per cent of turtles were landed, cooked and distributed on Murrunga and Milingimbi Islands. Most turtle were cooked on Milingimbi Island (62 per cent), with far fewer being cooked at Murrunga Island (18 per cent). Other remote islands made up about 20 percent of the total cooking events. Yan-nhaŋu turtle hunters were drawn from 11 per cent of the population, and yet made up three out of seven turtle crews, and captured 32 per cent of the total turtles during the study period. Another important aspect to be discussed ahead, is the place of cooking, as the preferred cooking site is usually situated next to the residences of particular groups, and as such influences the distribution. However, most significantly Figure 8 shows that a comparatively large part of the turtle harvest is captured by, and distributed to Yan-nhaŋu despite, their comparitively small proportion in regard to the overall population of Milingimbi Island.

Figure 9 Harvest, distribution, population ratio over four years 2000-4

![Chart showing harvest, distribution, and population ratio over four years 2000-4.]

Clearly the small Yan-nhaŋu population is getting a statistically significant part of the turtle distribution at Milingimbi Island. As discussed, Yolŋu understand the resources of an estate to be the property of the owners based on principles of cosmological links. However, ownership rights are not the only rights at issue in the distribution. A number of competing rights are at work in the hunting and distribution of turtle. Turtle hunters have an important right to distribute, exchange, and consume turtles they have captured (Bradley 1997: 349-362). Furthermore, the butchery of these high-status animals is governed by ancestrally prescribed law (rom) that is rigorously enacted in relation to turtle distribution. Ancestral law posits that the crew of the hunting expedition are apportioned very particular turtle parts based on their role in the boat.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Social and material relations of turtle hunting

The hunters of turtles are also those who have special distribution rights, so that the composition of a hunting crew and the roles that crew members play is an important aspect of the analysis of marine turtle economy.

Composition of a turtle hunting crew

Turtle hunting crews were made up of both Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu men. However, some of these crews were made up of men from predominantly non-Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru and so they were recorded as non Yan-nhaŋu crews. Similarly for Yan-nhaŋu crews composed of men from predominantly Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru. Each of these crews have nicknames reflecting the ba:purru groups of the senior brothers, primarily because they were made up of the same group of brothers and cousins on successive occasions. Yolŋu named boats and crews. These boats received names from the ensemble of names owned by a ba:purru much like the dog names discussed in Chapter five. The uniformity of hunting crew composition over time meant that almost everybody in the community of Milingimbi knew the nicknames, names, and roles the senior players in most hunting crews. These roles relate to the distribution of turtle cuts discussed ahead.

Crews were generally recruited from brothers, or classificatory brothers, and cousins of a particular ba:purru, living together in houses and sharing a single, or a few fireplaces in close proximity. Boat crews, generally made up of four to six men between the ages of 14 and 40, usually lived, travelled and ate together. There was a high degree of regularity in turtle hunting crew composition among senior participants. The number of ba:purru hunter crews and the relationships between members of these crew is shown in Table 27. I use the fairly ambiguous European term cousin to describe relations on board the boat as a simplification to bring attention to the point of crew affiliation not gurutumirr (familial relations). The first line shows the group affiliation of the turtle hunting crew. The second line shows the simplified kin relation of the crew to the captain; many senior brothers were the buŋgawa (boss) of crews. The other lines show the most common relationships between crew members. This information shows the composition of all the major Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu crews hunting marine turtle over the study period.
Table 27 An example of crew composition and ba:purru affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crew #</th>
<th>Non-Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Non-Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Non-Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Non Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Yan-nhanu</th>
<th>Yan-nhanu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin mothers clan Duway</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother same clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin same clan</td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
<td>Couin different clan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>Classificatory brother different clan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Cousin different clan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that there are a proportionately large number of Yan-nhanu crews compared to their population size this is not of itself a complete explanation of the ratio of distributions as the ba:purru affiliation of a crew influenced the choice of cooking site. This is an important factor in determining the over all ratio of distribution of turtle resources at Milingimbi.

Location and deployment of turtle ovens

Turtle oven sites are semi-permanent, named sites for turtle and dugong cooking. In the period before the coming of the Methodist Overseas Mission, turtle would be cooked in close proximity to where they were caught because of the great effort needed to move such large creatures. Since the advent of the aluminium dinghy, turtle can be cooked at named turtle oven sites usually in close proximity to the home fire, but separate from the family hearth. Turtle ovens comprise a pit, and a number of fist-sized cooking rocks (djirrimol). Heated, and put inside the turtle they help cook it from the inside out, while the body lies on the fire. Historically, baler shells (ŋalawili) were used to drink the highly prized internal juices of cooked turtle (yenhu or weka), now a tin can, or tin cup (banigin) is used. These juices are said to have beneficial health, and spiritual effects when consumed.  

---

111 Barber (2005) reports Yilpara residents discarding this turtle juice (Barber 2005: 28).
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Turtle oven sites take their names from surrounding sites of ancestral significance. In the Crocodile Islands there are six major named turtle oven sites: Milingimbi, Narawaŋgu, Bordiya, Gurriba, Murrunga and Bodjiriki (see Appendices six and seven).\textsuperscript{112} Two of these important ovens at Milingimbi and Narawaŋgu are sited within 800 meters of each other along the beach on Milingimbi Island, but they are quite distinct. Crucially, the location of turtle cooking at a particular oven near to the residence of a particular group results in close kin being present at the distribution.

Map 13 show Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu preferences for turtle cooking sites. It can be seen that both Yan-nhaŋu and non Yan-nhaŋu crews preferred to cook their turtles at one of the two named turtle ovens at Milingimbi Island more than 70 per cent of the time, and this factor is significant in the analysis of the final distribution.

\textsuperscript{112} These turtle ovens are named after sites but are not directly on those sites and may move around in relations to the lager site so they do not carry site codes.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Map 13 Cooking sites frequented by turtle hunters 2000-4

The non-Yan-nhaŋu turtle hunting crews living at Milingimbi tend to use turtle oven sites at Narawandu close to their residence. On the other hand, the Yan-nhaŋu crew
living at Milingimbi Island use the Milingimbi oven closest to their house. The choice of turtle oven site has an effect on the distribution of turtle produce because cooking location reflects residence, and residence reflects the wider social relations of groups.

The location of turtle oven cooking sites is not the only variable affecting the social relations shaping the distribution of turtle meat. The laws of turtle butchery add another layer of complexity to the social arrangements and proportion of distributions to groups (see also Bradley 1997: 349; Barber 2005: 25). An examination of the distribution of turtle meat can elucidate important aspects of the relations between Yan-nhaŋu and non-Yan-nhaŋu groups.

*Phases of turtle distribution and exchange*

The law (*rom*) dictates the way turtle cuts are made, and to whom these resources are distributed.\(^{113}\) The proper distribution of turtle meat is a complex affair. The first two phases of distribution provide a window into Yan-nhaŋu social relations, and links to such customary prescribed acts. In the first phase of distribution the turtle hunters divide their share of the turtle meat in cuts based on their role in the hunt. In the second phase, they subdivide these portions with their close kin. After this subdivision all the parts, and any remainders are taken for re-cooking and shared with everyone present. This first distribution, like the cooking, is very important because of the ancestral principles that underwrite the whole process. Yolŋu believe any divergence from the correct behaviour- the *rom* of catching, cooking and distributing- can lead to sickness and bad luck, including death. Such beliefs are not unfounded as everyone has a story about death at sea, which is rarer now but was commonplace in the past. Consequently, butchery and distribution follows a strictly ancestral precedent (contra Rouja 1998 and Barber 2005).\(^{114}\)

The role of each member of the hunting team determines their share at the primary distribution of turtle meat. That is, the distribution of named cuts is dependent on the role the hunter plays in the hunting expedition. Such rules are consistent with those practices to a lesser or greater extent as described for Yolŋu elsewhere (Barber 2005). The convention that hunters receive a prescribed cut dependent on their roles is


\(^{114}\) Barber reports a high level of rule bound protocol surrounding the butchery of turtle but more limited convention surrounding the distributions to and from hunters (Barber 2005: 65)
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

widespread through out Australia (Bird et al 1997: 49; Bradley 1997: 349; Barber 2005). Table 28 describes the roles of turtle hunters:

Table 28 The four roles of turtle hunters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Role description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bungawa</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Oversees proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Djambatj</td>
<td>Harpooner</td>
<td>Controls harpoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Waypunaway</td>
<td>Paddler</td>
<td>Steers the boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Wakinŋu</td>
<td>First mate</td>
<td>Bails out bilge, assists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The leader of an expedition is usually called the bungawa (captain), a Macassan loan word. This bungawa is often a senior man with white hair bubaitj birriyanharranŋu, having status derived from ritual responsibilities. He is responsible for the direction and timing of hunting, protection of the crew from spiritual and physical danger, and the enactment of ritual to improve success in procuring turtles (see Warner 1937(69): 132; Thomson File no 10 fieldnotes August 1937 Mooroongga Island, Chapter four, Guwikthana'ba). The bungawa properly provides guidance on ancestral laws for the practice of turtle hunting and division. He manages the roles and relations of the hunting crew attending to issues of moral peril more than captaincy per se, and so plays a supporting role in facilitating friendly competition among the young men for the accolade djambatj (great hunter). Typically competition for the role and accolade of djambatj is the preserve of young men in close kin or affinal relations. They compete with and support each other for repute in an air of good natured generosity.

The role of harpooner in the hunting crew is called djambatj, synonymous with the title awarded those having achieved standing as great hunters. The pleasure of hunting camaraderie, and the prominence attached to the title djambat provides enough motivation for each man to learn with enthusiasm the various roles required to hunt turtle until he achieves the entitlement to harpoon turtles in his own right. The bungawa (captain) gets the best cuts of turtle followed by the next most senior in status- usually the djambatj (harpooner). The remainder is distributed to the waypunaway (chief paddler, today the man who drives the motor), and last, the wakinŋu (bilge man), of which there is often more than one (see also Warner 1937:
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

129; McCarthy 1960: 146; Bradley 1997: 349). At times there is some pressure by younger men to participate in the turtle hunt, and boats may occasionally be full of apprentice hunters learning roles. Neophytes are rewarded with cuts from the wakinju share of turtle meat. What is paramount is that the division of such cuts strictly follow ancestral laws, so preventing the potential illness that is attached to improper distribution. Table 29 shows the strictly allocated named cuts of turtle conferred on each role:

Table 29 The role related distribution of turtle meat cuts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhanu cut</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Role recipient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 wadanja</td>
<td>head</td>
<td>A. bungawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 wana x 2</td>
<td>arms</td>
<td>A. bungawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 midiki</td>
<td>upper chest</td>
<td>B. djambatj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 lungu</td>
<td>middle chest</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 nonu</td>
<td>lower chest</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 djirrdjirr</td>
<td>upper back</td>
<td>B. djambatj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 witi</td>
<td>middle back</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 djapurr</td>
<td>lower back</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 wirriŋa</td>
<td>green fat</td>
<td>B. djambatj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 birrti</td>
<td>back leg top</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 gorryindi</td>
<td>back leg bottom</td>
<td>D. wakinju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 dumu</td>
<td>pelvic complex</td>
<td>D. wakinju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 gawalanu</td>
<td>tail</td>
<td>D. wakinju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 lira warru</td>
<td>stomach</td>
<td>B. djambatj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 bugaga</td>
<td>upper intestine</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 wakinju</td>
<td>lower intestine</td>
<td>D. wakinju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 jukurr buthalak</td>
<td>yellow fat</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 ŋaltjirri</td>
<td>kidneys</td>
<td>D. wakinju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 burrugutj</td>
<td>lungs</td>
<td>B. djambatj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 dhudurrk</td>
<td>heart</td>
<td>C. waypunaway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there is an assiduous adherence to ancestral conventions there are often a number of competing pressures by kin in demand for immediate distribution of turtle
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

resources (Peterson 1993). These pressures involve negotiations under the judicious eye of senior people, and a jural authority vested in the group.

Ancestral law provides guidelines for the practice of turtle distribution, but kin collect their immediate share in what, to an outsider, may look like a chaotic free-for-all. Despite appearances tacit conventions of distribution are recognised and followed by all. Examples of actual distributions to kin were recorded to demonstrate how concurrent kin rights are negotiated within the formal conventions of primary distributions. The primary distribution is to hunters based on their role, and the secondary distribution is to kin along lines of demand and seniority. First, the hunters get their share, and then kin demand, take, or are given their share, without clear temporal differentiation between these two phases. Table 30 shows an example of an actual distribution event, listing the distribution of named turtle parts as distributed to hunters according to their role, followed by distribution to kin present.

115 Bradley (1996:348) refers loosely to the principle that everyone ‘gets a taste’ whereas Barber (2005: 65), indicates the remainder is shared in a ‘more flexible and negotiated process’. It is precisely that process being examined here.
**Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange**

**Table 30 Example of primary and secondary distribution 25/5/01**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Turtle part</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kin relationships in receipt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bungawa .A.</td>
<td>wadaga</td>
<td>head</td>
<td>A’s; FZS, w M B, o B, Z,ZS,ZD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wana</td>
<td>arms</td>
<td>A’s; FZS, w M B, o B, Z,ZS,ZD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djambatj .B.</td>
<td>barrugutj</td>
<td>lungs</td>
<td>B’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, w B, y B, o B, Z,ZS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lira warru</td>
<td>stomach</td>
<td>B’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, w B, y B, o B, Z,ZS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wirriqa</td>
<td>green fat</td>
<td>B’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, y B, o B,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>djirrdjirr</td>
<td>upper back</td>
<td>B’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, y B, o B,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>miḏiki</td>
<td>upper chest</td>
<td>B’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, y B, o B,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waypuna .C.</td>
<td>dhudurrk</td>
<td>heart</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jukurr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bathalak</td>
<td>yellow fat</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bugaga</td>
<td>upper intestine</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>birrti</td>
<td>back leg top</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>djapurr</td>
<td>lower back</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>witi</td>
<td>middle back</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lungu</td>
<td>middle chest</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nouru</td>
<td>lower chest</td>
<td>C’s; F, FF, Mm, w M, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakinju .D.</td>
<td>naltijri</td>
<td>kidneys</td>
<td>D’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wakinju</td>
<td>lower intestine</td>
<td>D’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gurryindji</td>
<td>back leg bottom</td>
<td>E’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dumu</td>
<td>pelvic complex</td>
<td>E’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gawalajnu</td>
<td>tail</td>
<td>E’s; FZD,FZS,F, M, FF, m B, w B, Z,S,D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show the material distribution of turtle meat to kin at a typical turtle distribution event, including the initial distribution of cuts calculated according to roles and the secondary distribution of those turtle cuts to kin. The *bungawa* nominally receives his cut, but in practice his close kin (sister’s son, and father’s sister’s son), actually take it for recooking immediately, while paying homage to the convention. A primary distribution is normally followed by a secondary distribution even though these two phases may overlap substantially, or happen almost simultaneously. To be more precise, participants affirm that the turtle is being divided according to the formal
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

blueprint of ancestral law, even though this distribution may be difficult to discern without familiarity with the convention. This strict distribution provides a mechanism for a social accounting of distribution, and for the purposes of this analysis, a tool for distinguishing who gets what.

The difference between the primary and the secondary distribution reveals to what extent turtle is being distributed between Yan-nhaçu and non-Yan-nhaçu people involved in the hunting of turtle and those present at distribution events. Examination and use of the of the data to compare the level of distribution between Yan-nhaçu and non-Yan-nhaçu groups in total, shows the extent to which Yan-nhaçu and non-Yan-nhaçu hunters are distributing turtle to their kin. Figure 10 shows a statistically significant percentage of the primary distribution over four years distributed to/or by Yan-nhaçu hunters, and that Yan-nhaçu kin were often in receipt:

*Figure 10 Total primary and secondary distribution over four years 2000-4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Distribution of Turtle</th>
<th>Secondary Distribution of Turtle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yan-nhaçu</td>
<td>Non Yan-nhaçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Yan-nhaçu are present at many distributions reflect their high levels of participation as members of both Yan-nhaçu and non-Yan-nhaçu turtle hunting crews. Yan-nhaçu men are preferred in such crews because of their status as expert hunters, and in large measure because of their personal spiritual and ritual connections to the sea. Such connections are thought to bring good luck, and to protect the safety of turtle hunters on the treacherous seas around the outer islands. The value of marine products such as turtle meat, and their exchange among kin, has a value over and above the recognition of ancestral entitlement. Such exchanges are of tremendous additional importance in fulfilling the moral obligations attached to bride service, conferring
advantage in connubial competitions and collaborations. At a number of levels the sea provides the actual material condition for the physical survival of Yan-nhaŋu people as will be seen ahead. Significantly, the exchange of turtle products has reaffirmed the continuing significance of a broader Yolŋu collective acknowledgement of Yan-nhaŋu marine resource ownership.

*Marine turtle egg harvest at Murrunga Island*

The lifestyle of the islands is often expressed in terms of the diet, in an appeal of or longing for fresh sea foods and in particular turtle eggs in their many stages. The seasonal availability of subsistence resources is a factor in accounting for variation in the diet of the outer Crocodile Islands. In what might be described as the ‘cuisine de saison’ the food of the season, the timing of hunting is tuned to the fatness of resources in the great variety of protein sources at Murrunga. In almost every season when planning the day’s hunting people integrate egg collection with other subsistence practices. Egg collection articulates with the yearly cycles of fishing for bony fish (*guya*), and of the collection of shellfish (*wayanaka*), which make up the larger part of daily protein. Seasonally available meat (*bural*) from terrestrial and marine reptiles, cartilaginous fish (*larrana*), meat derived from birds (*ligilig*), and bird’s eggs (*lanyarr*) are also part of the menu when they become available (see Chapter six). Turtle eggs, however, are a favoured food- ‘fruit de mer’, or fruit of the sea, always ripe and a mainstay in the diet.

Eating turtle eggs is considered something akin to an act of ‘eating country’, or imbibing the essence of sea country, a revivifying experience. Through the act of consumption one re-establishes essential links with the sea. Yan-nhaŋu people believe that the turtle ancestors are responsible for the fertility of turtle stocks, and that eating turtle eggs is sharing in the bounty of this ancestral essence (*ma:rr*). Yan-nhaŋu people refer to them as the ‘food of the islands’, and yearly visits by Yan-nhaŋu people living more permanently at Milingimbi are a feature of Murrunga life. Constantly expected are visits from countrymen and kin to return and eat eggs, to share in the harvest of their customary marine resources. A characteristic expression on those occasions when people have returned to the islands to share in the prize of eggs is ‘gaku madaptharrangula’ ‘joy giving turtle eggs!’.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

The outstation at Murrunga is situated on the lake created by the giant green turtle *Wanggal Wurrulguma* (Yan-nhaŋu green turtle ancestor). For about ten months of the year the core community consists of about 40 people made up of 25 to 30 women and children, and a more mobile complement of men. The turtle egg harvest is a fundamental part of daily subsistence at Murrunga, providing valuable dietary support for ongoing island residence, and an essential part of the homelands community lifestyle. The value of this marine resource will become clear in a description of the turtle egg harvest and a brief discussion of its place in the wider Crocodile Islands economy.

Women are the primary gatherers of turtle eggs, gathering some 70 per cent of those eggs on their daily subsistence rounds. They are also the key holders of local knowledge. They are the transmitters of tradition related to domestic ceremonies and subsistence activities to the children, who accompany them whenever they are not in school. Foraging behaviour exposes children to personal links with ancestral places and introduces the lexicon of the islands. This continuity of compact with important places is a key aspect of the character of homelands life, differing from that at the inner island community of Milingimbi.

The population of the islands fluctuates, but the role of the turtle egg in the diet remains remarkably constant. The numbers and composition of people living at the outstation changes greatly due to seasonal, ceremonial and economic factors. At peak nesting times many kin come to stay on the islands to harvest, and eat eggs. Additionally, ceremonies held on the island may be timed to coincide with such nesting times, as the turtle egg resource is plentiful, predictable, and available over a broad seasonal period. This makes the turtle egg part of the Murrunga diet in much the same way as Meehan (1977, 1982) found shellfish to be an indispensable part of the overall diet of Anbarra people living at nearby Cape Stewart. However, the turtle egg is much more than just a fallback food to the Yan-nhaŋu. It is a food that symbolises life on the islands for the Yan-nhaŋu in a way that for the most part is not visible in other communities in Australia.

The central importance of turtle eggs at Murrunga appears to give them significance unrivalled elsewhere. Smith (1987) working on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula reports a relative lack of familiarity with turtle egg collection and identifications. He says that turtles are known to lay eggs on the rocky islets as well as on the mainland.
beaches and are collected whenever a nest is found, but special trips to the island for eggs are not made, and only one or two nests are found per year (Smith 1987: 83). This is in contrast to the situation in the Pellew Islands which contain mostly flatback turtle rookeries although ‘in contemporary times nearly all nests are wrongly attributed to the green turtle’ (Smith 1987: 375). Rouja observing the Bardi in Western Australia similarly found flatback turtle nests on two occasions, but a lack of familiarity with nesting turtle identification by the Bardi produced uncertainty about the species (Rouja 1998: 56).

Bradley (1997), attributes a more important place for turtle eggs in Yanyuwa society, and describes a number of rules and prohibitions that alleviate the intensity of egg harvests, which he reports are based on ancestral beliefs. He comments that ‘usually such rules seem to be associated with places where the sea turtle is an important Spirit Ancestor’ (Bradley 1997: 358). Although he describes a comprehensive level of egg harvest prohibition, he says, ‘It would be wrong to presume that such taboo, “no-go” areas are a purposeful form of species resource management’ and exist largely because of restricted access, having ‘more to do with sacred places’ (Bradley 1997: 360). This observation is consistent with the way Yan-nhanu people tend to consider marine resource management issues, as they too manage turtle resources through recourse to ancestral laws.

Interestingly, Bradley (1997) reports that eggs were to be eaten in a manner prescribed by law in which ‘one must sit cross-legged in front of the eggs one wished to consume and pick them up with both hands’ (Bradley 1997: 360). Yanyuwa people appear to have had four named egg stages and so may also have had a comparable system to that of the Yan-nhanu system of computing gravid female turtle return. However, similarly to the Yan-nhanu, the Yanyuwa did not usually capture flat back turtles found on the beach at nesting time (Bradley 1997 268). Rouja (1998) found that the Bardi also exploited the seasonal patterns of turtle behaviour, but does not elaborate in his report except to say that they recognised a pattern.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Seasonal differences between species of turtles

Yan-nhaŋu have an intimate knowledge of the behaviour, availability and location of marine species. Children report on the behaviours of turtles, following turtle tracks made in the sand beyond the high tide marks on the beach. Children interpret turtle subterfuges, such as a turtle having left a phantom nest, and sometimes not depositing at all after a number of attempts, as a clever decoy or misdirection (laymarrama). The Yan-nhaŋu say that the gakuway (gravid) female turtles possessing eggs, will return to nest five to six times in the same vicinity, every 13 or so days, on the high tide depending on species, and always in the same place so that you can find them. Figure 10 the seasonal pattern of egg deposition by species and collection over the study period.

Figure 11 Harvest frequency of turtle eggs by species and month 2000-4

The four species of turtle that nest in the Crocodile Islands have a seasonal, peak egg-laying period during May in the season Dharratharramirr. At Murrunga the period of peak egg deposition arrives just after the bivalve, mullet and seagull egg season, and prior to the season when barramundi mate, and the hatching of baby sharks occurs (see Chapter six). It is during the peak season when all species of turtle eggs are abundant that they become the focus of the island diet, as distinct from their role as a
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

supplementary food source. Consequently, eggs retain their place at the centre of an adaptable suite of seafood in the varied island diet.

The number of recorded nests harvested throughout the Crocodile Islands per month demonstrates a distinct, seasonal high in May, but shows a sharp decline in June when no records were kept. I was absent during the June-July period, but estimate a further 60-80 nests were taken during that period. June is the time of most intense turtle nesting. At this time a number of kin from Milingimbi join the outstation population to take part in the harvest of marine resources and some of the harvest is transported back to Milingimbi. The harvesting of turtle eggs is not a single pursuit but intergrated with other hunting activities. The harvest of marine turtle eggs is not as bound in ritual activity as hunting by harpoon, but it still has significant conventions, and smaller rituals attached to it. These very specific turtle egg collecting rituals so much a part of the familiar local knowledge of Murrunga Island are carried out as if second nature by one and all.

Murrunga is a large island surrounded by sandy beaches, all of which are suitable for turtle egg laying, but not all beaches are used by turtles, and different species have very different habits. Because of its size the entire coastline is too large to patrol daily in search of nests. This means the geographic distribution of turtle eggs is a significant factor in the harvest of eggs. Local knowledge has developed a reliable system of understanding and predicting the seasonal proclivities of turtle species and their nesting. Turtle nests were harvested from 49 named beach sites in the Crocodile Islands over four years and 45 of these named sites are beaches on Murrunga Island. Map 14 reveals the sites most commonly chosen for turtle egg collections and the frequency of nest harvest.
Significant nesting sites like Bulgupulgu (Mu 5) at the eastern end of the island are also the focus of integrated hunting and fishing activities. In Chapter six I described the proximity of ancestral fish traps to fresh water wells, shell fishing and turtle egg collecting sites and ‘permanent camps’. Time and energy is saved when camping, fishing and collecting sites are close together. And as we have seen these factors shape human behaviours in the land and sea scape is such a way that also shape the landscape to coincide with human desires. Egg gatherers not only consider tides, times and the geographical characteristics of turtle nesting behaviour in planning daily subsistence activities, but pay close attention to the law (rom) about the ‘right’ way.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

As stated earlier, senior women are to a large extent responsible for the intergenerational transmission of the law connected to local marine-based subsistence knowledge. For example, during the collection of bush foods (muru) it was common for senior women to recount the names of places, mythical events and personal relations linking children's names (yakarra), and kin relations (gurru), to the places visited by older generations. Recounting a distinctly personal linkage for each child by name, by kin, and by group ba:purru connection to each place and event the children learned about their links to country. Children learned how to predict the time and place of returning female nesting turtles.

A Yan-nhaaju system for predicting the timing of returning gravid turtles is called gayanga gaku walirr winiyubal (GGWW) (is the reasoning of egg return time). GGWW is an important part of island knowledge imparted to children during egg collection events. This system is an essential tool for knowing when and where gravid females will return, usually to the same beaches they themselves hatched from. This GGWW knowledge provides a mental map for estimating return timings, directives for where to go, and on what tide and time at which to leave to collect eggs at different stages of development.

When a nest is found it is the practice of people to estimate the exact time of egg deposition using the system of GGWW based on named egg developmental stages. These developmental stages signify how long the eggs have been interred, and how long until the next 13-day egg deposition event is likely. These stages give an accurate picture of gravid return, and reduce the uncertainty in estimating the timing of turtle return and nest location. If one digs a nest that is seven days old one can deduce that in six days, on the high tide, one will see the returning turtle. Great familiarity with the egg development cycle gives one an intimate understanding for storing or collecting eggs. The basic egg stages adapted from the GGWW are elaborated by a number of factors; however, the following basic categories are common to all sites and turtle species nests (Table 31)

---

116 The focus of turtle hunting by harpoon means that gravid female turtles are rarely taken.
Table 31 Marine turtle egg development categories (GGWW)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egg stage</th>
<th>Number of days</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barowal</td>
<td>1 – 6</td>
<td>Egg translucent, as calcification forms a circle called ‘the growing sun on the shell’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rypar wahirway</td>
<td>6 – 14</td>
<td>Growing calcification until the egg becomes completely opaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manulit laňahaway</td>
<td>14 – 28</td>
<td>Baby visible on opening, egg becoming turgid and the egg water becomes salty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruwuk</td>
<td>28 – 48</td>
<td>Egg shell becoming soft as young turtle prepares to emerge, papery in last days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The system of GGWW allows the harvester to return to a nest at the time when the eggs are at the preferred stage of development. Nests that are being stored for later collection are marked by inserting an upright stick into them. This stick signals to other turtle egg collectors to leave the marked nests undisturbed so that those who marked it can return at a particular time to collect eggs of a particular development stage. For example, should one prefer to eat one’s eggs ruwuk, with a well-developed turtle embryo inside, then one would leave the eggs in the nest for between 28 days and 48 days.

The turtle egg stage, and associated changes in texture and flavour of developing embryos, is not the only way that eggs provide a variety in the homelands dietary experience. Turtle egg laying by different species of turtle provides greater variability in the harvest. Different species have different behaviours, and different sized and flavoured eggs. Each species leaves different tracks, and they all lay differing numbers of eggs. The least encountered species of nesting turtle is the hawksbill guwartji, (Eretmochelys imbricata). These turtles rarely nest on the islands but are collected when they do. The other three species flatback garriwa, (Natator depressa), pacific or olive ridley muduthu, (Lepidochelys olivacea), and the green turtle wurrulguluma,
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

(*Chelonia mydas*), are of great significance in the seasonal cycle. Personal preferences guide decisions about harvest and cooking techniques and some eggs are exchanged with kin at Milingimbi. The significance of turtle egg collection is far greater for people at Murrunga than it is for those at Milingimbi as discussed in the following section.

Relevance to the larger community

Map 15 shows the geographical distribution of egg collecting in the Crocodile Islands over the study period.

*Map 15 Egg harvest frequency and location by island 2000-4*
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Almost all turtle eggs harvested originated from Murrunga Island with only a small contribution from the other islands. The 16 per cent of eggs harvested from Gurriba (North west Crocodile Island) were collected simultaneously with the annual seasonal seagull egg harvest in May. The seagull egg harvest only lasts for two to three days each year. At this time a large number of turtle eggs are also taken. Only two per cent of turtle eggs collected at Gurriba, at this time were actually cooked on Gurriba. All eggs collected including those at Gurriba and other islands are included in the following data. Most of the eggs harvested at Gurriba were cooked and shared at households in Milingimbi, and so contributed to the four-year total of cooking events shown in the following Map 16:

Map 16 Turtle egg cooking events 2000-4

Frequency & Location of Egg Cooking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murrunga</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namuyani</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narawundu</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rulkajarra</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gininygurra</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yathalamara</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yilan</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagarra</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dham-dham</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamadi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramingining</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

The frequency of turtle egg cooking events on Murrungga Island is indicative of the importance of eggs to the annual cycle of subsistence on the island. Of the 83 per cent of eggs harvested from the outer Crocodile Islands each year, 79 per cent of those are cooked and consumed on Murrungga. Except for Gurriba, no other turtle egg rookeries of any size exist, or are utilised by Yolŋu, so consequently egg harvest relates almost exclusively to Murrungga. Turtle eggs are a principle food source in the peak season, and at other times a fallback food, but because of their predictability and storage capacity, their extraordinary flexibility in the diet, and their transportability, they are one of the crucial protein sources in the customary marine economy of Murrungga.

The popularity of turtle eggs is enhanced by the variability of their flavour and texture during the stages of their development. Outstation people demonstrate a preference for variety in the diet, which promotes diversity in the choice of food sought in the ‘carte du jour’ of daily subsistence on the outstation in contrast to the uninspiring sameness, or ‘djawa’yurr’ (lit: boring) diet at the Milingimbi community (See also Meehan 1977, 1982). The Yan-nhaŋu expression *ben yalyunaway* depicts the commonly held desire for a varied diet made up of many food types. Eggs are always sought, and are eaten raw, cooked, by themselves or mixed with other ingredients. For example, Murrungga cuisine includes a dish known as *tjipi*, a tepid flour paste, sugar, fresh oysters and turtle eggs mixed together and lightly cooked, sometimes with a touch of salt—a dish synonymous with, and available only on the Murrungga homelands.

The collection and consumption of turtle products is an integral part of life in the Crocodile Islands. The exchange, and the relative proportion enjoyed by the Yan-nhaŋu in regard to turtle meat and eggs are characteristic of the marine economy on the islands in general. People living on the islands recognise the place of the landowners in regard to their estates and resources. The articulations of this economy provide evidence of the ongoing wider acknowledgement on the basis of shared belief in ancestral laws, by people of many Yolŋu groups resident in the Crocodile Islands, of the indisputable facts of Yan-nhaŋu marine resource ownership. These laws indicate an indissoluble attachment of the people of the sea to their marine sites and resources that inflect all aspects of Yan-nhaŋu life.
Chapter Seven: Sacred turtle exchange

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the place of the marine turtle economy as a small but significant part of a wider marine economy within the customary sector of the Crocodile Islands. The products of the marine economy, and in particular marine turtles, derive from Yan-nhaŋu estates. This characteristic provides an insight into ongoing reciprocal relations between Yan-nhaŋu and Yolŋu kin in a deeply interdependent social network of relations lived out on the Yan-nhaŋu estate. The examination of hunting, collecting, cooking, and distribution of turtle products in the Crocodile Islands reveals an acknowledgement of Yan-nhaŋu marine resource ownership by Yolŋu kin living and hunting on their sea country. The seasonal, material, and social relations of the turtle economy reveal something of the fundamental nature of Yan-nhaŋu relations with kin and their marine resources. This brief picture of the marine turtle economy is indicative of wider relationships with sea country, and the provision of material, ritual and social means for survival for the six sociopolitical groups sharing marine estates and a distinctly Yan-nhaŋu cultural identity.

Economic exchange relations operating at the nexus between the reproduction of marine identities, and the provision of means of survival give enormous significance to the hunting of turtle, which continues to maintain Yan-nhaŋu relations with their ancestral estates and marine identity in contemporary times. The Yan-nhaŋu, although few in number, exhibit high levels of participation in the hunting, exchange and consumption of turtle caught on their own sea country. The amount of turtles caught by Yan-nhaŋu hunting crews, and the patterns of distribution, cooking, the amount they acquire, exchange and consume underscore an overarching acknowledgment of their inalienable possession of the marine sites from where such resources are taken, and an abiding adherence to the ancestral laws that underwrite the society generally. The slightly higher participatory rates in the activities of voyaging and harpooning; a widely accepted recognition of their appetite for marine adventuring, expertise as hunters, all characteristics consonant with their ritual links to turtle and sea country. These attributes make Yan-nhaŋu desirable participants in turtle hunting expeditions and are indicative of their marine heritage.

The material bounty derived from participation in turtle hunting not only reinforces this recognition of resource ownership, but provides a number of other potential
benefits and opportunities for achieving and exchanging social capital. The reputation of *djambatj* acquired from skill in hunting, and the renown by others may improve social capital through rights to distribute turtle meat. Such exchanges of marine resources may fulfil obligations to specific kin, which, in turn, is advantageous in connubial exchanges. The aforementioned benefits of connubial success are evident (See Chapter two). Furthermore, given appropriate circumstances, such enhanced status can be transferable to the ceremonial sphere, and to the public Yolŋu sphere with potential advantages for individuals and for groups. Therefore, turtle hunting retains its significance throughout the Crocodile Islands and Yolŋu society more widely.

Continued residence on the homelands at Murrungga, to a greater extent than the other island homelands on the Yan-nhaŋu estate, is linked to the collection and consumption of marine turtle eggs. Turtle eggs make up a substantial, and a particular part of the customary diet at Murrungga providing an important dietary supplement with a wide seasonal availability and a wide array of flavours characteristic of developmental stages. This gives turtle eggs a prominent place in the culture and diet of the homeland. The collection of marine turtle eggs supports, in a material way, residence on the island, and provides for an environment with a Yan-nhaŋu character and manner of life that is different from that of the Milingimbi community. The daily excursions for egg collection, harmonising with shell fish, fish and other gathering activities, contribute in a substantial way to the intergenerational transmission of experience of ancestral sites and myths, personal histories, lexicon, and contact with the invisible social actors of the islands that make an indelible impression on the psyche of children and their experience of their mythological heritage. This is a crucial aspect of the intergenerational transmission of continuity in relation to the marine environment.

Yan-nhaŋu people want to represent their estates. Opportunities under ALRA, and dissatisfaction with State policy, have changed the contexts of contemporary struggles for recognition of their entitlements at issue in the next and concluding chapter.
Chapter Eight:

The contemporary context of Yan-nhanu identity

Marija Yan-nhanu Women preparing to Dance the Gamalajga Wayarr Mulanda

Garma Festival 2006

Plate 15 Garma festival at Gulkula

The landscape as an environment has an active role because of the potentialities it affords. However, it can also be an active component in people's lives because of its history, because of the intrinsic properties it is believed to have, because of the memories located in it, because of the way it is conceived and what it is thought to be (Morphy and Morphy 2006: 68).
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

Napuluma rathauŋ djingamurriyun Yan-nhaŋumurru

Our sea speaks Yan-nhaŋu

Change and continuity for the Yan-nhaŋu can only be understood in relation to the broader history of the Yolŋu, and more recent engagements increasingly shaped and constrained by the State. This chapter rearticulates the themes and topics of the thesis as it discusses the context in which Yan-nhaŋu struggle to maintain their distinctive cultural identity. This ethnographic description of historical, cosmological, social, linguistic, ecological and socio-economic aspects of Yan-nhaŋu cultural specificity has brought into relief the differences and similarities of people identifying as Yan-nhaŋu from other Yolŋu people, and their place in the broader fabric of Yolŋu society. Yan-nhaŋu continue to strive to gain control of their ancestral marine estates and resources in contexts shaped by this history. In light of these contemporary influences physical and spiritual links to sea country continue to enhance the reproduction of a distinct Yan-nhaŋu marine identity

The Reverend James Watson described Milingimbi as an ‘emerald jewel in a sapphire sea’ (Mackenzie 1976: 28). The mission staff, biriyanaranu, those given to prayer (biriya), became ‘key instruments’ of assimilation policy (Tatz 1964: 18). The State took leases for Naphtha Petroleum at Galiwin’ku 1921–1926, and the Methodist Overseas Mission at Milingimbi without acknowledgement of the land owners. For the Yan-nhaŋu the mission brought conflict, revenge, dispersal, and domination by eastern Yolŋu groups. On top of colonisation of their resources by eastern kin, demographic decline, and loss of control over their estates was increased exploitation of their marine resources by Japanese and then by European fishermen. In 1942 the founding of the Galiwin’ku mission further marginalised Yan-nhaŋu from control over their estates, while it fostered stories of extinction and enhanced contests for succession by kin within the secular sphere that led to the ‘Adjustment Movement’ (Berndt 1967; McIntosh 1994, 2000, 2006). The increased power of residence groups in competition for resources -- connubial, economic, political, ritual, physical -- has coalesced with the legacy of inadequate housing, health and education to increase competition with kin and diminish opportunity for equity in their estates.

State policy toward Indigenous people has had four overlapping phases: subjugation, segregation and protection, assimilation, and recently self-determination. In 1911 the Commonwealth Aboriginal Ordinance Act and associated protectionist policy created
reserves and missions to make sedentary the ‘nomads’ and ‘smooth the dying pillow’ (Cole 1979: 165). In 1931 the Arnhem Land reserve was gazetted. The State maintained control over the reserve by continuing to provide leases and licences for mining exploration, pastoralism, fishing trepang, pearl shell and crocodile hunting inside the reserve. Coincident with the international human rights era the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth) remains the apex of State recognition of indigenous rights that has been steadily eroded. Under section 12(1) of the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978* applications for sea closures were made—(1981) Crocodile Islands and (1988) Castlereagh Bay and Howard Island. However these closures gave little protection from commercial fishermen (Keen 1980, 1985; Peterson 1998). The representations for these applications, brokered by eastern Yolŋu kin, did not distinguish Yan-nhanjū sacred sites. Consequently, dominated Yan-nhanjū groups see continued commercial fishing of their sacred sites as a symbol of State denial of their rights over their ancestral land and sea.

In 2005 land use agreements were negotiated recognising Yan-nhanjū ‘primary spiritual responsibility’ under *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth) over the town sites of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku. State and Federal Governments applied for leases over the whole area of both townships. The Yan-nhanjū refused to confer leases back to the State. One Yan-nhanjū woman captured the moment in the following way:

*Nhunjku dhungupal gatju-* nhunjku waŋarr- waŋgalanja nhanjū waŋarr napuluma

‘take your money,— that is your god, this land/sea is our god’

(Fieldnotes Murrunga 2007)

Eighteen months later under the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response NTER the State compulsorily acquired the town leases for five years, with a provision for a further 90 years. Yan-nhanjū rights were again usurped by the State but not their links to sea country.

A paradox is created in which Yan-nhanjū people attempt to reject the harmful entailments of State intervention whilst embracing the necessary but insufficient increment in resources. A history of State indifference and chronic disadvantage enhances pragmatism as increasingly contradictory, under capitalised State policy
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

intensifies Yolŋu disadvantage. Increasing corporatisation of the relationship with Indigenous people promotes an ideology of imagined undifferentiated citizenry supporting a denial of full recognition of difference and denying their desire to live on country. Policies moving people off the homelands into ‘growth towns’ foster changing economic and social circumstances in which Yolŋu sociality takes place At one level they produces conditions that enhance the resolution of and identification with a Yan-nhaŋu sociopolitical identity as they compete with other Yolŋu groups for official recognition and market-based resources, whilst being simultaneously dependent on these resident Yolŋu kin for ritual, connubial and economic support. Intense State pressure is being applied to Yan-nhaŋu people to cede their title and move off their homelands. As the legacy of chronic neglect increases, so do pressures on Yan-nhaŋu, from resident kin, to cede their title to their land/sea in exchange for basic services from the State. This is the contemporary context in which the Yan-nhaŋu continue to struggle to keep their distinctive place in the world.

Change and continuity in Yan-nhaŋu marine identity

I have couched this ethnographic description in terms of Yan-nhaŋu difference because of the significance of a Yan-nhaŋu identity within Yolŋu sociality. The differentiation and maintenance of social identities in Yolŋu society furnish a framework for the formation of coalitions for the negotiation of conflicts as well as cooperation. Yolŋu people identify and define themselves in an intersubjective discourse through contrasts and alliance with these others with whom they share features in common, including non indigenous residents. Significantly, Yolŋu distinguish between certain aspects of ‘similarity and difference’ conceived in terms of ancestral foci that differentiate as well as conjoin collectivities, forming the basis of Yolŋu sociality. Degrees of similarity and difference are implicit in ongoing competition for resources and in economic exchanges, exchanges that govern the potential for the survival of sociopolitical groups such as the Yan-nhaŋu.

Exactly how these contrasts and continuities of similarity and distinctive identity are enacted and defined inside society, and how they are signified, are crucial domains in this ethnographic enquiry. The significance of the socio-linguistic identifier Yan-nhaŋu, both as a self descriptor and among other groups, is an important part of identity. Language use and type is a compelling way to mark difference particularly in the linguistically diverse contexts of northeast Arnhem Land. Language as a system of
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

signs is fundamentally about naming. And a distinguishing effect of this naming, and of the place of (Yan-nhaŋu) language in a (Yolŋu) system of naming, is that people are identified and differentiated by the language they use. Yan-nhaŋu people may identify themselves and be recognised by others in society as Yan-nhaŋu even when not using their language.

A decidedly metaphysical relationship is understood to exist between language type and place. I have described how Yan-nhaŋu language is understood to be the language of the Crocodile Islands but more importantly and in a more fundamental way the spiritually conceived connections between language, people and the ancestors produce an enormously profound complex of identification. Yolŋu people continue to stridently assert that a language, its words, and names are endowed by the cosmogonic acts of the ancestors along with the places created by those ancestors. For the descendents of the ancestors, their language and their places are linked by the indissoluble threads of ancestral essences. This knowledge connects Yan-nhaŋu people to place and language in a profound way.

What of the fact that there are only 27 full speakers of Yan-nhaŋu now living, and that the other 89 are only partial speakers? Herein lies a vivid illustration of the transformations of a living language, and a contrasting fundamental continuity of ontological perspective linked to religious belief. Given the above discussion of the spiritual connection of language type, generated by a shared cosmological view, and linked to place, there is great coherence in a public adherence to an ideology of ancestral linguistic immutability. This ideology, founded on logics of ancestral links, orients Yan-nhaŋu in the linguistic, ritual and social fabric of Yolŋu society. Moreover, it provides a rationale and a blueprint for the re/production of Yolŋu society along cosmic lines. It is beyond dispute that despite demonstrable transformations of Yan-nhaŋu language over time, seen in the amalgamation of its dialects, the rise of a lingua franca, and the changing conditions of its use, all of which appear to contradict the law of ancestral immutability, people continue to assert they are Yan-nhaŋu speakers. This assertion is extended by the obligatory use of Yan-nhaŋu in the ritual sphere, and specifically in the notion that ancestral essences are understood to be most potent in ‘foundational’ bundhurr names. The calling out of such power names at important times during ceremonies continues. This aspect of the ritual incantation continues despite changes in everyday modes of communication and the simplified
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhańu

grammar of songs. These fundamental ancestral links entailed in bundhurr are reinvigorated in the performance of ritual and Yan-nhańu manikay, providing an impetus for a continuing ideology of linguistic immutability in the language of the ancestors.

The paradox is that the lingua franca can be heard in the communities of Milingimbi and Galiwin’ku and Yan-nhańu people of all ages may speak in Burrara at Maningrida as Yan-nhańu people retain much of their multilingual ability. However, this affords no contradiction as Yan-nhańu people do not find it paradoxical to habitually use a language other than Yan-nhańu. Incongruity is dispelled by the fact that people understand that it is not necessary to speak the language to own it, it is part of their ancestral inheritance. Moreover, ambiguities and flexibility in social forms, metaphors, and rhetoric coalesce with an ‘ideology’ of permanence to meld such contradictions into seamless common beliefs permitting a wide variety of communicative styles in a growing number of situations. The practice of using everyday language that is not Yan-nhańu, makes no difference to the definition of Yan-nhańu language, or to the rights of Yan-nhańu language owners. From a Yan-nhańu perspective Yan-nhańu language continues to mark locatedness within the rapidly changing social environments of the Crocodile Islands. From the perspective of its common linguistic content, however it is still an extremely endangered language further imperilled by monolingual policies at the national level.

A history of relentless transformation demonstrates that living languages can and do change and survive. There exists some hope that Yan-nhańu language may survive in some way. Incessant change in circumstances, locally and more widely has continued to shape Yan-nhańu language use. Such extraordinary events as prehistoric sea level rise, spreading initiation rites and kinship systems, Macassan visitation, and the circumstances of Mission residence have all contributed to linguistic divergence (see Chapter five). State policies are indifferent to the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages, as shown by the dismantling of bilingual programs is followed by the compulsory and exclusive teaching of English for the first four hours a day across the Northern Territory. (Although, paradoxically, it must be said that some language-maintenance programs get State support they are profoundly inadequate to achieve even moderate reversal of language loss). Despite conclusive evidence to the contrary, widespread lack of support for multilingualism assumes it to be deleterious to
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

English language acquisition. Surrounded by a monolingual State indifferent to multilingualism and committed to an all English speaking society, Yan-nhaŋu feel the pressure on their language. The legacy of underinvestment in Indigenous communities, the denial of support for the homelands movement, and pressures to depopulate the Indigenous estate are keenly felt by all Yolŋu.

For the moment, Yan-nhaŋu language as symbol, and as practice, retains its cultural and ontological significance, a fact marked by attempts at language revival (Bowern and James 2005). But language is only one part of a Yan-nhaŋu identity. Unlike descriptors used in the east like “Balamumu” or “Dholpuyŋuy” referring to a distinctive set of groups occupying a particular region, the Yan-nhaŋu identity is part linguistic, partly cosmological (mythological and ritual), social organisation, a particular socio-political history and a distinctive marine lifestyle linked to their salt water estates. To further discuss these continuities in similarity and difference in Yan-nhaŋu identity I turn now to symbols and practices linked to the sea.

Symbols and practices linked to the sea

Throughout this thesis I have called attention to a shared cosmology as an axiom lending coherence to the system of Yolŋu social relations. I have argued that this cosmology is a fundamental dimension of the reproduction of sociopolitical groups, their relations with other groups, and their religious identities (see Chapter four). Widespread Yolŋu cooperation in the performance and enactment of these religious forms demonstrates their connectedness to networks of mythological links. Significantly, these mythological links express a number of variously shared ancestral journeys, while concurrently permitting the content of such myths to be celebrated according to local perspectives. It is in this context that I have demonstrated the distinctive practices of Yan-nhaŋu people, teasing out the parameters of local religious traditions. Site-specific rituals linked to fish traps and sites around the islands and distinctive sorcery practices demonstrate correspondence between, and variation from the heterogeneous complex of Yolŋu ceremonial practices. Ritual practices that both differentiate Yan-nhaŋu ritual life from, and link it to, wider networks of Yolŋu forms. The significance of these continuities in boundary maintenance, in similarity and difference, are demonstrated in the articulation of ongoing exchange networks.
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

This broader network of Yolŋu ceremonial forms enables a far reaching and flexible forum for the exchange of symbolic and physical resources. The exchanges of this customary economy taking place as it were under the radar of, and to some extent irrespective of the economic objectives of the State, are crucial to the continuity of ritual life. Rituals like the ḕa(rra support the parochial specificity of ritual groups and work in opposition to the homogenising effects of State sponsored commodity dependency. Symbolic and physical resources of the Yolŋu ritual sphere are indispensable in sustaining and reproducing the ceremonial networks of sociopolitical groups and their economic relations. Such exchange is accommodated by the identification of similarity and differences between ancestral entities and ceremonial practices that include the potential discovery of new links. Distant groups celebrating similar ritual forms may forge or refresh contacts between groups across great distances with different resources. Similarly, ritual provides opportunities for the creation of social capital, extension of the bonds of obligation, and expansion of exchange networks. And these ritual exchanges and the trade of goods and services sustain wider kin networks. Ancestral doctrines may themselves become a medium of exchange, perpetuating socio-political groups and religious identities over time, and therefore important to the Yan-nhaŋu as an instrument of re/production at a number of levels. Among these ancestral doctrines the ḕa(rra ceremony is pre-eminent.

The myth of the Djaŋ'kawu sisters that underlies the Dhuwa ḕa(rra is comparatively well known in northeast Arnhem Land mythology, but the miraculous creation of the Crocodile Islands and the maritime journeys of the Djaŋ'kawu ancestors of the Yan-nhaŋu has remained known to the very few Yan-nhaŋu ritual experts. The powerful story tells of the two sisters and their brother paddling a bark canoe into the perilous ocean and transforming the seascape and creatures of the sea and sky of the Arafura. The ceremonies that celebrate the Yan-nhaŋu perspective on Djaŋ'kawu and the Yirritja ḕa(rra are performed in a ritual sphere controlled by abovementioned eastern kin with more terrestrial perspectives. The direct outcome of their ceremonial monopoly is a diminishing opportunity for the ritual recital of specifically Yan-nhaŋu perspectives. Evidence of these eastern perspectives can be found in those versions of the ḕa(rra recorded by Warner (1937), Berndt (1951) and Keen (1978), each of which has decidedly eastern aspect. Nevertheless, Yan-nhaŋu men of all ages from six ba:purruru groups conscientiously sing the songs of their oceanographically distinct but contiguous estates. Other ritual types, public garma and mortuary ceremonies and site
based rituals including aspects of the ‘Djaŋ’kawu myth’ are still rehearsed in initiation
and other ceremonies in and around the Crocodile Islands.

Acknowledgement in the literature of the Yan-nhaŋu propensity for the practice of
sorcery by Warner (1937) and Thomson (1937, 1961) appears in hindsight to have
been a prudent strategy, a tool of self defence in times of conflict. Yan-nhaŋu
withdrawal to the outer islands behind a veil of sorcery rehearses a common refrain in
the folklore of the Crocodile Islands. The story of Dundirr is a powerful reminder of
the ritual practices linked to the sites of the ancestors. By mixing morning glory and
mistletoe at Wudulpañŋa (gukmiyanŋu roŋu ga yarr’yarrŋani Wudulpañŋa (Mu 32).
According to the story, Dundirr reduced the mollusc population of Murrunga by
twenty species to forty in 1932. Stories such as this, evidenced in the physical
landscape produce an abiding belief in sorcery among Yolŋu. These ritual practices
involving beliefs about sites as conduits for ancestral powers and the efficacious
control of these powers are a powerful social force. These beliefs in the power of the
ancestors leave their unmistakable imprint on the laws guiding the minutiae of daily
life and underwriting the moral political order. The unseen ancestral actors are
implicated in the processes of social harmony, fortune, and good health just as they are
in the cause of illness, death and calamitous storms. The knowledge of such
techniques, apart from being a practical means for acting in and on the social world,
maintains their currency. For the Yan-nhaŋu these resources are another form of
capital in exchange for ritual and economic advantage, in the struggle to survive,
within the Yolŋu milieu even today.

The history of the Mission in Arnhem Land comprises a number of conflicting stories
depending on whose account is in focus. The conflicts of in-migration, and the
subsequent cunnobul struggles produced by the regional upheaval of pre-existing
patterns of ritual and marital relations saw the demographic success of eastern
mainland groups to the detriment of small groups to the west including the Yan-nhaŋu.
Despite this Yan-nhaŋu men were still able to marry. As demonstrated there has been a
shift to a more easterly orientation of cunnobul choice. Nonetheless, these marriages
remain commensurate with Yan-nhaŋu and broader Yolŋu kinship organisation, and
metaphorically and rhetorically consistent with the formula of cosmic precedent.
Compatibilities in the overarching Yolŋu system of asymmetric kin classification
inform these new and extended patterns of relationships between Yan-nhaŋu and larger
groups, reflecting the cosmological connections between wayarr ancestors, conceived of and described in the idiom of kinship. Equivalences in kinship arrangements and wider ancestral affiliations lend a great continuity to the patterns of estate ownership, ritual and social identities of Yolŋu groups over time.

A marine ecology and identity

The Yan-nhaŋu word for ‘person’ is yolŋu and, notwithstanding their unequivocal identification as Yolŋu, the Yan-nhaŋu say that their difference resides in their ancestral links to the sea. The overwhelmingly religious schemata that underlie people’s conception of their physical and spiritual relationships to the environment, gives the connection between people and place a metaphysical character. For the Yan-nhaŋu the relationship between the marine environment and their economic exploitation of these marine ecosystems is governed by the precepts of ancestral law. This law directs ecological and economic relations, producing kinds of behaviour which in turn sustain sociopolitical groups, demographic success, and locality-based ontological perspectives that signify a Yan-nhaŋu identity. A marine identity is in this sense a consequence of the complex reconstruction of human cultural systems in reflexive relations with a marine ecology.

The deep and intimate Yan-nhaŋu engagement with their marine environment has at the same time shaped this environment. Yan-nhaŋu foraging has left the delicate impression of their inter-island travels on the archaeological record. The beautiful historical patterns and stories of Yan-nhaŋu relations with their marine environment structure contemporary reproduction of a distinctive life world. The configuration of camp sites, water wells, and fish traps are evidence of the generations of living ancestors that inhabited the places of the islands. This environment itself shaped and mediated by the meanings and metaphors entailed in the Yan-nhaŋu world view. This world view comprised of the spiritual and physical links of people with place produces a seamless identification with the islands and seascape. These links are expressed in the patterns of mobility, in control over access and ownership, of local knowledge and systems of classification, and diet and technologies that signify a provincial distinctiveness (see Chapter six). Despite the transformation of technologies, the use of aluminium dinghies and nylon fishing nets, it is the substantial and consciously reproduced intergenerational transmission of symbols and practices that structures continuity into Yan-nhaŋu relations with their sea country and kin over time.
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

An appreciation of the metaphysical character of Yan-nhaŋu relations to the sea makes sense of their expression of these links in the idiom of kinship. Sites in the sea and the winds and all the other phenomena understood as linked in a network of ancestral essences form a poetic image of symbiotic interdependency: all the parts of an intricate network of life infused with spiritual meaning. This idea of ancestral essences underlies the articulation and observance of ancestral laws and ritual action designed to revivify these essential linkages (see Chapter four). The governing principle of ancestral law is confirmed in the relations of reciprocity and exchange entailed in the exploitations of marine resources and shown for example in the workings of the marine turtle economy. The ancestral dictum that the resources of an estate are the property of the owners of that estate is acknowledged and manifest in the material relations of turtle exchange. Yan-nhaŋu people receive a statistically significant amount of the turtle harvest in acknowledgement of their ownership of this key marine resource (see Chapter seven). A figure complemented somewhat by their increased participation in the undertaking and performance of harpooning, generated by their recognisable spiritual links, and local knowledge of the tides and times of the Crocodile Islands.

The landscape as an environment is an active component in people’s lives because of its history, because of the intrinsic properties it is believed to have, because of the memories located in it, and because of the way it is conceived and what it is thought to be (Morphy and Morphy 2006: 68). A powerful illustration of the spiritual and physical connections to the sea comes from marine turtle egg harvest at Murrunga. Eggs symbolise life on the islands, manifest in the expression ‘joy giving turtle eggs! ‘gaku madapharrayulu!’. Finding eggs requires the system for predicting gravid turtle return, gayanga gaku walirr winiyubal (GGWW) (is the reasoning of egg return time) and a knowledge of 49 named beaches on which eggs are laid. Eggs are a highly sought food source in the ‘carte du jour’ of daily subsistence and an essential ingredient of the dish tjipi (trepid flour paste, sugar, fresh oysters and turtle eggs mixed together and lightly cooked, sometimes with a touch of salt). Residence at Murrunga provides an exposure to the rhythms of island life that encourages a particular social, cultural, and linguistic experience. The transmission of tacit understandings in the remnant community at Murrunga sustain and reinvigorate the symbols and practices known as ‘following in the footsteps of the ancestors’, dhurrukuyu garana bayŋu runrumthana garayw. These encounters with place and the invisible social actors of
the islands produce a powerful experience of identification with the named places and ancestral sites of the Crocodile Islands. A contemporary manifestation of the ongoing desire for these fundamental relationships with country is seen in the growing demand by Yan-nhaŋu to represent and control their ancestrally endowed marine estates and resources.

Yan-nhaŋu are taking opportunities in light of contradictory policies to promote projects that protect their distinctive cultural values, physical and spiritual connections to the sea. They are proposing a fee for service arrangement to look after the sea which they already carry out without inducement, in light of the fact that the State is unable to manage cultural, linguistic, and biological diversity in a way that resonates with aspects of a State vision of ‘economic’ development, and promoting Yan-nhaŋu cultural reproduction. Yan-nhaŋu technical, material, and symbolic aspects of a marine identity are resources supporting the provision of coastal security services. Yan-nhaŋu continue to provide the services of bio-security, linguistic, and cultural resource enhancement and reproduce a Yan-nhaŋu marine identity. They are beginning to imagine projects that will further enhance the reproduction of their relative cultural autonomy and marine identity in parallel to the State.

From a wider perspective, preceding the Blue Mud Bay decision the sea remained a lacuna with indigenous rights in the sea unrecognised around Australia (Morphy and Morphy 2006: 69-70). This thesis in its specific focus on the Yan-nhaŋu has addressed this neglect and drawn attention to other ways of understanding the sea, its meaning, and agency in a global future. Some Yan-nhaŋu remain confident of the ability of the sea to change European trajectories: Europeans still have to come to the Crocodile Islands. In a boat out past Gurriba (North west Crocodile Island) an old man was optimistic about eventual State recognition of Yan-nhaŋu claims to the sea. In a gentle response to a pessimistic grandson, he implied the agency of the sea thus:

\[ Wokai maːri, nhaŋu gubbermen mala dhumuk! \]

But grandfather, people of the government do not listen!

\[ Rulka warrguyurr, nhaŋu gumimurrru dhaːŋuy baŋbal mittjiyaŋa nani gurru marangi nhani bartalanguba napuluma rathaŋu djingamurriyun Yan-nhaŋu! \]
Chapter Eight: The sea that speaks Yan-nhaŋu

Don't worry, here is a secret, leave him/her in the boat and when he/she listens hard to the sea then he/she will know, our sea speaks Yan-nhaŋu!
Appendices

Appendix One:

Transcription of a Malarra Guñbirritji Djaj’kawu Story

Malarral/Guñbirritji Djaj’kawu Story Text

Ganyitiŋu, Wayakama (Gurrul-gurrul) and Rrurrinya create the islands, sites in the sea, maŋayin and fresh water wells and put down the law and language along their journey to the sunset.
Two women Ganyitiŋu and Wayakama and their brother Rrurrinya paddled the sacred canoe Galiwin’ku from Galiwin’ku Elcho Island eastwards towards North West Crocodile Island and then on to the sunset. Speaking Yan−nanju, the younger sister says: ‘we will paddle to the island and the older sister agrees. The island, canoe and brother share homophonous names linking their metaphorical actions. Paddling to the island (Brother) may be interpreted as meaning a creative act in which the waparr together create the islands. *Tense confusions arise from the supposition that these acts of distant past continue to co-exist with the present.

tə Galiwin’kuŋa wayanha balay Gurrulgurrul banguŋa Wayakama nyininha balay manana wapanaŋa

gl n -loc vt 3pplu n dem n vi 3pplu past particle vi

ft The sisters create Galiwin’ku and go west


tə Yan-naŋu wapana wanh-a dhanthana-ba balay wanh-a-li.

gl n dem vi -obj vi/h-emp vi -adv:tm-allala 3pplu n -alla.

ft They spoke in the language of Yan-naŋu as they travelled toward the sunset.

tə Nyninaha balay manana-ŋa ŋa-li gurrkuman-ba galiyanu* nunaŋa Dalmana-ŋuru

gl vi 3pplu past -vt 1pplu future particle past particle vi dem n -abl

ft as they paddled they created Abbot Island

tə wapanaŋa balay Dalmana balay waŋgalaya yirrpaha balay wapanaŋa ŋa-li nhaburr?*

gl vi 3pplu n 3pplu n vi vi 3pplu n ldp dem-int.

ft they spoke out the place names of Abbot Island and then they wondered where to go next

tə nunaŋa ŋa-li gurrku dhabakthur yanaŋa galiyanu -ba garanha galiyanu garanha Rrurrinya

gl dem-loc 1pplu vi vi vi vi -emp vi vi vi n

ft the sisters and brother continue to paddle and travel to the west

tə ga Wayakama galiyanu balay garanha yirrpaha banguŋa Dalmana ŋa-li galiyanu banguŋa

gl adv:tm n vi 3pplu vi vi abl n 1pplu vi abl

ft on the way creating Abbot island

tə garanha Bralbralŋa wapanaŋa go naŋu wangaŋa ŋumun**-yu banguŋa manana galiyanu lipalipa

gl vi (Re 11) n -loc vi vi dem n indefinite pro adj dem tem vi n -inst

ft on their way to Bralbral in the sacred canoe

tə Galiwurrnu Ganyitiŋu ga Wayakama galiyanu-ŋa banguŋa garanha yo galiyanu -bagaranha

gl n n adv:tm n vi -subiv abl vi vi -temp vi

ft they continued to sing and paddle the sacred canoe

tə ŋumun** -garra dhula Naŋkaŋa-ŋa -gu wangaŋa -la -ba naŋu -ba rious

gl indefinite pro -cont dem n -loc-dat vi -emp - temp dem -emp n/vi

ft they created the place of the conical mat maŋayin in the sea

tə wangaŋa Djuṯu-ŋa balay yirrpaha Djuṯu-ŋa banguŋa yirrpaha.

gl n n -loc 3pplu vi n -loc dem vi.

ft and they created the island of Djuṯu and sung out its names

The sisters created Djuṯu (NW Crocodile Island) and created Naŋkaŋa *(The sacred ngmarra mat/fish trap/bag−maŋayin a principle site for the spirits of Malarra children)
**Numun** is a place-holder/metasyntactic device deployed to hold the place of an object or process the speaker cannot remember, does not know, cannot say or may be of a restricted nature. Numun, in the context of **riya** (head/singing) often describes transformation of the *wajarr* into place or object through the consubstantial transformation of ancestral essence connected with song/singing/imagery as the content of Wajarr thought is believed to be equivalent to the tone of a song **riya** bringing the supernatural to life through language.

tx *ganharaya*na larr -ba balay garanha *gi*li*ni* *man* galiyan -haba-la garanha-nha-ba garanha gl vi -temp vi 3pplu vi 3pplu temp vi -temp -vt -emp vi -emp vi ft they left this place in the distant past.

tx *numu-garra* dhula Bral-braljya waya-wayanha-balga *nhanu*-ba **riya** wangalga Djutu-ga gl indefinite pro-dem n vi -vi -temp -emp dem-temp -emp n n n -abl ft they spoke and created these places

tx balay yirrpana *nhanu* *nam*-mungu dhakahkhan *gilli* gurku wuna *y*-bayku -ba gl 3pplu vi dem diec temp vi 3pplu future n -inst abl -temp ft they these things and water in the distant past on their way to the island

tx Bral-bral -*ya* *yo*? gl n -loc ex? ft Bral-bral do you understand?

tx Dhabakhtana balay garanha baykumuna -ba *nhanu** r**iya** lipalipa ga *wananha* gl 3pplu vi dem -cont temp dem n vi n adv:tm vi ft they were singing and speaking

tx *nhanu* **riya** lipalipa ga *numu-garra* *nhanu** r**iya** lipalipa ga *wananha* gl dem n n adv:tm indefinite pro-temp dem n vi n adv:tm vi ft from the sacred canoe

tx ga *nhanu** r**iya** Nalawili ga Ganagirr yirrpana balay Bral-bral-*ya* gl adv:tm prox dem Melo umbilicatus adv:tm n vi 3pplu n n ft and created the bolar shell Madjyin and the sacred bag madajyn in their way to NE Crocodile Is

tx Djutu-*ya* *nhanu* Bral-bral-*ya* bayul-ya balay wayanha Galwin'ku -*iyuru* gl n -loc dem n -loc temp cont -all 3pplu vi n n -abl ft they made these islands and reefs after they left Galwin'ku

tx ga *nhanu** r**iya** bitjja ga Nalawili *nalithana* balay yakarra yirrpana. gl adv:tm dem nivi adv adv:tm Melo umbilicatus vi 3pplu n n vi. ft singing like this and creating and putting down the madajyn and the names of the places.

tx Dhabakhtana balay garanha yirrpana balay Bral-bral dhanthana balay garanha Birrka-birrk gl vi 3pplu vi vi 3pplu n vi adv vi n -loc ft as they went towards Bral-bral and Birrka-birrk on Murruga Island

tx yirrpana balay ga Bulugupulgu-*ya* yirrpana *ga Birrka birrk-*ya* balay gurinyam dhalamunu gl vi 3pplu adv:tm n -loc vi adv:tm p n -loc adv vi dem temp ft after they created the sites at Murruga

tx wanha balay yan bilyana Gurryindi balay Ganyitinga ya Rsurriya Wayakama bala gl vi 3pplu n vi n 3pplu n adv:tm n n alla ft they began to change their language as they moved into Gurryindi country

tx mana garanha duha walima walanka walima yan *nhanu* *gali* yan *walima* *ba* gl cont adv dem adi 3pplu adj n dem 1pplu n adj temp ft as is the law they made a different language in the new country

tx yan gurinyam yan *nhanu* yan balay walima'ba *gayathana* balay galiyan gl n vi n dem n 3pplu adj adv vi 3pplu vi ft they used this language as they arrived in the new country

tx garanha rulka *nhanu* badak *guli* mana wangayini *nya*-ga bilamunu *gali* gl vi neg dem -dat diec cont vi -loc vi adv 1pplu ft they always speak the language of Gurryindi (now speaking Gurryindi) an changed

tx gurkh *wuana* wana dhanant-dhu dhalamunu bala yan *walima* yan *wananha* gl future n vi -obj vi erg -loc adv n adj n vi ft always speaking the different language of the place

tx *ngili* dingiri wamitikiri Gurrryinid bilya Yan garanha Djambyn mana gani dhanatha-nha we gl vi reflex pro n n vi alla vi n cont vi -obj vi/th ft they sing together in the Gurrryindi language of Djambyn

292
Appendix No. 1

tx Djambin mala matha bayngul balay dhanthana garanha yan -guli Djambi, yo yan
gl n n cont 3plpl vi adv n adv n pos n
fi the sing and speak in the language called Djambi

tx Djambi, yo yan guli Djambi nhajkumunu balay yan gunharryana bayurlu gu
gl n poss n dem n 2p poss 3plpl n vi cont -inst
fi they left the language of Djabin for us to speak

(tx guli gyrrku dhana-karra binam’ba yan balay wanjana Yan-nhaigu, Yan-nhaigu
 gl 1plpl fut 3plpl -obj vi temp n 3plpl vi n temp, n temp
fi they said we will always speak Yan-nhaigu

(tx balay wanjana watthana dhula balay girthana Yan-nhaigu dhula Djambi bala
gl 3plpl vi vi n dem 3plpl adv n dem n because
fi as they travelled the country they speak in the Yan-nhaigu language called Djambi

(tx nunun Djinaj yan walima -ba balay biliana Rurriya ga Wayarkama bayurlu
 gl in indefinite pro n n adv -temp 3plpl vi n adv:tm n temp
fi and they changed their names as always

(tx balay wayana yakarra balay barartha yirrpana malagaj mandany wangala
 gl 1plpl-subj n 3plpl adv n vi n 3plpl n
fi they made this law strong for us to follow

(tx balay Galiwin’ku yirrpana, ba? , ga gallyana balay garanha gapu balay
 gl 3plpl n vi, inq?, adv:tm vi 3plpl vi n 3plpl
fi they made this law at Elcho Is, see?, they puddled and made fresh water (in the sea)

(tx nhainha, yo?, riira gapu yirrpam balay Wayarkama -yu ga Rurriya -yu ga walinya -ba
 gl vi, inq?, nvi n vi 3plpl n adv:tm n - adv:tm adv-temp
fi do you understand, they made the water and the country

(tx wanka dhanthathanaba balay wambali yan gana.
gl vi vi -emp-temp 3plpl n n adv
fi in this distinct language (Yan-nhaigu) on their way to the sunset

293
Appendix Two:

Transcription of a Gurryindi Djaŋ’kawu Story

Gurryindi Djaŋ’kawu Story Text

Gurryindi Djaŋ’kawu Myth recorded at Rapuma Island 1.10.2000

tax Baygulgu Garrawarra Garriakngur -pur bala wayana Ganyiti

gl vi Dhawa ba:puru home land -loc abl/Djm vi Wayarr

ft Long ago the Djaŋ’kawu sisters travelled from the Liyagawunirr place

tax ga Dalkunaway Garrawarra mala Garrawarra mala

gl adv:tm Wajarr D. patri group n D. patri group n

ft from the land of the Garrawarra people

tax gabathan balay garranha girriyana bala

gl vi pro3du vt vi abl/Djm

ft they paddled their canoe then

tax girriyana balay wunjilanga pyumun-garra Djaŋ’adha ga yindi Mayparrinya

gl vi pro3du n vi indefinite pro/n n adv adv n

ft they created the sites (Ma 2) and (Ra 31) Djaŋ’adha (Ma 2) and Mayparrinya (Ra 31)

tax dhulamunu balay -bal girriyana ga dhaana mana ŋuthunu

gl dem/loc pro3du -abl vi adv:tm 3plu cont Gurryindi Madayin

ft then they created the sacred Malaysian arrowroot tacer leontopetaloides Madayin

tax bathan Gurryindi mana -ya bathan -nha dhaana -mana

gl vi imp Yan-dhaana cont -inst vi imp -obj vt h 3plu -cont

ft showing us how to cook this Madayin

tax Mayparrinya Bajalgu ga Djarrga ḋjankumunu.

gl Goryindi site Wajarr adv:tm Wajarr dem/loc.

ft at Rapuma Island the sisters

tax Djaŋ’ga dhaana mana ḋjankumun yindi mitji ḋanja:ra.

gl bundarr 3plu cont loc adj plu n.

ft gave us the Madayin ritual ḋanja:ra.

tax Mana buthun ga dhaana wayana ḋjankumunu nomiyani

gl cont vi adv:tm 3plu vi h/loc cont conj

ft Then they like the two Djaŋ’kawu sisters of

tax Djirrpiny -ṭhu ga Gundjulu -w Gamalangga nam Gurryindi

gl n -objv pro n -objv ba:puru diectic ba:puru

ft the Gamalangga group

tax ḋjanunu nhawi buthunara Gundjulu ga ḋjanu Djirrpinyin Gurryindi

gl dem indefinite pro/n vi nr adv:tm this n ba:puru

ft they spoke the law of the islands

tax ḋjanunu bilamanu wunjalga Rapuma-xun nam wanha balay bārrŋgarara

gl dem vi loc n/abl pro vi 3du vt

ft at Rapuma Island the heard the sound

tax rirrikay ꯢgirriyana dharrinyan mana gana balay bārrŋgararanka Garrawarra sound

gl n kin vi cont adj 3du vi temp ba:puru

ft of their grand-child Liyagawunirr Djaŋ’kawu singing

tax manaha ḋjalmiyana bathi Guliir ḋjalmiyana mana Garrawarra mitji Manyburrrurr
Appendix No. 2

gi cont vi n n vi cont ba:purru n n
ft and the Liyagawumirr Djaj' kawu gave them the sacred bag

tx Bulyarrawuy ga Muwala gali bathi yaku bundhurr namunu yalmyana mitji Yolŋu
gl n cont n pro n n n pro n n n
ft and the names and law for the people

tx Garrawurra manymak gana garrana waŋana bilma dhuwali binamunu namunu
gl ba:purru adj erg dat cont n diectic adj diectic
ft and they sung and played clapssticks as the Garrawurra Djaj' kawu

ft they said in their language you hold these sacred claps sticks

tx Garrawurra bilma nhuma dhu ga ɲayathama, bilma nhuma dhu
gl ba:purru maŋayin pro2pdual dem adv:tm vi maŋayin pro 2pdual dem
ft who gave them the sacred claps sticks to hold

tx ga ɲayathama ga dhuŋa dhulw' yan nhunu dhu ga ɲayathama,
gl adv:tm vi adv:tm maŋayin n n pro2pdual adv:tm vi
ft those Djaj' kawu.

tx Wayana gunhaba balayna Garrawurra

gl vi
ft those Djaj' kawu left

ft we don't sing in their language

tx Wayana manikay ṣunanaba manday manikay ṣunanaba manikay

gl pro sub ba:purru n vi pro3du-obj vth vi n
ft their song to follow

tx Wayana mana yaka biyak nytja balay mana,
gl pro3du-obj vth neg dem emph pro3du-obj vth cont.

ft this is the Yan-ŋayam language they gave us.
Appendix Three:

Previous maps of northeast Arnhem Land and the Crocodile Islands.

Map 17 Webb (1932)

Webb, T. Theodor, *Tribal organisation in eastern Arnhem Land*. Oceania, (1932: 411). Webb correctly identifies Yan-nhaŋu linked to estates on Murrunga, Milingimbi and Galiwinku but refers to them incompletely conflating one group speaking a Djinan.
Map 18 Warner (1937)

Lloyd Warner (1937: 40), *A Black Civilization: a Social Study of an Australian Tribe*. Warner along with Webb 1933 recognise the estates of the Yan-nhaŋu but do not elaborate on their marine specificity.
Map 19 Berndt (1952)

Berndt (1952:1), *The Djangawul: an Aboriginal religious cult of northeastern Arnhem Land*. Berndt shows the journey of the Djan'kawu without reference to the three Yan-nhanju versions that cross the Arafura.
Map 20 White (1963)


FIG. 7. White's map of circulating connubium in east Arnhem Land.
Map 21 Shapiro (1981)


Map 4 General Location of the Major Estates of Sibs Listed in Table 6 (cf. Webb 1933; Warner 1937: 49, Capell 1942). 1 = Dambugawumirri, 2 = Dartuwuy, 3 = Djawalnga-Djambarpuy, 4 = Galpu, 5 = Guyula, 6 = Marrangu, 7 = Bilkili, 8 = Burruwandji-Ritarrngu, 9 = Dasyurrgarr, 10 = Duthji-Warramiri, 11 = Ganyawu, 12 = Girkirr, 13 = Gurrumuru-Dalwangu, 14 = Mirraminta-Warramiri, 15 = Ngalupuyngu, 16 = Oswulkaara, 17 = Wanguri
Map 22 Rudder (1993)

Rudder (1993: 195) 'Yolngu Cosmology: An unchanging cosmos incorporating a rapidly changing world? Phd' Rudder provides a pattern of bestowal of women based on ideal marriages. He focuses on groups from the east of Yan-nhaju country and other than Yan-nhaju.
Map 23 Wilkinson (1991)

Wilkinson, M. P. (1991: 2). Djambarlpuynu A Yolngu Variey of Northern Australia: Languages of North east Arnhem Land, PhD. Wilkinson provides general land-language correlations for Yolŋu varieties and surrounding languages. She recognises the separation between Yan-nhaŋu and Nhangu speaking people.
Appendix Four:

Method and results of archaeological examinations at Murrungga Island 1998

The survey conducted over the dry season from March to October 1998 investigated recent archaeological sites on Murrungga Island to confirm ethnographic descriptions about site usage practices and local ecological knowledges. Site designations for recent archaeological sites at Murrungga Island adhere to definitions used by archaeologists working in Northern Australia for example, Meehan (1977, 1982); Bowdler (1983:135); Hiscock (1995:3); Bourke (2000) and Faulkner 2006), and the definitions of archaeological sites as defined by the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act (1991; See also Hiscock 1994a: 56). The site survey found a great deal of variability in the deterioration and density of archaeological material around the island resulting from subsequent human activity and geomorphic processes. Sites were categorised and are depicted in the following map of site distribution.

Map 24 Recent archaeological site types at Murrungga
Starting at the site Bulgupulugu (Mu 5) and circumnavigating in an easterly direction I recorded one hundred and thirty three sites comprising twenty seven named stone fish traps, seven ritually significant fresh water wells and three categories of occupation sites classed as permanent camps (pc), day camps (dc) and lunch scatters (ls) (Meehan 1982: 10)

Documentation of site names, type, histories, moiety and patri-group affiliation, ritual significance. Also measured was the distance from fish traps, fresh water wells, and ecological sites inclusive of an analysis of shell fish types present. Also documented were data on the depth, dimension, and orientation of sites in conjunction with a photographic record of the faunal composition of all site types.

The following table shows the shellfish species identified in an analysis of the faunal composition of these recent archaeological sites. Shellfish types marked with an asterix are in the Gupapuyŋu language from Davis (1981).
### Table 32 Shellfish species present in archaeological sites on Murrungga Island 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaaju</th>
<th>Burarra</th>
<th>Guapaynu</th>
<th>Lincnaus</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Moiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gulilga</td>
<td>Anamarrpida</td>
<td>Mitawarr*</td>
<td>Turbo cinereus, petholatus, Subinella angui</td>
<td>Turban shells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Njarka</td>
<td>Njarka</td>
<td>Njarka*</td>
<td>Asaphis deflorata, Arca corallicola, curvicula, multivillosa</td>
<td>Faded sunset shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gumanka</td>
<td>Gunugulumba</td>
<td>Guminka*</td>
<td>Cardita semicirrulata, Stavelia hirida</td>
<td>Ark shells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wurrunka</td>
<td>Gunugulumba</td>
<td>Wurrunka*</td>
<td>Pinctada chennitzi, maxima, sugilata*</td>
<td>Minature pearl shell</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Garrawili</td>
<td>Wurrunka</td>
<td>*Bangandarrayyar</td>
<td>Gafarium tumidum, Nerita chameleon<em>undata</em> littorina scabra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rrugundhanganalj</td>
<td>Nukdjurrugu</td>
<td>Muraminy*</td>
<td>Malleus albus, Metapenea bennettia</td>
<td>Hammer oyster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Girirtijj</td>
<td>Barrabiyanarraj</td>
<td>Girirtijji*</td>
<td>Coltellina paropsis</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Dhungku</td>
<td>Anjdjima</td>
<td>Dhukuray*</td>
<td>Nerita polita</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Bagungharr'pani</td>
<td>Mathawatu</td>
<td>Dhukurray*</td>
<td>Nerita lineas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bojirringarra</td>
<td>Delgingingi*</td>
<td>Coltellina</td>
<td>Malleus albus, Metapenea bennettia</td>
<td>Hammer oyster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gundirtaninj</td>
<td>Andjahaykida</td>
<td>Djilku*</td>
<td>Gyraulus arnaceus</td>
<td>False trumpet</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Birrajja</td>
<td>Latha</td>
<td>Gadarr*</td>
<td>Gyraulus arnaceus, Maculatus, Maculatus</td>
<td>Corals generic</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Latha</td>
<td>Latha</td>
<td>Ganpur*</td>
<td>Latona cuneata, Charnidise cruculata</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mirriya</td>
<td>Djimmiirri</td>
<td>Ginniggryal*</td>
<td>Physopax kuraadai, Acanthopleura gemmata</td>
<td>Hairy crab</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Guwarrumg</td>
<td>Djinipanbudha</td>
<td>Djilu*</td>
<td>Physopax kuraadai, Acanthopleura gemmata</td>
<td>Hairy crab</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Djerrka</td>
<td>Badama*</td>
<td>Eoibium aurisjudae</td>
<td>Physopax kuraadai, Acanthopleura gemmata</td>
<td>Oyster</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Waygaka</td>
<td>Waygaka</td>
<td>Yunuji*</td>
<td>Thias kieneri, trigonous, Maximellla exinata, arnicera</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Nukurrakrak</td>
<td>Nukurrakrak</td>
<td>Nannari*</td>
<td>Thias kieneri, trigonous, Maximellla exinata, arnicera</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Dimirrway</td>
<td>Niniki*</td>
<td>Turrinita terebra</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Waypanbininj</td>
<td>Anindjirrirri</td>
<td>Turrinita terebra</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Wurruru-wurruru</td>
<td>Wurruru</td>
<td>Wurruru*</td>
<td>Turrinita terebra</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Maguq</td>
<td>Anamogomogo</td>
<td>Gulkari*</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Girripi</td>
<td>Bamparrarwarr</td>
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<td>Placuna, Placuna placenta*</td>
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<td>Yungulali</td>
<td>Yungulali*</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Dhalarrpaninj</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Dhajimbut</td>
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<td>Aawarpanba</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Aawarpanba</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Nyoka</td>
<td>Ungalidjirruwa</td>
<td>Nyoka*</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Nalawili</td>
<td>Dharuma</td>
<td>Dharuma*</td>
<td>Melo umbiculatus</td>
<td>Balar shell</td>
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</table>
### Table 33 Shellfish species present in archaeological sites on Murrungga Island 1998 cont

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-nhaŋu</th>
<th>Burarra</th>
<th>Gugpapunya*</th>
<th>Lineaus</th>
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<td>Naawili</td>
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<td>Manuyalat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimaynu</td>
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<td>Dimaynu*</td>
<td>Lurugada</td>
<td>Namburra</td>
<td>Nakanyu</td>
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<td>Dharawudha</td>
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<td>Dharawudha</td>
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<td>Nonda</td>
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<td>Gurrugurru</td>
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</table>

It was found that the sixty six shellfish species present in recent archaeological sites at Murrungga originate from a number of distinct ecological systems. For heuristic purposes these ecological zones and associated shellfish species are further separated into categories. Firstly, they are separated into those originating from marine and or estuarine derived environments and then into specific ecological zones.
Table 34 Shellfish species and ecological zones at Murrunga Island 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yan-ohagu</th>
<th>Outer reef</th>
<th>Middle reef</th>
<th>Inner reef</th>
<th>Sand bar</th>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>Mud</th>
<th>Sapphire</th>
<th>Mangrove</th>
<th>Salt flat</th>
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<td>nyndjia</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 35 Shellfish species and ecological zones at Murrunga Island 1998 cont

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outer reef</th>
<th>Middle reef</th>
<th>Inner reef</th>
<th>Sand bar</th>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>Mud</th>
<th>Samphire</th>
<th>Mangrove</th>
<th>Salt flat</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yan-ylungu</td>
<td>wiyaŋul</td>
<td>gaŋga</td>
<td>djinaŋa</td>
<td>munatha</td>
<td>bala</td>
<td>djudum</td>
<td>muŋun</td>
<td>jarthha</td>
<td>nyndja</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It was found that the following species were not present in sites created after 1932. It was also found that these species are no longer available on Murrunga Island.
Table 36 Estuarine Species Extinct on Murrungga Island After (1932)

<table>
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Ethnographic investigation revealed that a cyclonic storm caused a mass extinction of shellfish after the December/January Barramirr season of 1932. This storm event caused all shellfish species originating from estuarine habitats on the Island of Murrungga to become extinct. This storm is said to have been caused by sorcery enacted by the Walamanu woman Dundirr at Murrungga (see Chapter seven)
Appendix Five:

Method and analysis of the marine turtle economy 2000 - 4

Reliability and coverage of data

The collection of quantitative data relating to turtle utilisation was obtained over four years, between 1.1.2000 and 1.1.2004. This period of observation incorporated the collection of information on numbers; species, sex, frequency and quantity of turtle products collected and exchanged in and around the wider Crocodile Islands area as defined in Chapter Seven.

Data was gathered in the 40 weeks of the Australian Northern Territory school term each year, and some of the holidays. On average, I was absent from the Islands for 4-5 weeks of the year, from December to January and three to four weeks in June to July. Researcher absence for four to six weeks each year from December to January falls within the Yolŋu season of Barra’mirr. This is a time in the Crocodile Islands of strong wind, rain and turgid seas with low visibility for turtle hunting. These seasonal characteristics coupled with diminution of turtle egg laying means that few turtles are observed and or captured in this period. These seasonal marine turtle behaviour correspond to observations made by eastern Australian and Torres Straits Islander researchers (Limpus et al; 1994; 2001:43 Nietschmann 1977: 26).

The accuracy and completeness of data coverage on hunting, cooking and distribution of turtle was assisted by my close proximity of residence and the easy access to participants during cooking and distribution events. Long term familiarity with the island’s hunting crews, genealogical and kin relations and group simplified data crosschecking. Additionally, interviews with informants and visits to the cooking site after consumption to count discarded turtle shells provided sound data validation. I recorded 74 successful hunting trips in the study area in four years. Although unsuccessful hunting trips were not formally recorded, I estimate with high probability that two out of every three hunting trips were successful. Consequently, an average of thirty turtle hunting missions were launched each year in the four year period and approximately twenty of those were successful each year.
Although I went on many hunting operations the greater part of the information I recorded came from interviewing participants upon their return. I documented the names of the crew members, their role, ba:purru group Yan-nhaŋu or non-Yan-nhaŋu affiliation, the name and affiliation of the capture site so to distinguish the amount of turtle caught in each estate over the year.

Cooking location is a decisive factor influencing the distribution analysis of turtle exchange by residence groups. Milingimbi hosted 62 percent of cooking events over four years and Murrunga Island hosted a further 18 percent. Other remote islands constitute the remaining 20 percent of the total cooking events. I visited the outer Crocodile Island of Murrunga for two to three days each week over the four years at which time I documented data on capture and exchange patterns. At Milingimbi five major named turtle oven sites shared the turtle cooking events over four years. These turtle oven sites were Milingimbi (M 1), Narawunju (M 3), Bininmiringuli (M 46), Namuyani (M 60), and Dham-dham (M 61). Four are found within an 800m precinct, along the beach and in close proximity to my house (see appendix six).

Intermittently hunting crews cook on the remote islands at named turtle ovens although, crews usually prefer to cook turtles at turtle ovens near their residences. For example, occasionally hunting parties associated with the seasonal collection of tern and seagull eggs on the island of Gurriba cooked turtles on the island. I verified the physical remains of cooking by visiting the turtle oven site at Gininygurra (G 5) on Gurriba on a number of occasions. 20 percent of cooking events occurred at named turtle ovens on smaller Islands. The breakdown follows: Bodjiirk Island (B 1) hosting 8 percent of the total turtle harvest cooking events, Garrangarnga (Ga 1) with 5 percent and Gurriba (G 1) with 4 percent. (see appendix seven)

To enable analysis and promote the comparison of Yan-nhaŋu and non Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru group participation I classified the core group of brothers in each turtle hunting crew with their ba:purru group affiliation as a ba:purru designation. Consequently, Yan-nhaŋu brothers were designated as a Yan-nhaŋu hunter group. Conversely, a crew of non Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru brothers and affines was designated as a non-Yan-nhaŋu hunter group. The hunter crews made up of brothers changed little over the years. Consequently, these designations reflect strongly personal kin relationships between crew members in turtle hunting of both Yan-nhaŋu and non
Yan-nhaŋu groups and generating predictability in the pattern of turtle exchanges adding to the reliability of data.

*Method of Turtle Distributions Data Collection*

The process of turtle partition is dealt with at length by McCarthy (1960), Smith 83-85, Bradley, 349-357, and Rouja 141-150, 234-237) Barber Appendix 1, 26-9 2005). I attended more than forty turtle cooking events at all of the named turtle ovens on the inner and outer islands during the study period. I interviewed and recorded the details of all of the distribution events that I was unable to attend. I recorded the roles of the hunters present and kin attending the primary distribution process. I designated the primary and secondary distribution to a baːpurru group based on two principle criteria (see Chapter Seven). Primary distribution was designated by turtle hunting role. Secondary distribution was designated by baːpurru using criteria Yoŋu employed in distribution procedures. Initialy, senior people directing distributions along kin lines were followed. In the next case secondary distributions were designated by the numerical representation of a particular baːpurru group present. Exchanges were analysed for the relative representation of Yan-nhaŋu and non Yan-nhaŋu baːpurru group participation.

*Reliability and Coverage of Egg Harvest Data*

Data on turtle egg collection was gathered for forty of the fifty two weeks of each year in same manner as employed for turtle hunting data. I quantified the numbers of marine turtle nests by participating in a little over four hundred turtle nest collection events over four years. In this way I was able to collect data on the substance of nest harvest and associated cultural meanings. Four of the five species of turtle hunted in the Crocodile islands lay their eggs in a seasonal pattern on the island of Murrunga. The number of laying events diminishes in the Christmas holidays (December) Dhuŋudhurr. This turtle behaviour corresponds with the low numbers of data recorded during the November and December period, whereas observer absence is the reason for more incomplete data recorded during June. Researcher absence in June is represented by low numbers of egg laying events during the peak egg-laying season of Dharratharramirr.

In addition egg collection took place in my absences on a weekly basis. Correspondingly, I reconstructed the nest harvest rates based on testimony and
Appendix No.5

evidence in the form of foot prints left at the site of extraction. In the school holidays
during the Dharratharramirr June/July season the majority of nesting takes place on the
outer islands. Although absent at this time I conducted regular informal interviews by
telephone with custodians responsible for collecting activities.

I documented the name of the site where a nest was harvested, harvester identity and
ba:purru group affiliation, and the number of eggs in each nest. Where the number of
eggs deposited per species (where not available a species average was computed,
including the minimum value, average, and maximum clutch size). I recorded the
cooking site name, date of cooking and exchanges of eggs. I recorded the
developmental stage using the Yan-nhaju system for predicting the timing of returning
gravid turtles Gayanga Gaku Walirr Winniyubal (GGWW) (lit: reasoning of the egg
return time) (GGWW). Egg development categories are a key concern to collectors
because of changes to the aroma, flavour, texture and culinary potentials of different
egg stages. Like shellfish for the Anbarra, eggs are a key subsistence strategy
providing an ‘alternative, or “fall back”, food source after other foraging expeditions
have proven unsuccessful’ (Meehan 1982: 112). Understanding of the GGWW and its
manipulation by timing nest harvest promotes diversity in the choice and flavour of
food types available in the ‘carte du jour’ of the daily diet on the homelands (see also
Appendix Six:

Yan-nhaŋu sites in the Crocodile Islands

Map 25 Walamaŋu sites
### Table 37 Walamanu Sites Crocodile Islands

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### Table 38 Malarra/Gunbirritji sites Crocodile Islands

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Map 27 Gamalang sites

Gamalang sites
Crocodile Islands
### Table 39 Gamalaŋa sites Crocodile Islands

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Map 28 Gurryindi sites

Gurryindi Sites
Crocodile Islands

Appendix No. 6
# Appendix No. 6

Table 40 Gurryindi sites Crocodile Islands

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Appendix Seven:

Map of sites referred to in the text
Map 29 Locations of sites referred to in the text
Map 30 Locations mapped on Gurriba Is

Legend
- Reef
- Sand dune
- Light scrub
- Paperbark forest
- Heavy forest

Scale
1km
Map 31 Locations mapped on Milingimbi Is
Appendix No. 7

Map 32 Locations mapped on Rapuma Is

Legend
- Reef
- Fresh water
- Mudflats
- Open Euc Forest
- Semi closed coastal shrub
- Mangroves
- Sand dunes
- Reefs

Rapuma

Legend
- Reef
- Fresh water
- Mudflats
- Open Euc Forest
- Semi closed coastal shrub
- Mangroves
- Sand dunes
- Reefs
Map 33 Locations mapped on Garuma Is

Banyan Island
Garuma
Gawilŋur

Legend
- Paperbark
- Mudflats
- Mangroves
- Open Euc Forest

Scale
0 1km 2km

Gurruwunway
Djilkarraymirri
Mayaŋa
Mayaŋa

Gulkaya ck

3 12
4 5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

Gulkaya ck

326
Map 34 Locations mapped on Murrunga Is
Map 35 Locations mapped on Galiwin’ku Is
Appendix Eight:

Map of the Crocodile Islands and Castlereagh Bay
Map 36 English and Yan-nhaŋu site names in the Crocodile Islands
Glossary of Yan-nhaŋu Terms

*significant ritual element including moiety and specific affiliation

Angutchatjia/dhaku fish trap style made by Burarra and Yan-nhaŋu people exhibiting a funnel shape with a retroflex valve at the open end to inhibit fish escape *Dhuwa

ba:day ceremonial string/sea weed/turtle hunting rope *Dhuwa Malarra. Madayin signifying the key relationship with turtles also for Gurryindi balgut, and Gamalaŋga rawu

ba:purru people, groups and things sharing inter-related, focal, aspects of a common identity comprised of shared ancestral essences, including sites, madayin, wanjarr, rom, from which derive a least-inclusive usage of a group name, clans, sibs, and mala-ma pairs, may also refer to mortuary rituals

ba:purru walipma ‘one group’, an association of groups of different identity, also sharing a specific identity making them one group, eg Mandjikay, Mariŋa

ba:rra west from the Macassarese barrat *Dhuwa Gamalaŋga/Liyagalawumirr

ba:rra’mirr season in January-February with westerly winds

badarr bark tree forest

badarru milky way *Dhuwa Gamalaŋga/Liyagalawumirr

banumbirr morning star, Venus *Dhuwa Malarra/Liyagalawumirr

banumbirr dhupthana early morning/Venus in decline

banu this way, syn: rai̍li

banugin cup/container, syn: nunguŋa

banku that way, syn: bala

balgur Brachychiton paradoxis flowering signifies the season of seagull and tern eggs collection at Gurriba North west Crocodile island

baga-paga sooty oyster catcher *Dhuwa Gamalaŋga

baka-bakmiyanu pay back/respond to kinship obligation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bakulunha/mila</td>
<td>collect/gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balanda/biriyanararu</td>
<td>European/white person, distinct from Yolŋu white/white people, from- biriya-prayer- white people Lir: those given to prayer, as were the first Europeans met by Yan-nhanju people in the 1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balyun</td>
<td>beg/cadge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baman</td>
<td>the past, ṇatjili baman and bamanpirr is the far distant past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bambi/bandurruŋ</td>
<td>Dasyatis fluviorum, shovel nose ray *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bara weyal</td>
<td>turtle egg gestation stage one to six days old in which the turtle egg is translucent and calcification forms on the shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bararrŋu</td>
<td>Yolŋu group from the Wessels Islands speaking the Nhanju language shared with the Bararrpararr, Golpa, and Yalukal, from the same proto-nhanju parent language as Yan-nhanju languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barku/dhawal</td>
<td>far off/distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barkuwatj</td>
<td>dissimilar/apart, the opposite of galki/yi-gurrepa close, similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrangunha</td>
<td>Urolophus sp, eagle ray *Dhuwa Malarr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrala</td>
<td>sand bar, syn: batpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrandji</td>
<td>sugar glider *Dhuwa Malarr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrathala</td>
<td>strong/stiff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrawan</td>
<td>bark canoe small gal-gal Dhuwa, and the large dirrka Yirritja made of sewn bark up to 40 foot with a sail(layarra), distinct from the dug-out lipa-lipa or ranan Makassan origin na:ku' dirrka, buyku, djutu, warmarr’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bathi</td>
<td>basket/bag/woven pandanus bag/container/ ritual bag names signify specific groups, Gurryindi/muwala, Malarr /ŋalka, gayawu, Gamalanga /mindiŋŋ/ Walamanju/ganangirr, Liyagawumirr /guwilirr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bayŋu</td>
<td>continuous particle, syn: ŋuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben</td>
<td>eat, syn: luka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben yalyunaway</td>
<td>alternative food/desire for different food, syn: matha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yalyunhamirr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>betŋu</td>
<td>fish trap/ woven flat sheets of grass/pandanus *Dhuwa Gurryindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biŋma</td>
<td>clap sticks/ category of song/song rhythms bequeathed by the waŋarr *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bin'ku</td>
<td>from there sum, syn: beŋur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>binpa</td>
<td>splinter/wing/shard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bin-wanha</td>
<td>always/everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biriyanaŋaru</td>
<td>white/white people, from- biriya-prayer- white people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lit: those given to prayer, as were the first Europeans met by Yan-nhanju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birrimbirr</td>
<td>benign aspects of the Yolŋu animating force, now often referred to as the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birrkbirrkŋaniŋ</td>
<td>lap wing plover *Dhuwa Malarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitak</td>
<td>spangled perch *Dhuwa Gamalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boŋduk</td>
<td>spotted wood roach *Dhuwa Gamalanga/Marrançu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boa’mirr</td>
<td>mad/bamabama, dull/yalŋi soft, retarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bokmana</td>
<td>creation-acts that instantiate the law; rom, at particular sites wangala, imbuing ancestral animating power ma:rr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buŋgawa</td>
<td>captain/boss/Maccassan loan word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bundhurr</td>
<td>ritual names or “power” names - describe ritually significant words called out at important moments in ritual performance linking concepts of people, places, and ancestors. Yan-nhanju people habitually use the expression bunddur rather than the more widely known likan ‘elbow’ term, syn: gunburr, bugali, burrep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bubaitjway biriyanaŋaru</td>
<td>senior person/elder/white haired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burarra/Burera</td>
<td>language group comprised of kin to the Yan-nhanju from the Matai, Anbarra, Gun-nardba, Gidjingarli and Goragormi groups living immediately west of the Crocodile Islands on the mainland at Cape Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burr'bu</td>
<td>curse/incantation, sorcery technique syn: nyerra, nyirra and wiyarriŋa*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burralku</td>
<td>the island of the morning star banumbirr (Venus) from whence the Djaŋ’kawu came *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burrugu</td>
<td>sharks particularly the emerging young of the black tipped reef shark Carcharhinus spallanzan *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
burrugumirri  season in beginning of midawarr March-May with gentle with south easterly winds when the young of the black tipped reef shark Carcharhinus spallanzan eggs hatch

burrumitipa  rock cod *Dhuwa Gurryindi

da:kanu/dhumungur  FZDDC, father’s sister’s daughter’s daughter’s child

dha:  mouth/opening/ gapu dha, near shore ocean known for changeability and spitting out sounds, guythana

dha:yuny  story/tale

dha:Kay gulkhana  divide/cut a piece/share/shared mundane or ritual element used to invoke relatedness e.g. language style, dance style, song style

Dhanju  linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Wangurri, Rirratjingu, Golumala, Datiwuy, Njamil and Galpu ba:purru

dhamala  white breasted sea eagle *Dhuwa

dhamphana  enter/go in

dhamphun munuguba  late night/Pleiades descending below horizon

dhapi  foreskin/ceremony describes both ritual itself and initiand. Circumcision ceremonies form a ‘regional’ suite sharing common themes and include the Mandayala, Gunapi, Djungwuan, and Nulmarrk and the Yirritja moiety Yabaqurrwa

dharratharramirr  season in May-June-July with strong easterly winds

dhawal gayaṇa  Lit: child site think/natal site/birth place

dhawarak/gaminyarr  ZSC(DC) sister’s son’s or daughter’s child

dhawathun  come out/exit/emerge

Dha’yi  linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Wuμumurra, Gumana, Wawilak and Ritharrŋu groups

dhin’thun  follow/track

dhuqlakthana  prohibition on invoking the spirits/uttering names of the dead

dhuŋupalbu  fish that live amongst the rocks and reefs

dhula/nhanju  here/this, syn: dhuwal/ dhuwal
**Glossary of Yan-nhanjuy terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dhuludur</td>
<td>season in October-December with northerly winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhulway</td>
<td>saltwater wayarr/sea space/muddy water of the inshore Crocodile Islands linking Walamaqu and Gamal in the Walamaqu ritual complex*Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhumi</td>
<td>bottom/significant opposite of gangiya on top/trifling/insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhumirriju</td>
<td>husband (woman speaking) FZC, syn: dhuway, dhuwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhupun</td>
<td>exhumation and hollow log re-burial commemorations; Lorrkun, Larrakitj, Djalambu<em>Yirritja Daymirr, Dembuka, Larratjatja</em>Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurrpa</td>
<td>track, footprint and ‘footstep’ often used with luku or djalkirri to indicate animal tracks and signs of ancestral passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurrukuju</td>
<td>follow ancestral law/behave well, exp: dhurrukuju garana bayju rumrumthana garayw, following in the footsteps (way/approach/doctrine) of the ancestors, alt; dhurrukuju rutka dudakthana garaywa garana do not break the law, syn: dhin’tun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td>moiety/patrilineral semi moiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwalamirri</td>
<td>language-variety spoken by Yirritja moiety—patrilineral groups in the linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/her and spoken by Gumatj, Gupapuyju (Birrkili, Daygurrngurr, Guyamirrilili), Wubulkarra, Madarrpa (monuk), Makarrwanhalmirri, Mangalili and Munyuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwalmirr</td>
<td>language-variety spoken by Dhuwa moiety—patrilineral groups in the linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/her and spoken by Liyagawumirr, Datiwuy, Dhapuyuju, Djambarrpuuyju (Dhurili, Guyula, Wutjara), Djapu, Liyagawumirr Marrakulu, and Marraju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhuyu</td>
<td>most sacred, known only with authorisation by senior men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimurru</td>
<td>east from the Makassarese timor*Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dja:goway</td>
<td>carer/guardian, one who looks after, role of the Ma:ri MM(B), MM, MMBSS(D) (mother’s mothers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djaj’kawu sisters</td>
<td>(Djankawu, Djangkawu, Djang’kawu, Djanggawul, Djankgao) Two sisters, and sometimes a brother held to be the primary wayarr ancestors said to have created the lands and ancestors of of North east Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Yan-nhaju terms

*Dhuwa* moiety: the are said to have created the countries of *Rirratjiŋu, Nya:ymil, Da:tiwuy, Djambarpuynju, Liyadhalinmirr, Liyagawumirr, Liyagalawumirr, Maļarra/Gunbirriṯiṯi, Man-harrŋu, Gamalanga, Gurryindi, Matal* and on to the sunset. The myth underlies the performance of the *Dhuwa Nja:rra* ritual

*Djaju*: linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by *Warramirri, Lamamirri, Girrikirri* and *Barraparra* groups

*Djalatan*: south from the Makassarese *selatang*

*Djalkirri/luku*: foot/footprint/root/ancestral identity/

*Djamarrkuriŋu mali*: children’s’ spirits are the essence animating spirit of human life said to communicate with the father and *marngitj* sorcerers

*Djambatj*: harpoon tip first to hit the turtle, and the second is called *nika nhaju*, also expert harpooner/auspicious hunter/eminent, earning a right to distribute choice cuts of turtle and dugong, prestige and renown

*Djanda*: *Varanus* sp, goanna *Dhuwa*

*Djeda munguguba*: after midnight/milky way decline

*Djewulŋaŋkaraŋgal*: seaweed*Dhuwa/Yirritja*

*Djilŋi*: beloved/favourite

*Djinaj*: linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by *Wulaki, Man-nharrŋu, Murrunjuni and Dadiwitji* groups, probably derived from a *Nhaju* parent language

*Djinahu*: mud wall fish trap

*Djinaga*: inside/secret/restricted

*Djinagabo*: *fish of the inner reefs*

*Djinba*: linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by *Ganalbiŋu, Da:bi, Walmapuy* and *Mandjalpuynju* groups, probably also derived from the *Nhaju* parent language

*Djini*: there, syn: *dhuwala*

*Djirrimol*: fist sized turtle cooking rocks

*Djjudum*: soft tidal muds
### Glossary of Yan-nhaŋu terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>djungaya</td>
<td>manager, (person of MMM or ZD waku (*pulu) relations to the ceremonies and land of his mother's clan (managing the sacra of their mothers' group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>da:l</td>
<td>strong/hard/potent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dada</td>
<td>smoke purification ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dikarr</td>
<td><em>Cypselurus melanocercus</em>, flying fish <em>Dhuwa Maŋarra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dilak</td>
<td>adult/old person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dlilji</td>
<td>back/spine/bush/inland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dumimurru</td>
<td>signifying the real underlying story/ restricted knowledge of underlying identity of an estate/possession of maŋayin, Syn rulka gankiya dhudikurr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaŋarra</td>
<td>corals and coral reefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gadayka</td>
<td><em>Eucalyptus tetradonta</em>, stringy bark <em>Dhuwa Gamalanga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaku</td>
<td>eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galinydjil</td>
<td>inter-tidal waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galimirriŋu, galay</td>
<td>W (MMBDC) male’s potential wife or wife’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galka/ragalk/gal</td>
<td>sorcerer possessed of spirit familiars, mali, mayili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galtha</td>
<td>ritual creating and marking consensus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Gamalanga             | Garmalangga, Karmalanga, Kokolango, Kokolangomala  
  *Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru*                         |
| gamunungu             | painting/ colour/ pattern/ white clay                                                          |
| ganaba                | leave/discard                                                                                  |
| ganatjirri/gapu       | water, syn: gannak, bugula                                                                     |
| ganatjirri malŋ’thunaway | literally following the water, denotes the source of the animating ancestral life spark, one’s ‘country of the water’ bugula bukuŋarra (‘begot of the water’) |
| ganatjirri dįŋgamurriyun | distant sea sound of rumbling, the sea speaking                                                      |
| ganatjirri gulun      | is the middle, or ‘tummy’ of the ocean with the tide yarrŋ’yarrthun, known for its gentleness and generosity |
| ganatjirri mundaka    | distant sea/far ocean/ the sea that speaks, syn: wulumba  
  *Dhuwa*                                             |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Glossary of Yan-nhanu terms</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ganatjirri wirripanhaba</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ganinyidi/dhona</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gankiya</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ganma</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ganyingirr</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>garngiyabo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>garma</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>garrala</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>garriwa</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>garriwa gaku madapharranju! exp: ‘Ah turtle egg giver of joy!’</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>garun</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gatjamirriŋu/mukul ba:pa</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gatjamu/ga:thu</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gatpiyun</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gawudalpudal</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gayanyaway</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gayanga gaku walirr winniyubal</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gaykayŋapi</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gahuŋurrungitj</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ganygiya</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>gidiwak</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>girri</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>git git</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gonj wukundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gothana yitiwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gubberman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guku girriyanabaupal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukuja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulnu walipma yathi walkur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulnu/mumalkur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulnuugukwaku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluk namathana yamayun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluk djuyun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gulun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluwurru</td>
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<tr>
<td>gulu'kulunu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gumurr dutji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gujuju/mukul rumaru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gunuju/ba:pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gupa namayun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurrmirriju</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

gurruŋu  
kin/relation/family member

Gurryindi  
Gorryindi Guri:ndi Dhuwa Yan-nhanju ba:purru

gurup/runganyu  
FZDC, father’s sister’s daughter’s child

gutjuŋu, gutharra  
ZDCM SC, FFZDC grandchild, the child of a son

gutjingu pulu  
(ZDC) group, from whom your group, that is ego’s group, received gifts or the parents of the wife

guwartji  
Eretmochelys imbricata, hawksbill turtle *Yirritja

guwilurr  
sacred dilly bag*Dhuwa Liyagawumirr

guwikthana’ba  
ancestor invocations/incantations or curses controlling ancestral powers by speaking special names bundur, syn: guwikthun, guykthun

guya  
fish/boney fish

guykthana  
spit/spurt/curse

guyulan mitji gulun riyaway  
mid night/milky way in the middle of the night sky

lapakarra  
spotted tree goanna Varanus sp *Dhuwa Gamalanga

larratjaytjay  
barracouta *Dhuwa Maľarra

lambilpuma  
lightning snake *Yirritja Walamanju

larrtha  
mangroves

laymarrama  
misdirection/subterfuge/trickery

likan  
elbow/aspect of group identity/sacred name, syn:
bundhurr

Liyagawumirr  
(Liagalwamiri,Liagaomir,Dämbugawmirir/Garrawrura,Buyuyugululmirr,Matjarra). Dhuwalmirr speaking group close ma:ri to Maľarra/Guŋbirtti

lolo djinabu  
mud fish trap employed at special sites on the inner islands *Yirritja

lolo maranilŋa nanduwa  
fish traps on the reef flats at special sites on the outer islands*Dhuwa

lolo munathaŋa  
fish traps with sandy floors on the outer islands*Dhuwa

luŋgu  
harpoon/turtle harpoon/maŋayin*Dhuwa Gamalanga

luŋgurrma  
north wind and cardinal point *Yirritja from the Makassarese utara

339
Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

ma:li mayili/mailli image/meaning/essence/spirit mali or djamarrkurlu mali (children’s’ spirits) syn: wunjili, gapu malŋ’ thunaway

ma:muku wukundi/maralkur MMB, mother’s mother’s brother

ma:muku/ma:ri’mu FF(Z) father’s father and sister

ma:nba bottle nose dolphin *Dhuwa Gamalinga

ma:ri MM(B), MMBSS(D) ma:ri (mother’s mothers)

ma:ri manydji also gutharra-manydji grand child-grand parent reciprocal-ma:ri-gutharra( ma:ri -MM(B), FF(Z), MMBSS(D) –gutjinya/gutharra ZDCM SC, FFZDC may be shortened to (MM-wDC)

ma:ri-pulu MM group providing mothers-in-law for ego

ma:rr super natural creative essence, power, strength, spirit, faith, personality, linked to ancestral essences

ma:rr ganjga galkimiyama exp: ‘a little bit close’, an all purpose equivocator in the class of ‘same but different’, gently blurring

ma:rmirriw lack of power/deficit, may require compensation

madakarrritj dangerous/angry

madayin mardayin/marrayin/mu-dayan, sacred, secret, holy, taboo including objects or species containing consubstantial ancestor essence an important sacred ceremony, syn: dhuyu, dharrpal, djok

makarr/yutungurr thigh/mainland/song poetry

makarratja conflict resolution ceremony

malagatj dangerous wanarr usually appearing in human form with characteristically recognisable markings

Malkurra Yirritja Yan-nhanju ritual association of groups

man’ijarr Ceriops sp, mangrove tree, purification ritual burning leaves to dispel spirits. Wood used for cooking nathumu, Tacca leoncontapenoides Malaysian arrowroot. *Dhuwa Man-nharrju

Malarra/Gunbirritjji (Malarra/Malarra/Yan(n)nhangu/Gunbirr/Gunbirri/Gunbirrtji/Gunbirrdji/Gunbirrji). Malarra referring to saltwater (maramba) aspects of the group and Gunbirritjji indicating the dry land (mulka-da:lthara) aspects of the people’s ancestral endowments Dhuwa Yan-nhanju ba:purru
### Glossary of Yan-nhanu terms

- **Mandjikay**: (Mandjiagi) *Yirritja* ritual association linking groups speaking *Djaju* to *Burrara* sharing floating wood, fish and rock *wanya*

- **Manikay**: a genre public ritual songs, accompanied by clapsticks and didjeridu; may also used generically to refer to song items (a performance) song subjects (the specific subject matter) and song series (an assemblage of songs)

- **Man-nharrju**: *Djinaŋ* speaking *Dhuwa* group

- **Manutji bulthanaway**: telling the eye/signifying/bringing to mind/calendar species, e.g. the red flowering kurrajong tree *balgurru* (*Brachychiton paradoxus*) flowers tell Gamalanga people that the crested tern *djaraŋ* (*Sterna bergii*) are laying eggs on the beach at Gurriba

- **Manutji rathaway**: turtle egg gestation period from between fourteen to twenty eight days in which the baby turtle is visible on opening, with the egg becoming turgid and the albumen becoming salty

- **Maramba**: salt water sea space and *wanya* extending from Murrunga out past the Wessels Islands *Dhuwa Malarra*

- **Maranil**: rock platforms at the seas’ edge

- **Mardapthurraŋu**: joy giver/endearment

- **Marrgingitj**: medicine man cult possessed of spirit familiars, *mali*

- **Marranjalk**: cartilaginous fish/sting rays

- **Marrawatja**: SC grand child, child of son

- **Marriŋa**: (Marringo) *Dhuwa* Yan-nhanu ritual saltwater complex linking *Gurryindi, Malarra* and *Gamalanga*

- **Matha**: language/tongue, syn: yan

- **Mayaŋa**: creeks/rivers

- **Maypal**: shellfish edible/bivalve/gastropod

- **Mayangbu**: fish that live in rivers

- **Mayalttha winds**: season in February-March with gentle north easterly

- **Mewana**: *Cyperus conicus*, fish trap fibre

- **Midawarr**: season in March-May gentle with south easterly winds

- **Milgirriŋ**: brief ritual seclusion on first menses
Glossary of Yan-nhantu terms

*minyti*  paintings, colours and patterns

*mirrirri*  strict law of censure on reference to woman’s name, or reference to private functions, or incestuous connotation in the presence of a brother

*mithirri*  Gymnura australis, eagle ray *Yirrija Mldjngi*

*mitjil/mala*  group/collection/ *ba:purru*

*mokuy/nyuy*  ghost/spirit of the dead

*momu*  FM (MFZ) father’s mother

*motj*  (muir). Category of snake like *wajarr* connected to the Wawilak mythology and including *Mndjyala, Gunapipi, Djnguwan* and *Nulmark* ceremonies

*muduthu*  Lepidocheles olivacea, Pacific or Olive Ridley turtle *Dhuwa*

*mulanda*  white breasted wood swallow *Dhuwa*

*munilibili*  seasonal coral spawn *Yirritja*

*mananja*  thief/robber/commercial fishermen

*munathanja gabalarra*  permanently submerged sands

*munathanja dhalkyar*  sand dunes/fore dunes

*mununj/munjun*  sapphire/rarely inundated mudflats

*munjubi gabiyana*  mid morning

*munjuguba banumbirr giriyan*  evening/Venus rising

*muru*  food of all types

*Murrunga*  (Mjunnga, Marunga, Marungga Moorongga Moorongga Moorronga, Walarra, Warrada, Warrada) Largest of the outer Crocodile Islands

*Murrunjun*  (Murrungun, Marungun) An alliance of groups sharing the *banumbirr* (morning star complex) including: Yan-nhantu Malarra/Gunbirritji, Djinaŋ speaking Wulaki, Wugiganydjarr, and Dhuwalmirr top Djapu

*muwala*  sacred dilly bag *Dhuwa Gurryindi*

*muyungu*  Tephrosia polyzyga, fish poison

*nj kanyu*  Anadarra granos, cockle shells *Yirritja Batjimurruŋu*

*njawili*  Melo umbiculatus, baler shell *Dhuwa*
Glossary of Yan-nhaŋu terms

ŋalka  |  sacred 'dilly' bag* Dhuwa Malarr
nhala  |  where, syn: wanka
ŋa:muŋuŋa:ndi  |  M, ZDDD, MBSD, mother
ŋandi pulu  |  (M), mother's group provides wives to male ego's group
ŋandjalaway  |  turning/change/become in ancestral transformation, syn: bilyun
ŋanybak/djali  |  ceremonial armbands
ŋanymarra  |  conical mat/utility bag/mat and cover, later flattened to sell to missionaries
ŋarra  |  preeminent local ceremony based focusing on the interdependence of by re-enacting the creations of ba:purru of the same moiety. Distinct from regional ceremonies involving people from both moieties with a wide variety of maŋayin
ŋangabo  |  fish dwelling in caves on the inside reefs
ŋaŋi, ŋathi  |  MF (MFB) grandfather-maternal
ŋatu  |  Cycas media nut bread, syn: dinku
Nhaŋu  |  linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Golpa (Gurlba), Barraŋu (Brangul), Yalukal and Gutiway groups
nhaŋu  |  this/here, syn: dhuwal
nhunu  |  you, syn: nhe
nyaŋbal  |  Poporiya sp, Dhuwa Malarr maŋayin
nyndjia  |  tidal salt flats
nyon  |  Holothurian sea slugs/ stupefactant/fish poison
ŋok-ŋok  |  owl* Yirritja
ŋoybu  |  fish that live near the bottom
ŋurrŋangabu  |  fore runners, 'old people', ancestral human beings, syn: ŋurrŋangal /bularkitj
ŋunhu  |  over there, syn ŋunha
ŋurruthirr  |  returning tide
Nyurrwulu  |  Yirritja Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>njuthulumu</td>
<td><em>Tacca leocoontepeniodes</em>, Malaysian arrowroot <em>Dhuwa Gurryindi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rakay</td>
<td><em>Eliocharis dulcis</em> sedge rush corm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raitjpa</td>
<td>haematite, iron oxide /ochre this variety sourced from Ganapay Galin'ku is highly sought and traded throughout North east Arnhem Land <em>Dhuwa Malarra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ranyia</td>
<td><em>Pandanas spiralis</em>, fibre for making fish traps, bags and mats, seed pods provide nuts <em>lu-k-luk</em>, apical growing point is a vegetable food <em>muru</em>, syn: <em>guγga, makuyuk</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rantanaba</td>
<td>spear/stab/poke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rangga</td>
<td><em>(ranga, rangga)</em> Restricted primary ritual paraphernalia/secret and sacred ritual objects <em>madayin</em>, often made of wood or stone and decorated with sacred designs representing particular ancestral beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ranjithirr</td>
<td>receding tide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapiny</td>
<td>freshwater/freshwater song series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapam</td>
<td>big name place, inclusive of many smaller place names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rarrandharr</td>
<td>season in August-September with a north west wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ratha</td>
<td>child/baby/toddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rawu</td>
<td><em>Brachychiton paradoxis</em>, ceremonial fibre, sea weed <em>Dhuwa Gamalanga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ringitj</td>
<td>ancestral element/ shared site of religious importance/shared ritual object/ sharing singing and names associated with a site at the confluence of several group’s countries, an embassy associated with ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rirrikulbu</td>
<td>fish that live in fresh water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riya waŋa</td>
<td>talk/consult with spirits/pray/wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riya wailirrway</td>
<td>midday/ sun overhead /turtle egg gestation stage between six –fourteen days growing calcification on the outer shell becomes completely opaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rogu</td>
<td><em>Ipomea tuba</em>, beach vine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rom</td>
<td>law/custom/way/behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rulka</td>
<td>negative/no, syn: <em>bayŋu</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>runu gulkurunju</em></td>
<td>small islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ruwuk</em></td>
<td>turtle egg gestation stage between twenty eight- forty eight days the egg becoming soft as the young turtle prepares to emerge, shell becomes papery in the last ten days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tjipi</em></td>
<td>flour paste, sugar, oysters and turtle eggs mixed together and lightly cooked often at Murrunga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wadaŋa</em></td>
<td>coastal hills/fore head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wadaŋa lup</em></td>
<td>head washing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wakal</em></td>
<td>fun/teasing/kidding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wakirnu</em></td>
<td>without relatives/unconnected/lower intestines/bilge man in a turtle hunting crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waku</em></td>
<td>ZC, FFZC, MMM(B)/children (woman speaking) or sister’s children (man speaking) manager (djungaya) for ego’s country and sacra, syn: gukulŋuguk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waku pulu</em></td>
<td>those people in the relation of ZC, FFZC, MMM(B)/children (woman speaking) or sister’s children (man speaking) to their mother’s groups sacra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walamanju</strong></td>
<td>(Walamangu, Wolamangu, Wallamungo) Yirritja Yan-nhanju ba:purru is also a collective name including Walamanju, Bindarrar and Nuruwula ba:purru walipma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>walipma</em></td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>walirr rirrpirru</em></td>
<td>sun going down/late afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wangurri</strong></td>
<td><em>Yirritja Dhanju</em> speaking ba:purru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waŋadanama</em></td>
<td>wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waŋarr</em></td>
<td>self-existent supernatural beings/ god/ creator/ ancestor/ spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wangala/waŋa nurrungitj</em></td>
<td>land/sea country/home site, syn: ñarraka waŋa,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>warnba</em></td>
<td>sunset/westerly/orange colours of sun set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wawa</em></td>
<td>B, brother/older brother/younger brother, yuku-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waranŋul</em></td>
<td>outside/open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>waypunaway</em></td>
<td>turtle boat paddler/driver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Yan-nhanu terms

weka turtle soup/intestinal fluids syn: yenhu
willirr shell/seashell debris/midden
wutij olive python, *Dhuwa
wiyangul middle/centre
wurrguluma Chelonia mydas, green turtle *Dhuwa
yakarra names
yakarra yirrpanaba naming/giving of names/cosmogonic act of ancestral naming, syn: ya:ku-mirriyangal
yan language/tongue/way of speaking

Yan-nhanu (Yaernungu, Yanango, Yarenango, Yannâdhângu, Jarnangu, Janjango, Jan:angu, Jaer-nungo , Janango). Socio-lectal designation for six patrilineal ba:purru comprising Walamänŋu, Malarrä, Gwalalânga, Gurryindi, Bindararr and NYrrâwura groups originating in the Crocodile Islands

yapa Z, sister
yarr’yarrngani Cassytha filiformis, coastal mistletoe *Dhuwa
yidâki didgeridoo/didjeridu/drone-pipe
yirralka bone country/ spiritual/ patrilineal site/ home, syn:
ŋarraka wanja

Yirritja Yirritja moiety—patrilineal semi-moiety

yinika coastal grasses
yol who/someone

Yolŋu (Yuulngu) human being/person/group of people from North east Arnhem Land, dark skinned person, Yolŋu distinct from European, syn: Murungin, Mewatj, Wulamba and Balamumu

yolŋu’-yulŋu people/reduplication of person

yothu-yindi small-big/child-mother/ Dhuwa/Yirritja/ owner/manager, ideology of mutual relations of care and obligation between all aspects of the cosmos

Yoyu---yo!!! exasperation/oh dear dear!!!
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355
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363
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Bibliography


*End*
Glossary of Yan-nhanu Terms

*significant ritual element including moiety and specific affiliation

Angutchatjia/dhaku  fish trap style made by Burarra and Yan-nhanu people exhibiting a funnel shape with a retroflex valve at the open end to inhibit fish escape *Dhuwa

ba:day  ceremonial string/sea weed/turtle hunting rope *Dhuwa Malarra. Madayin signifying the key relationship with turtles also for Gurryindi balgut, and Gamalanja rawu

ba:purru  people, groups and things sharing inter-related, focal, aspects of a common identity comprised of shared ancestral essences, including sites, madayin, wanjarr, rom, from which derive a least-inclusive usage of a group name, clans, sibs, and mala-mada pairs, may also refer to mortuary rituals

ba:purru walipma  ‘one group’, an association of groups of different identity, also sharing a specific identity making them one group, eg Mandjikay, Marija

ba:rra  west from the Macassarese barrat *Dhuwa Gamalanja/Liyagalawumirr

ba:rra’mirr  season in January-February with westerly winds

badarr  paperbark forest

badarru  milky way *Dhuwa Gamalanja/Liyagalawumirr

banumbirr  morning star, Venus *Dhuwa Malarra/Liyagalawumirr

banumbirr dhupthana  early morning/Venus in decline

banu  this way, syn: raili

banigin  cup/container, syn: nunguga

banku  that way, syn: bala

balgur  Brachychiton paradoxis flowering signifies the season of seagull and tern eggs collection at Gurriba North west Crocodile island

baga-paga  sooty oyster catcher *Dhuwa Gamalanja

baka-bakniyanu  pay back/respond to kinship obligation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bakulunha/mila</td>
<td>collect/gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balanda/biriyanaranju</td>
<td>European/white person, distinct from Yolŋu white/white people, from - biriya-prayer- white people Lir: those given to prayer, as were the first Europeans met by Yan-nhanju people in the 1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balyun</td>
<td>beg/cadge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baman</td>
<td>the past, ŋatili baman and bamanpirr is the far distant past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bambi/bandurrŋu</td>
<td>*Dasyatis fluviorum, shovel nose ray *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bara weyal</td>
<td>turtle egg gestation stage one to six days old in which the turtle egg is translucent and calcification forms on the shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bararrŋu</td>
<td>Yolŋu group from the Wessels Islands speaking the Nhanju language shared with the Bararrpararr, Golpa, and Yalukal, from the same proto- nhanju parent language as Yan-nhanju languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barku/dhawal</td>
<td>far off/distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barkuwaŋatj</td>
<td>dissimilar/apart, the opposite of galki/yi-gurrepa close, similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrangunha</td>
<td>*Urolophus sp, eagle ray *Dhuwa Maŋarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrala</td>
<td>sand bar, syn: batpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrandji</td>
<td>sugar glider *Dhuwa Maŋarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrathala</td>
<td>strong/stiff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrawan</td>
<td>bark canoe small gal-gal Dhuwa, and the large dirrka Yirritja made of sewn bark up to 40 foot with a sail(layarra), distinct from the dug-out lipa-lipa or ranan, Makassan origin na:ku' dirrka, buyku, djutu, warmarr'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bathi</td>
<td>basket/bag/woven pandanus bag/container/ ritual bag names signify specific groups, Gurryindi/muwala, Maŋarra /ŋalka, gayawu, Gamalanga /mindirr/ Walamanju/ganangirr, Liyagawumirr /guwilirr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bayŋu</td>
<td>continuous particle, syn: nuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben</td>
<td>eat, syn: luka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben yalyunaway yalyunhamirr</td>
<td>alternative food/desire for different food, syn: matha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>betŋu</td>
<td>fish trap/ woven flat sheets of grass/pandanus *Dhuwa Gurryindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biŋma</td>
<td>clap sticks/ category of song/song rhythms bequeathed by the waŋarr *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bin'ku</td>
<td>from there sum, syn: beŋur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>binpa</td>
<td>splinter/wing/shard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bin-wanha</td>
<td>always/everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biriyanaranŋu</td>
<td>white/white people, from- biriya-prayer- white people Lit: those given to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prayer, as were the first Europeans met by Yan-nhaŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birrimbirr</td>
<td>benign aspects of the Yolŋu animating force, now often referred to as the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birrkbirrkŋaniŋ</td>
<td>lap wing plover *Dhuwa Malarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitak</td>
<td>spangled perch *Dhuwa Gamalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boŋuk</td>
<td>spotted wood roach *Dhuwa Gamalanga/Marranŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boa'mirr</td>
<td>mad/bamabama, dull/yalŋi soft, retarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bokmana</td>
<td>creation-acts that instantiate the law; rom, at particular sites wangala,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>imbuing ancestral animating power ma:rr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buggawa</td>
<td>captain/boss/Maccassan loan word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bundhurr</td>
<td>ritual names or “power” names - describe ritually significant words called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>out at important moments in ritual performance linking concepts of people,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>places, and ancestors. Yan-nhaŋu people habitually use the expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bunddur rather than the more widely know likan ‘elbow’ term, syn:gunburr,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bugali, burrpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>babaitjway biriyanaranŋu</td>
<td>senior person/elder/white haired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burarra/Burera</td>
<td>language group comprised of kin to the Yan-nhaŋu from the Matai, Anbarra,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gun-nardba, Gidjingarli and Goragormi groups living immediately west of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crocodile Islands on the mainland at Cape Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burr'bu</td>
<td>curse/incantation, sorcery technique syn: nyerra, nyirra and wiyarrita*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burralku</td>
<td>the island of the morning star banumbirr (Venus) from whence the Djaj’kawu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>came *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burrugu</td>
<td>sharks particularly the emerging young of the black tipped reef shark Carcharhinus spallanzan *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms**

*burrugumirri*  
season in beginning of *midawarr* March-May with gentle with south easterly winds when the young of the black tipped reef shark *Carcharhinus spallanzani* eggs hatch

*burrumitypa*  
rock cod *Dhuwa Gurryindi*

*da:kanu/dhumungur*  
FZDDC, father's sister's daughter's daughter's child

*dha:*  
mouth/opening/ *gapu dha*, near shore ocean known for changeability and spitting out sounds, *guykthana*

*dha:yuny*  
story/tale

*dha:kanu* *gukthana*  
divide/cut a piece/share/shared mundane or ritual element used to invoke relatedness e.g. language style, dance style, song style

*Dhanu*  
linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Wangurri, Rirratji, Golumala, Datiwuy, Njamil and Galpu *ba:purru*

*dhamala*  
white breasted sea eagle *Dhuwa*

*dhamphana*  
enter/go in

*dhamphun munuguba*  
late night/Pleiades descending below horizon

*dhapi*  
foreskin/ceremony describes both ritual itself and initiant. Circumcision ceremonies form a 'regional' suite sharing common themes and include the *Mandayala, Gunapipi, Djuŋgwan*, and *Njalurra* and the *Yirritja* moiety *Yabururrwa*

*dharratharramirr*  
season in May-June-July with strong easterly winds

*dhawal gayana*  
Lit: child site think/natal site/birth place

*dhawarak/gaminyarr*  
ZSC(DC) sister's son's or daughter's child

*dhawathun*  
come out/exit/emerge

*Dha'yi*  
linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by *Wunjumurra, Gumana, Wawilak* and *Ritharrnu* groups

*dhin'wun*  
follow(track)

*dhudakthana*  
prohibition on invoking the spirits/uttering names of the dead

*dhunjupalbu*  
fish that live amongst the rocks and reefs

*dhula/nhanju*  
here/this, syn: *dhuwali* *duwal*

333
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dhuluqur'</td>
<td>season in October -December with northerly winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhulway</td>
<td>saltwater waparr/sea space/muddy water of the inshore Crocodile Islands linking Walamaqwu and Gamal in the Walamaqwu ritual complex*Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhumi</td>
<td>bottom/significant opposite of gangiya on top/trifling/insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhumirriŋu</td>
<td>husband (woman speaking) FZC, syn: dhuway, duwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhupun</td>
<td>exhumation and hollow log re-burial commemorations; Lorrkun, Larrakitj, Djalambu*Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daymirr, Dembuka, Larratjatja*Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurrpa</td>
<td>track, footprint and ‘footstep’ often used with luku or djalkirri to indicate animal tracks and signs of ancestral passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurrukuŋu</td>
<td>follow ancestral law/ behave well, exp; dhurrukuŋu garana bayŋu rumrumthana garayw, following in the footsteps (way/approach/doctrine) of the ancestors, alt; dhurrukuŋu rulka dudakthana garaya garana do not break the law, syn: dhin’thun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwa</td>
<td>moiety/patrilineral semi moiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwalamirri</td>
<td>language-variety spoken by Yirritja moiety—patrilineral groups in the linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Gumatj, Guypuyŋu (Birrkili, Daygurrŋurr, Guyamirriŋu), Wubulkarra, Madarrpa (monuk), Makarrwanhalmirri, Mangalili and Munyuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuwalmirr</td>
<td>language-variety spoken by Dhuwa moiety—patrilineral groups in the linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Liyagawumirr, Datiwuy, Dhapuyŋu, Djambarrpuyŋu (Dhurili, Guylula, Wutjara), Djapu, Liyagawumirr Marrakulu, and Marraŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhuyu</td>
<td>most sacred, known only with authorisation by senior men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimurru</td>
<td>east from the Makassarese timor *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dja:gaway</td>
<td>carer/guardian, one who looks after, role of the Ma:ri MM(B), MM, MMBSS(D) (mother’s mothers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djaŋ’kawu sisters</td>
<td>(Djankawu, Djangkawu, Djang’kawu, Djanggawul, Djankgao) Two sisters, and sometimes a brother held to be the primary waparr ancestors said to have created the lands and ancestors of of North east Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

*Dhuwa* moiety the are said to have created the countries of *Rirratjulu, Nja:ymil, Da:tiwuy, Djambarrupuyu, Liyadhalinmirr, Liyagaumurr, Liyagalawumirr, Malarrqa/Gunjbirritji, Man-harrju, Gamalonga, Gurruyindi, Matua* and on to the sunset. The myth underlies the performance of the *Dhuwa Nyarra* ritual.

**Djaŋu**

linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/her and spoken by *Warramirri, Lamamirri, Girrikirri* and *Barraparra* groups.

**djalatan**

south from the Makassarese *selatang*

**djalikiri/luku**

foot/foot print/ root/ancestral identity/

**djamarra kurli mali**

children’s’ spirits are the essence animating spirit of human life said to communicate with the father and marngitj sorcerers.

**djambatj**

harpoon tip first to hit the turtle, and the second is called *nika nhanju*, also expert harpooner/auspicious hunter/ eminent, earning a right to distribute choice cuts of turtle and dugong, prestige and renown

**djanda**

*Varanus sp, goanna* *Dhuwa*

**djeda mungubba**

after midnight/milky way decline

**djewul/Jakarrangal**

seaweed* Dhuwa/Yirritja*

**djilŋi**

beloved/favourite

**Djinaŋ**

linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/her and spoken by *Wulaki, Man-nharrju, Murrunjung* and *Daŋiwitji* groups, probably derived from a *Nhanju* parent language.

**djinabu**

mud wall fish trap

**djinaga**

inside/secret/restricted

**djinagabo**

*fish of the inner reefs*

**Djinba**

linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/her and spoken by *Ganbalbinu, Da:bi, Walmapiyu* and *Mandjalpuyu* groups, probably also derived from the *Nhanju* parent language.

**djini**

there, syn: *dhuwala*

**djirrimol**

fist sized turtle cooking rocks

**djudum**

soft tidal muds
**Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms**

*djungaya* manager, (person of MMM or ZD waku (*pulu*) relations to the ceremonies and land of his mother's clan (managing the sacra of their mothers' group)

*da:l* strong/hard/potent

*dada* smoke purification ritual

*dikarr* *Cypselurus melanocercus*, flying fish *Dhuwa Mañarra*

*dilak* adult/old person

*diltji* back/spine/bush/inland

*dunimurru* signifying the real underlying story/ restricted knowledge of underlying identity of an estate/possession of mañayin, Syn rulka gankiya dhudikurr

*gaðarra* corals and coral reefs

*gaðayka* *Eucalyptus tetradonta*, stringy bark *Dhuwa Gamalanga*

*gaku* eggs

*galinydjil* inter-tidal waters

*galimirriyu, galay* W (MMBDC) male’s potential wife or wife’s brother

*galka/ragalk/gal* sorcerer possessed of spirit familiars, *mali, mayili*

*galtha* ritual creating and marking consensus

*Gamalanga* Garmalangga, Karmalanga, Kokolango, Kokolangomala *Dhuwa Yan-nhanju ba:purru*

*gamunungu* painting/ colour/ pattern/ white clay

*ganaba* leave/discard

*ganatjirri/gapu* water, syn: ganmak, bugula

*ganatjirri malŋ’hunaway* literally following the water, denotes the source of the animating ancestral life spark, one’s ‘country of the water’ bugula bukumarrra (‘begot of the water’)

*ganatjirri djiangamurriyun* distant sea sound of rumbling, the sea speaking

*ganatjirri gulun* is the middle, or ‘tummy’ of the ocean with the tide yarrk’yarrthun, known for its gentleness and generosity

*ganatjirri mundaka* distant sea/far ocean/ the sea that speaks, syn: wulumba *Dhuwa*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ganajirri wirripanhaha</td>
<td>whirlpool/sea siphon/water spout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganinyidi/dhona</td>
<td>sacred digging-sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gankiya</td>
<td>onto/onto deep/signifying the opposite to the real underlying story/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>restricted knowledge of underlying identity of an estate/possession of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>madayin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganma</td>
<td>brackish/estuarine, metaphor where fresh and salt water mix is used by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yolnu to describe among other things the processes of making the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge of one world available in another exp: gamak ganu gulkmiyama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganyingirr</td>
<td>sacred bag *Yirritja Walamanu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garngiyabo</td>
<td>fish that live on the surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garma</td>
<td>public ceremony genre including Goylan, Banumbirr Djurrpun and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marraajirri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garrala</td>
<td>black ibis *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garriwa</td>
<td>Natator depressa, flat back turtle *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garriwa gaku madaptharranju</td>
<td>exp: ‘Ah turtle egg giver of joy!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garun</td>
<td>Caretta caretta, logger head turtle * Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gatjamirinu/mukul ba:pa</td>
<td>FZ (sisters on the fathers side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gatjamu/ga:thu</td>
<td>C, FFF(Z), child or father’s father’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gatjpiyun</td>
<td>invocation for increase/solicitation of wayarr for assistance by giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a symbolic gift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gawudalpudal</td>
<td>black bird,*Dhuwa Liyagawumir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gayaway</td>
<td>Lit: ‘having a thought’ a wish, a magical action exemplified by wishing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or creative visualisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gayanga gaku walirr winniyubal</td>
<td>Lit: reasoning turtle egg return time, formula for working out the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time of gravid female turtle return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaykay/gapipi</td>
<td>MB, ZDDS, MBSS, maternal uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganu/nurrungitj</td>
<td>charcoal/hearth/, metaphorical link to patrilineal essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganjygiya</td>
<td>top/uppermost/superficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gidiwak</td>
<td>Taeniura lymna, blue spotted ray, poisonous *Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girri</td>
<td>possession/things/artefacts, syn: marthakal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git git</td>
<td>Sterna albifrons, little tern *Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goŋ wukundi</td>
<td>restrictions related to mortuary pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gothana yitjiwala</td>
<td>smoking ceremony welcoming a newly born, syn: rratha gothana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gubberman</td>
<td>Government/State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guku girriyanu banjbal</td>
<td>sun up/day break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukuŋa</td>
<td>long tom, guwarina *Dhuwa Maŋara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulŋu walipma nathi walkurr</td>
<td>MMMBS, mothers mother’s mother’s brother’s sons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulŋu/mumalkur</td>
<td>MMMBD, mothers mother’s mother’s brother’s daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gukulŋugukwaku</td>
<td>ZC, FFZC, MMM(B)/children (woman speaking) or sister’s children (man speaking) manager djungaya for ego’s country and sacra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluk ŋamathana ŋamayun</td>
<td>body painting connected to mortuary ceremonies, gupa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluk djuyun</td>
<td>mortuary smoke purification in which the green leaves of the iron wood tree are burned to scare away the harmful aspects of the spirit of the dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gulun</td>
<td>freshwater swamp country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guluwurru</td>
<td><em>Pisonia grandis</em> or Solomon Island cabbage tree endemic to coral quays is the identity of the Dhuwa Maŋara maŋayin, guluwurru canoe, syn: lumbi-lumbi <em>Dhuwa Maŋara</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gulu’kulunu</td>
<td>(Kolo kulongo). patrilineal totemic ancestors/one’s forerunners, grandfathers ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gumurr dutji</td>
<td>inter-moiety marriage/incest taboo/strictly prohibited in the east, said to be characteristic of westerly connubial arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guŋuŋu/mukul rumaru</td>
<td>MMBD (WM) actual and classificatory wife’s mother, strict avoidance relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gunuŋu-,ba:pa</td>
<td>F, ZDDS, SSS father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gupa ŋamayun</td>
<td><em>guluk ŋamathana</em>, ceremonial painting with white clay to make good, linked to guluk djuyun, send off, and smoke purification man’tjarr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurka</td>
<td>penis/gurkadjilŋi term of endearment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurrmirrinju</td>
<td>great hunter wayarr*Dhuwa Gamalaŋa/Man-nharrŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurruṯu</td>
<td>kin/relation/family member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurryindi</td>
<td>Gorryindi Guri:ndi Dhuwa Yan-nhaŋu ba:purru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gurup/runganu</td>
<td>FZDC, father's sister's daughter's child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gutjiŋu, gutharra</td>
<td>ZDCM SC, FFZDC grandchild, the child of a son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gutjingu pulu</td>
<td>(ZDC) group, from whom your group, that is ego's group, received gifts or the parents of the wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guwartji</td>
<td>Eretmochelys imbricata, hawksbill turtle *Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guwilirr</td>
<td>sacred dilly bag*Dhuwa Liyagawumirr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guwikthana'ba</td>
<td>ancestor invocations/incantations or curses controlling ancestral powers by speaking special names bundur, syn: guwikthun, guykthun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guya</td>
<td>fish/boney fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guykthana</td>
<td>spit/spurt/curse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guyulan mitji gulun riway</td>
<td>mid night/milky way in the middle of the night sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lapakarra</td>
<td>spotted tree goanna Varanus sp *Dhuwa Gamalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>larratjaytjay</td>
<td>barracouta *Dhuwa Malarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʌmbalpuma</td>
<td>lightning snake *Yirritja Walamanju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>larrtha</td>
<td>mangroves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laymarrama</td>
<td>misdirection/subterfuge/trickery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likan</td>
<td>elbow/aspect of group identity/sacred name, syn:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bundhurr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liyagawumirr</td>
<td>(Liagalwamiri.Liagaomir.Dambahawmirir/Garrawurra,Buyuyugululmirit,Matajirra). Dhuwalmirr speaking group close ma:ri to Malarra/Guŋbirrtji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lolo djinabu</td>
<td>mud fish trap employed at special sites on the inner islands *Yirritja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lolo maranilya nanguwa</td>
<td>fish traps on the reef flats at special sites on the outer islands*Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lolo munathaŋa</td>
<td>fish traps with sandy floors on the outer islands*Dhuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luŋgu</td>
<td>harpoon/turtle harpoon/maŋayin *Dhuwa Gamalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luŋgurrma</td>
<td>north wind and cardinal point *Yirritja from the Makassarese utara</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ma:li mayili/mailli</td>
<td>image/meaning/essence/spirit mali or djamarrkurli mali (children’s’ spirits) syn: wunyuli, gapu maln’tunaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:muku wukundi/maralkur</td>
<td>MMB, mother’s mother’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:muku/ma:ri’mu</td>
<td>FF(Z) father’s father and sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:nba</td>
<td>bottle nose dolphin *Dhuwa Gamalangga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:ri</td>
<td>MM(B), MMBSS(D) ma:ri (mother’s mothers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:ri manydj</td>
<td>also <em>gutharra-manydj</em> grand child-grand parent reciprocal-ma:ri-gutharra( ma:ri -MM(B), FF(Z), MMBSS(D) –gutjnu/gutharra ZDCM SC, FFZDC may be shortened to (MM-wDC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:ri-pulu</td>
<td>MM group providing mothers-in-law for ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:rr</td>
<td>super natural creative essence, power, strength, spirit, faith, personality, linked to ancestral essences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:rr gangga galkimiyanjama</td>
<td>exp; ‘a little bit close’, an all purpose equivocator in the class of ‘same but different’, gently blurring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma:rrmirriw</td>
<td>lack of power/deficit, may require compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>madakarritj</td>
<td>dangerous/angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>madayin</td>
<td>mardayin/marrayin/mu-dayan, sacred, secret, holy, taboo including objects or species containing consubstantial ancestor essence an important sacred ceremony, syn: dhuyu, dharrpal, djok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makarrr/yutungurr</td>
<td>thigh/mainland/song poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makarraata</td>
<td>conflict resolution ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malagatj</td>
<td>dangerous wanarr usually appearing in human form with characteristically recognisable markings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malkurma</td>
<td>Yirritja Yan-nhanju ritual association of groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man’tjarr</td>
<td><em>Ceriops</em> sp, mangrove tree, purification ritual burning leaves to dispel spirits. Wood used for cooking <em>nythumu</em>, <em>Tacca leontopodenoides</em> Malaysian arrowroot. *Dhuwa Man-nharru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malarra/Gunbirritji</td>
<td>(Malara/Malarra/Yan(n)nhangu/Gunbirr/Gunbirri/Gunbirrtji/Gunbirrddjji/Gunbirrji). Malarra referring to saltwater (maramba) aspects of the group and Gunbirritji indicating the dry land (mulka-da:ltara) aspects of the people’s ancestral endowments Dhuwa Yan-nhanju ba:purru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandjikay</td>
<td>(Mandjiagi) <em>Yirritja</em> ritual association linking groups speaking <em>Djiga</em> to <em>Burrara</em> sharing floating wood, fish and rock <em>waŋarr</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-nharrŋu</td>
<td>Djinaŋ speaking <em>Dhuwa</em> group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>maŋutji bulthanaway</em></td>
<td>telling the eye/signifying/bringing to mind/calendar species, e.g. the red flowering kurrajong tree <em>balgurru</em> (<em>Brachychiton paradoxus</em>) flowers tell Gamalanga people that the crested tern <em>djarark</em> (<em>Sterna bergii</em>) are laying eggs on the beach at Gurriba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>maŋutji rathaway</em></td>
<td>turtle egg gestation period from between fourteen to twenty eight days in which the baby turtle is visible on opening, with the egg becoming turgid and the albumen becoming salty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maramba</td>
<td>salt water sea space and <em>waŋarr</em> extending from Murrunga out past the Wessels Islands <em>Dhuwa Malarra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranil</td>
<td>rock platforms at the seas’ edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardaptharrŋu</td>
<td>joy giver/endeearment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrŋgitj</td>
<td>medicine man cult possessed of spirit familiars, <em>mali</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrondjalk</td>
<td>cartilaginous fish/sting rays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marratja</td>
<td>SC grand child, child of son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriŋa</td>
<td>(Marringo) <em>Dhuwa</em> Yan-nhanu ritual saltwater complex linking <em>Gurryindi, Malarra</em> and <em>Gamalanga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matha</td>
<td>language/tongue, syn: <em>yan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayanŋa</td>
<td>creeks/rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maypal</td>
<td>shellfish edible/bivalve/gastropod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayanŋbu</td>
<td>fish that live in rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayalথha winds</td>
<td>season in February-March with gentle north easterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mewana</td>
<td><em>Cyperus conicus</em>, fish trap fibre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midawarr</td>
<td>season in March-May gentle with south easterly winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milgirriŋ</td>
<td>brief ritual seclusion on first menses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

**minytji**  paintings, colours and patterns

**mirrirri**  strict law of censure on reference to woman’s name, or reference to private functions, or incestuous connotation in the presence of a brother

**mithirri**  *Gymnura australis*, eagle ray *Yirritja Mldjingi*

**mitjil/mala**  group/collection *ba:purru*

**mokuy/yanuk**  ghost/spirit of the dead

**momu**  FM (MFZ) father’s mother

**motj**  (muin). Category of snake like *wajarr* connected to the *Wawilak* mythology and including *Mandayala*, *Gunapipi*, *Djinguwalan* and *Nulmarra* ceremonies

**muduthu**  *Lepidochelys olivacea*, Pacific or Olive Ridley turtle *Dhuka*

**mulanda**  white breast wood swallow *Dhuka*

**munilbili**  seasonal coral spawn *Yirritja*

**mananya**  thief/robber/commercial fishermen

**munathaŋa gabalarraŋu**  permanently submerged sands

**munathaŋa dhalkŋar**  sand dunes/fore dunes

**mununj-munjun**  saphires/rarely inundated mudflats

**munubi gabiyana**  mid morning

**munuguba baŋumbirr girriyana**  evening/Venus rising

**muru**  food of all types

**Murrunga**  (Munjunga, Marunga, Marungga Mooroonga Mooroongga Moorongga, Walarrda, Warrada) Largest of the outer Crocodile Islands

**Murrungun**  (Murrungen, Marungun) An alliance of groups sharing the *baŋumbirr* (morning star complex) including: Yan-nhanju Malarra/Gunbirritji, Djinaŋ speaking Wulaki, Wugiganydjarr, and Dhuwalmirr top Djapu

**muwala**  sacred dilly bag *Dhuka Gurryindi*

**muyungu**  *Tephrosia polzyga*, fish poison

**ŋa'kanyu**  *Anadarra gransosa*, cockle shells *Yirritja* Batjimurrunuŋu

**ŋaławili**  *Melu umbiculatus*, baler shell *Dhuka*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṉalka</td>
<td>sacred ‘dilly’ bag*&lt;i&gt;Dhuwa Małarra&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nhala</td>
<td>where, syn: &lt;i&gt;wanha&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉama:nuŋ/ŋa:ndi</td>
<td>M, ZDDD, MBSD, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉandi pulu</td>
<td>(M), mother’s group provides wives to male ego’s group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉandjalaway</td>
<td>turning/change/become in ancestral transformation, syn: &lt;i&gt;bilyun&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉanybak/djali</td>
<td>ceremonial armbands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉyamarra</td>
<td>conical mat/utility bag/mat and cover, later flattened to sell to missionaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉarra</td>
<td>preeminent local ceremony based focusing on the interdependence of by re-enacting the creations of &lt;i&gt;ba:purr&lt;/i&gt; of the same moiety. Distinct from regional ceremonies involving people from both moieties with a wide variety of maďayin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉangabo</td>
<td>fish dwelling in caves on the inside reefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉatiji, Ṉathi</td>
<td>MF (MFB) grandfather-maternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉatu</td>
<td>&lt;i&gt;Cycas media&lt;/i&gt; nut bread, syn: &lt;i&gt;dinku&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;i&gt;Nhaŋu&lt;/i&gt;</td>
<td>linguistic category based on the proximal demonstrative for this/here and spoken by Golpa (Gurlba), Barraŋu (Brangu), Yalukal and Gutjiway groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nhaŋu</td>
<td>this/here, syn: &lt;i&gt;duwu&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nhunu</td>
<td>you, syn: &lt;i&gt;nhe&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyanbal</td>
<td>&lt;i&gt;Poporiya sp, Dhuwa Małarra maďayin&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyndjia</td>
<td>tidal salt flats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyon</td>
<td>Holothurian sea slugs/stupefactant/fish poison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉok-ŋok</td>
<td>owl* &lt;i&gt;Yirritja&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉoybu</td>
<td>fish that live near the bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉurruiŋangabu</td>
<td>fore runners, ‘old people’, ancestral human beings, syn: &lt;i&gt;ŋurruiŋangal /bularkitj&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉunhu</td>
<td>over there, syn &lt;i&gt;ŋunha&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉurruthirr</td>
<td>returning tide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṉurruwulu</td>
<td>&lt;i&gt;Yirritja Yan-nhaŋu ba:purr&lt;/i&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyuthulumu</td>
<td><em>Tacca leontopodiodes</em>, Malaysian arrowroot <em>Dhuwa Gurryindi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rakay</td>
<td><em>Elyocharis dulcis</em> sedge rush corm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raitjpa</td>
<td>haematite, iron oxide /ochre this variety sourced from Ganapay Galiwin'ku is highly sought and traded throughout North east Arnhem Land <em>Dhuwa Malarra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ranyia</td>
<td><em>Pandanus spiralis</em>, fibre for making fish traps, bags and mats, seed pods provide nuts <em>luk-luk</em>, apical growing point is a vegetable food <em>muru</em>, syn: <em>gujga, makuyuk</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rantanaba</td>
<td>spear/stab/poke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rangga</td>
<td>(ranga, rangga) Restricted primary ritual paraphernalia/secret and sacred ritual objects <em>madayin</em>, often made of wood or stone and decorated with sacred designs representing particular ancestral beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ranjithirr</td>
<td>receding tide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapiny</td>
<td>freshwater/freshwater song series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapam</td>
<td>big name place, inclusive of many smaller place names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rarrandharr</td>
<td>season in August-September with a north west wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ratha</td>
<td>child/baby/toddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rawu</td>
<td><em>Brachychiton paradoxos</em>, ceremonial fibre, sea weed <em>Dhuwa Gamalangga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ringitj</td>
<td>ancestral element/ shared site of religious importance/shared ritual object/ sharing singing and names associated with a site at the confluence of several group’s countries, an embassy associated with ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rirrikulbu</td>
<td>fish that live in fresh water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riya waŋa</td>
<td>talk/consult with spirits/pray/wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riya walirrway</td>
<td>midday/ sun overhead /turtle egg gestation stage between six –fourteen days growing calcification on the outer shell becomes completely opaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rogu</td>
<td><em>Ipomea tuba</em>, beach vine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rom</td>
<td>law/custom/way/behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rulka</td>
<td>negative/no, syn: <em>bayŋu</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Glossary of Yan-nhanju terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>runu guulkurunju</td>
<td>small islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruwuk</td>
<td>turtle egg gestation stage between twenty eight- forty eight days the egg becoming soft as the young turtle prepares to emerge, shell becomes papery in the last ten days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tjipi</td>
<td>flour paste, sugar, oysters and turtle eggs mixed together and lightly cooked often at Murrungga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wadaŋa</td>
<td>coastal hills/fore head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wadaŋa lup</td>
<td>head washing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wakal</td>
<td>fun/teasing/kidding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wakinju</td>
<td>without relatives/unconnected/lower intestines/bilge man in a turtle hunting crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waku</td>
<td>ZC, FFZC, MMM(B)/children (woman speaking) or sister’s children (man speaking) manager (djungaya) for ego’s country and sacra, syn: gukulŋuguk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waku pulu</td>
<td>those people in the relation of ZC, FFZC, MMM(B)/children (woman speaking) or sister’s children (man speaking) to their mother’s groups sacra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walamanju</td>
<td>(Walamangu, Wolamangu, Wallamungo) Yirritja Yan-nhanju ba:purru is also a collective name including Walamanju, Bindarrar and Nhurwula ba:purru walipma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walipma</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walirr rirrpirru</td>
<td>sun going down/late afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wangurri</td>
<td>Yirritja Dhanju speaking ba:purru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanjadanama</td>
<td>wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wayarr</td>
<td>self-existent supernatural beings/ god/ creator/ ancestor/ spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wangala/waŋa ŋurrungitj</td>
<td>land/sea country/home site, syn: narraka waŋa,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warnba</td>
<td>sunset/westerly/orange colours of sun set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wawa</td>
<td>B, brother/older brother/younger brother, yuku-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warajul</td>
<td>outside/open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waypunaway</td>
<td>turtle boat paddler/driver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
weka  turtle soup/intestinal fluids syn: yenhu
willirr  shell/seashell debris/midden
witij  olive python, *Dhuwa
wiyangul  middle/centre
wurruguuna  Chelonia mydas, green turtle *Dhuwa
yakarra  names
yakarra yirrpanaba  naming/giving of names/cosmogonic act of ancestral naming, syn: ya:ku-mirriyangal
yan  language/tongue/way of speaking
Yan-nhaŋu  (Yaernungu, Yanango, Yarenango, Yanndhŋangu, Jarnangu, Janjango, Jan:angu, Jaer-nungo, Janango). Socio-lectal designation for six patrilineal ba:purru comprising Walamanu, Malarra, Gamalanga, Gurryindi, Bindarrar and Nyurrwula groups originating in the Crocodile Islands
yapa  Z, sister
yarr'yarngani  Cassytha filiformis, coastal mistletoe *Dhuwa
yidäki  didgeridoo/didjeridu/drone-pipe
yirralka  bone country/ spiritual/ patrilineal site/ home, syn:
ŋarraka waja
Yirritja  Yirritja moiety—patrilineal semi-moiety
yinika  coastal grasses
yol  who/someone
Yolŋu  (Yuulngu) human being/person/group of people from North east Arnhem Land, dark skinned person, Yolŋu distinct from European, syn: Murungin, Mewartj, Wulamba and Balamumu
yolŋu'-yulŋu  people/reduplication of person
yothu-yindi  small-big/child-mother/ Dhuwa/Yirritja/ owner/manager, ideology of mutual relations of care and obligation between all aspects of the cosmos
Yoyu---yo!!!  exasperation/oh dear dear!!!
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360
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362
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