

Land, song, constitution: exploring expressions of ancestral agency, intercultural diplomacy and family legacy in the music of Yothu Yindi with Mandawuy Yunupinju¹

AARON CORN

*Pacific & Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures, F12 – Transient,
The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia
E-mail: aaron.corn@arts.usyd.edu.au*

Abstract

Yothu Yindi stands as one of Australia's most celebrated popular bands, and in the early 1990s became renowned worldwide for its innovative blend of rock and indigenous performance traditions. The band's lead singer and composer, Mandawuy Yunupinju, was one of the first university-trained Yolŋu educators from remote Arnhem Land, and an influential exponent of bicultural education within local indigenous schools. This article draws on my comprehensive interview with Yunupinju for an opening keynote address to the Music and Social Justice Conference in Sydney on 28 September 2005. It offers new insights into the traditional values and local history of intercultural relations on the Gove Peninsula that shaped his outlook as a Yolŋu educator, and simultaneously informed his work through Yothu Yindi as an ambassador for indigenous cultural survival in Australia. It also demonstrates how Mandawuy's personal history and his call for a constitutional treaty with indigenous Australians are further grounded in the inter-generational struggle for justice over the mining of their hereditary lands. The article's ultimate goal is to identify traditional Yolŋu meanings in Yothu Yindi's repertoire, and in doing so, generate new understanding of Yunupinju's agency as a prominent intermediary of contemporary Yolŋu culture and intercultural politics.

Introduction

Yothu Yindi is one of Australia's most celebrated popular bands. Its innovative blend of rock and Yolŋu performance traditions from northeast Arnhem Land (see Figure 1) has spawned six original albums (1989, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2000b) and thirteen music videos (1992a, 2000a).² The band's philanthropic arm, the Yothu Yindi Foundation (YYF), has also produced six albums of traditional music from Arnhem Land (YYF 2001–2003), the motion picture *Yolŋu Boy* (Johnson [dir.] 2000) and the annual Garma Festival at Gulkula (YYF 2006).

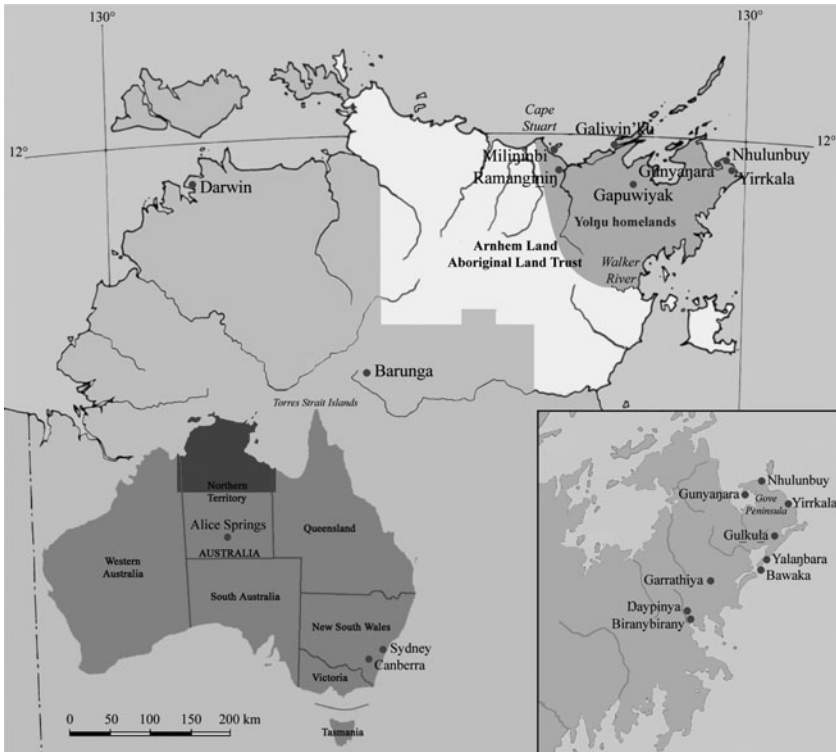


Figure 1. Locations within the Yolŋu homelands, Arnhem Land and Australia.

Formed in Darwin in 1986, Yothu Yindi was founded by three Yolŋu men from Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. Singer/guitarist Mandawuy Yunupinŋ, born 1956, became the band's primary songwriter. Witiyana Marika was then a purely traditional performer who sang and played *bilma* ('paired sticks'), while the late Milkaynŋ Munungurr was a traditional player of *yidaki* ('didjeridu').³ Mandawuy had also forged strong friendships with a second trio of rock musicians known in Darwin as the Swamp Jockeys, bassist Stu Kellaway, guitarist Cal Williams and drummer Andy Beletty, who completed Yothu Yindi's original complement. The sounds they created together were built on an unprecedented syncretism of Yolŋu performance traditions and global popular styles. Mandawuy's older brother, Galarrwuy Yunupinŋ, also contributed his skills as a traditional singer to the band's studio recordings, and created traditional artwork for each of its albums. Other significant members of Yothu Yindi have since included Indigenous singer Jodie Cockatoo, Yolŋu multi-instrumentalist Gurrumul Yunupinŋ, Papuan drummer Ben Hakalitz, Papuan keyboardist Buruka Tau-Matagu, keyboardist Matthew Cunliffe, and Yolŋu *yidaki* players Gapanbulu Yunupinŋ and Yomunu Yunupinŋ. At the peak of its popularity in the early 1990s, Yothu Yindi's chart success was unprecedented by any other band with indigenous Australian roots. In 1991, 'Treaty' (1991, tr. 2) became the first song with lyrics in any Australian language to chart anywhere. Worldwide multi-platinum sales ensued, as did a swathe of awards from MTV, the Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA), the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) and Australia's Human Rights

and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' (1991, tr. 3), a second song with lyrics in Yolŋu-Matha, also charted well. With the announcement of Mandawuy Yunupinju as the 1992 Australian of the Year, the band's place in Australian history was sealed. Further recognition for Mandawuy came with an honorary doctorate in education from the Queensland University of Technology in 1998, and the Jimmy Little Deadly Award for Lifetime Achievement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music in 2004.

Initial scholarship into Yothu Yindi focused on the roles of the entertainment and media industries in obscuring the politics behind 'Treaty'. The popularity of this song had initially been stimulated by an unauthorised dance remix (1992b, tr. 15) which stripped away all but three lines of its original English lyrics (Hayward [ed.] 1992, pp. 169–70; Hayward 1993; Mitchell 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Nicol 1993). Following studies aptly located the band's indigenous roots in Yolŋu culture, and identified *ganma* ('converging currents') and *yothu-yindi* ('child-mother') as significant traditional themes both in its creative work and in Mandawuy's parallel career as a Yolŋu educator (Neuenfeldt 1993; Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994; Magowan 1996, pp. 147–52; Dunbar-Hall 1997, pp. 39–42; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004, pp. 198–208).

While Mandawuy offered his own thoughts on these themes in the 1993 Boyer Lecture (Yunupinju 1994), there nonetheless remained many unanswered questions about Yothu Yindi's role as an intermediary of Yolŋu cultural life and indigenous political aspirations. It was unknown why Mandawuy started composing original rock songs with materials drawn from Yolŋu tradition, or what he had hoped this innovation would achieve. Amid the sketchy inaccuracies of the band's album notes, it was also uncertain which specific traditional song repertoires had been worked into the band's music, or how their incorporation was aligned with Yolŋu traditions for managing such hereditary properties. That the immediate family of the band's Yolŋu founders had been engaged in a protracted struggle against the mining of their homelands on the Gove Peninsula since 1963 was another crucial factor that was absent from discussion of its creativity.

This article addresses these concerns by drawing on my keynote address with Mandawuy Yunupinju to the Annual Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia at the University of Sydney in 2005, which charted the traditional values, family history and compositional intent behind Yothu Yindi's music (Yunupinju and Corn 2005). The article is also grounded in my close collaborations with the band to chronicle its history and repertoire, and to determine how its creative approaches both reflect and extend traditional expressions of Yolŋu sovereignty and culture (Corn with Yunupinju 2001, 2005; Corn with Yunupinju, Kellaway and Marika 2005; Corn with Yunupinju and Marika 2005). It is further contextualised within an extensive body of contemporary ethnographic research into Yolŋu culture and music (Williams 1986; Morphy 1991, 2008; Knopoff 1992; Keen 1994, 2000; McIntosh 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000; Magowan 1994, 2007; Dunlop [dir.] 1970–1996; Cooke [ed.] 1996; Neuenfeldt [ed.] 1997, pp. 39–88; Tamisari 1998, 2000; Toner 2000; Corn with Gumbula 2003, 2005; Corn 2003, 2005, 2007; Corn and Gumbula 2004, 2006, 2007; Magowan and Neuenfeldt [eds] 2005, pp. 29–45, 57–95; Deger 2006; Stubington 2007).

Through intercultural ethnographic dialogues with Yolŋu musicians, my approach has been to delve beyond the popular notions of 'dreamings', 'solo didgeridus', 'corroborees' and 'songlines' that have been internationalised as icons of

indigenous Australia (Williams 1986, p. 25; Corn 2003). My goal in the article is to identify ethnocentric meanings in the music of Yothu Yindi that are readily apparent to local Yolŋu audiences but obscure to others, and in doing so, to generate new understanding of Mandawuy Yunupinŋu's agency as a leading intermediary of contemporary Yolŋu culture and political aspirations.

Singing children of the earth

The Yolŋu (literally 'person', 'human') are the indigenous occupants and hereditary owners of northeast Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory (NT). There are approximately 7000 Yolŋu Australians whose remote homelands extend from the Gove Peninsula in the far northeast, west to Cape Stuart and southwest to Walker River. Four of the seven towns in this region, Milinjibi, Yirrkala, Galiwin'ku and Ramanginjŋ, were founded by the Methodist Overseas Mission between 1922 and 1973. Yothu Yindi's home town on the Gove Peninsula, Yirrkala, was founded as the second of these in 1934 (Horton [ed.] 1994, pp. 1,292–3; Corn and Gumbula 2006, p. 173). Gapuwiyak and Gunyaŋara were established by Yolŋu families as respective satellites of Galiwin'ku and Yirrkala in the 1980s, while the mining town of Nhulunbuy was developed against Yolŋu wishes near Yirrkala by the NABALCO corporation in 1967.

Yolŋu society is an expansive network of some sixty patrilineal groups (literally, 'groups') (Zorc 1996; Bagshaw 1998, pp. 155–73). Membership in each *mala* is agnatic with hereditary ownership of each Yolŋu group's country and other property passing from father to child in perpetuity. Mandawuy Yunupinŋu was born into the Gumatj *mala*, while Wiŋiyana Marika and Milkayŋu Munungurr were respectively born into the Rirratjinŋ *mala* and the Djapu' *mala*.

The Yolŋu collectively speak a cluster of seven Australian languages known as Yolŋu-Matha (literally 'human speech'). However, beyond everyday usage, each group possesses a discrete lexicon of esoteric *yäku* ('names') which, in formal usage, differentiates the *matha* ('speech') of one *mala* from another. Standing as constitutional evidence of this ownership, these lexicons of esoteric *yäku* are the most



Figure 2. Yothu Yindi performs to open the Yirrŋa Music Development Centre on the Gumatj homeland of Gunyaŋara (Aaron Corn, 1999).

valuable traditional asset any *mala* can possess other than country itself. Each *mala* owns at least one *wāṅa* ('country', 'homeland') incorporating all lands, waters and natural resources therein, and an incumbent canon of hereditary *yāku* ('names'), *manikay* ('songs'), *buṅgul* ('dances') and *miny'tji* ('designs'). 'So axiomatic' is this relationship for Yolḷu 'that people without land are people without identity' (Williams 1986, p. 232).

Yolḷu have inhabited northeast Arnhem Land for countless millennia, and maintain hereditary knowledge of maritime sites known to have been above sea level some 10,000 years ago (Yunupinḷu and Dhamarrandji 1997; Buku-Larrṅgay Mulka Centre 1999; Horton [ed.] 1994, p. 201). They trace their ultimate descent from metaphysical *waṅarr* ('ancestral progenitors') who originally shaped, named and populated the Yolḷu homelands, and are believed to remain sentient and ever-present therein (Williams 1986, pp. 42–3; Gondarra 2001, pp. 15–20; Corn and Gumbula 2004, pp. 101–16). It is by virtue of this birthright, passed from father to child through each generation of each *mala*, that all Yolḷu see themselves as both *wāṅa-wataṅu* ('country-holders') and *rom-wataṅu* ('law-holders').

The hereditary canons of names, songs, dances and designs bestowed by *waṅarr* with the homelands are central to Yolḷu identity and spirituality. They provide a highly durable ceremonial framework for practising Yolḷu *rom* ('law', 'culture', 'correct practice', 'the way'), and also constitute an esoteric body of Yolḷu knowledge known as *maḍayin*. *Maḍayin* describes the 'beauty' of all creation and the 'nature' of everything in it (Williams 1986, p. 29; Keen 1994, pp. 137–40; Gondarra 2001, p. 19). Its descriptions are both qualitative and exquisitely cryptic as is evident in traditional *manikay* series where *yāku* are used as a non-narrative lyrical resource (Williams 1986, p. 42; Keen 1994, p. 239; Corn and Gumbula 2007, pp. 120–2).

Only *maḍayin* of the *garma* ('open') and *dhuni* ('sheltered') classes are performed in public contexts, while the deepest esoterica of the *ṅarra'* ('restricted') class is conventionally revealed only to initiated men in seclusion (Keen 1994, p. 143).⁴ The *garma maḍayin* owned by each *mala* are organised in distinct strings of subjects that recount the species and ecologies observed by *waṅarr* as they founded the Yolḷu homelands. An individual subject can be shared by multiple *mala*. But for each individual subject, there still exists a string of several sacred names that is unique to each *mala* (Williams 1986, pp. 40–5). Canons of *garma maḍayin* always refer obliquely to details of ancestral characteristics and deeds recorded in the deeper *dhuni'* and *ṅarra'* classes. Yolḷu liken this relationship between the public and the restricted to a tree and its subterranean roots. Though unseen, a tree's roots are embedded in the same earth as the *waṅarr* themselves (Keen 1994, p. 169).

Access to use and understanding of a group's hereditary names, songs, dances and designs is regulated by qualified ceremonial leaders who are known as the *liya-ṅarra'mirr(i)* ('learned', 'wise').⁵ The process of becoming *liya-ṅarra'mirr(i)* is said to be a long and arduous one of attaining a demonstrable knowledge of all requisite *maḍayin*, and through this observance of ancestral law, accruing sufficient *mārr* ('inner strength', 'ancestral power', 'spiritual health') (Keen 1994, pp. 94–5). Yolḷu believe that the *waṅarr* who remain sentient and ever-present in country can sense the *mārr* of their living kin. They will render their homelands safe and abundant for those who can be recognised as *gurrutu* ('kin', 'family'), and similarly work to repel and poison intruders (Williams 1986, pp. 85; Tamisari 1998, pp. 256–67). Following ancestral precedent through the observance of one's hereditary *maḍayin* is therefore considered a high virtue among Yolḷu (Keen 1994, p. 149).

Despite the intercultural syncretism of Yothu Yindi's music, this classical Yolŋu worldview is seeded throughout its repertoire. The song 'Baywara' (1993, tr. 4), for example, clearly addresses the intimate relationships between country, ancestors and law in Yolŋu epistemology. Its verses and bridge describe the progenitorial journey of Baywara, the *wañarr* 'Olive Python', to Ŋaypinya. This homeland is owned by the Gälpu *mala* to which Mandawuy's late mother was born. The lyrics 'She walked with the law in her hands, singing children of the earth' (verse 1) describe how Baywara sang the Gälpu *mala* into being at Ŋaypinya as she embedded her law and her sentience deep into the earth there. In the chorus, Mandawuy identifies her as 'Maker of the Land, Maker of the Song, Maker of the Constitution'.

Land, song and constitution are all integral; all one. You can't isolate one from the other. It's all interwoven very tightly and you can't separate them. That is written in the bark paintings; in the scrolls of the log coffins; in the songs. No matter what their language in Arnhem Land, everyone practises that. Even down in central Australia where they practise the boomerang, they talk about the same thing. It's the constitution. It's the law. It's the basis of where we come from. If you've ever been exposed to those big ceremonies, you see people dancing whether they're Shark people or Stingray people; whether they're *Bäru* ['Saltwater Crocodile'], the Maraliŋja ['Saltwater Crocodile'] man. Maraliŋja discovered fire in the beginning, so when you're dancing *Bäru*, you become transformed into Maraliŋja. And that's when you say 'I'm the Maraliŋja. I own the land. I own that philosophy. I own that knowledge. I have a right to that land and you can't take that away from me'. Other groups are the same. When people dance Shark, they're transformed into the Shark ancestor, or the Stingray or whatever it may be. That's how one becomes transformed into something they want to show; they want to tell in that most classical way. The classical way of making their point known is by doing it in unity and strength with one's own *mala* and, of course, the *yothu-yindi* ['child-mother'] balance between *mala* is always there in that strength and unity. We are still doing this regardless of our laws having been rejected and trivialised. We don't care. We keep going because it's important to pass on this law to the next generation so it strengthens our identity as a first-nations people of this country. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

The music video for 'Tribal Voice' (1992a, tr. 6), a song from Yothu Yindi's second album (1991, tr. 7), exemplifies the intensity with which Yolŋu realise ancestral identities through ceremonial performance. It features a genuine *dhapi* ceremony for male initiation by 'circumcision'. Mandawuy dances Gapiŋri ('Stingray') over the three boy initiates, while his older brother, Galarrwuy, sings *manikay* and paints deeply sacred designs on their bodies. As he dances, Mandawuy fixes a piercing forward gaze and clutches a deeply sacred Gumatj *bathi* ('basket') between his teeth. Baskets of this kind are *dhuni*, and stand as the most sacred emblems of *wañarr* authority that can be displayed in any public context. The *bathi* bears a pair of long orange-feathered tassels and an elongated diamond motif representing the Gumatj *wañarr* Maraliŋja ('Saltwater Crocodile'). Such ceremonial *gakal* ('displays') of ancestral power are also *dhuni*. They mirror the fierce power of the *wañarr* and the gravity of ceremonial acts undertaken in their name (Morphy 1991, p. 263). As the 'Tribal Voice' clip ends, the boy initiates stand ready with the Gumatj elder Djaŋa Yunupinju. Sacred tassels of orange parrot feathers adorn their heads, arms and waists, with painted heads and torsos completing their otherworldly appearance.

The boy standing camera left, Yomunu Yunupinju, would come to play *yidaki* for Yothu Yindi in the mid-1990s. But here in ceremony, the metaphysical nature of being in all Yolŋu is made plain. Not only are the Yolŋu the direct descendants of the original *wañarr*, they are also mirrored physical consubstantiations of the original *wañarr* presences that remain eternal and sentient in country (Williams 1986, pp. 23–4).

'Tribal Voice' stands as Yothu Yindi's response to the lingering influence of Christianity in Yolŋu lifestyles following decades of local administration under state-sanctioned missions. The early Methodist missionaries in northeast Arnhem Land had abandoned their failing attempts to quell Yolŋu traditions in 1926, and instead established an enduring spiritual and cultural dialogue that respected both Yolŋu and Christian perspectives. Yet the withdrawal of the Methodists Overseas Mission from local government in the 1970s left room for a new brand of Christianity to sweep across Arnhem Land in the decade that followed. Owing much to US evangelism, it insisted on the abandonment of Yolŋu traditions in favour of an exclusive Christian practice. Mandawuy was deeply concerned.

People here were strongly into the church. The whole place was saturated and there seemed no way out. It was like every second man and his dog was into it. My way of rejecting this was to challenge them by saying, 'Hey, our tribal voice is going to be here forever. How about coming down to earth and thinking about where your feet are entrenched; where your reality lies?' 'Tribal Voice' is about that struggle for recognition of our religious freedom and, of course, our freedom of speech. Don't throw it away and go for something else. (Yunupijŋu from Yunupijŋu and Corn 2005)

'Tribal Voice' was therefore conceived as a stirring rock anthem for Yolŋu religious freedom and cultural survival. The song's chorus alludes to the global diversity of human religions, and echoes the activist expression of 'Get Up, Stand Up' by the Wailers (1973, tr. 1) (see Example 1). Mandawuy urges audiences to listen to their 'tribal voice', and later in the song's coda, he levels this appeal directly at the Yolŋu *mala* who own homelands on the Gove Peninsula: Gumatj, Rirratjŋu, Wangurri, Djapu', Dhalwanju, Dätiwuy, Mangalili and Gälpu (Dunbar-Hall 1997, p. 46). As backing singers repeat the hook 'You'd better listen to your tribal voice', Mandawuy shouts each of their names in turn over the word 'tribal' (see Example 2). With the lyrics 'Come now the spirits of my ancestors who have just gone before into the future of another day' in verse 3, Mandawuy evokes a central Yolŋu belief: the cyclical passage

Em C D (get up, stand up)

chorus

Mandawuy All the peo-ple in the world are dream-ing_ Some of us

6 C D (get up, stand up)

cry, cry, cry_ for the rights of sur - vi-val now_ Say-ing

10 C D (get up, stand up)

'come on, come on,_ stand up for your rights?_

Example 1. Opening of the chorus of 'Tribal Voice' (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 7).

of *birrimbirr* ('souls') through the physical and metaphysical planes of reality, from birth to death to rebirth, in an endless loop (Berndt and Berndt 1988, p. 213). In the spoken lyrics of the song's bridge, '*Yaka mengunja nhujuway rom; dhuwala bunjul gaka likan*', he also refers to the Stingray *gaka* he dances in the music video. While this statement has no direct English equivalent, it can be loosely translated from Yolju-Matha as 'Do not forget your law; this ceremonial display of ancestral power'.⁶

To a homeland far away

Before Yothu Yindi's ascent, never had sounds, images and ideas so sacred to the Yolju been presented through an idiom so seemingly profane as rock. The band's rise to fame in the early 1990s was unarguably buoyed by its exotic appeal amid the growing global market for World Music. Commercial success was nonetheless far from the local and personal concerns that inspired Mandawuy's songwriting. His intrepid synthesis of rock and traditional Yolju *manikay* developed in response to the entrenchment of Anglo-colonial influences in 1980s Arnhem Land. While the Methodist Overseas Mission had long been committed to working with Yolju in both English and Yolju-Matha, English was the only official language of the NT government agencies that, in the 1970s, had assumed their administrative and service roles. It was rapidly becoming impossible in Arnhem Land to buy groceries, book travel, access public services, find medical treatment or have a bank account without a working knowledge of English. English was also the only formal language of instruction in local schools, and now found even greater exposure among local youths amid the introduction to Arnhem Land of televisions, video players and portable stereos.

Yolju of Mandawuy's generation had come through the mission era with their traditional knowledge largely intact. But now, it fell to them to ensure that these old ways were not swept away in a torrent of the new. As a senior Yolju educator in an Arnhem Land school, Mandawuy knew that something radical needed to be done. His songwriting became his vehicle for shaping and theorising his ideas about new ways of schooling Yolju children bi-culturally.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, key of D major. The first staff is labeled 'chorus' and contains the lyrics 'You'd bet-ter lis-ten to your tri-bal voice— You'd bet-ter'. Above the staff are chords: Em, Bm/D, and Em. Below the staff, the name 'Mandawuy' is written above the notes 'Gu - matj!'. The second staff starts with a '4' in the margin and contains the lyrics 'lis-ten to your tri-bal voice— You'd bet-ter ...'. Above the staff are chords: Bm/D and Em. Below the staff, the name 'Mandawuy' is written above the notes 'Ri - rra - tji - ŋu! —'. The notation includes eighth and quarter notes, rests, and a double bar line.

Example 2. The first two Yolju mala names shouted by Mandawuy Yunupingu in the coda of 'Tribal Voice' (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 7).

It was with his very first original song of 1983, 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' (Yothu Yindi 1989, tr. 5), that Mandawuy began to explore the potential of blending *manikay* and rock. With most of its lyrics in English, this initial arrangement of 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' sounded like a fairly conventional rock song. However, in drawing on themes and lyrics from the hereditary Gumatj *manikay* of Mandawuy's own *mala*, it was an unprecedented step nonetheless. Mandawuy wanted the song to express his *warwu* ('sorrow', 'homesickness', 'worry') for the young family he had left behind in Yirrkala while he worked in Galiwin'ku as the Assistant Principal of Shepherdson College. To capture this emotion, he turned to the subject of *djäpana* ('coral sunset') from the *manikay* series for the Gumatj homeland of Bawaka which recounts the ancestral trespasses of foreign marauders known only as the Bayini (Mountford 1956, pp. 333–8). In the hull of their boat, the Bayini had captured a beautiful woman called Djotarra, and when they finally sailed from Bawaka into the beautiful coral sunset, their vessel struck a rock in the shallow coastal waters drowning all aboard. In their traditional *manikay* setting, the lyrics selected by Mandawuy for the Chorus of 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' express *warwu* for Djotarra's loss: '*Wo djäpana, wo warwu, wo rrämani, wo galanğarri*' which can be translated as 'Oh coral sunset, oh sorrow, oh coral sunset clouds, oh coral sunset'. It is no coincidence that the song's third verse also mentions the Balanda ('Euro-Australians'), who in the twentieth century, intruded on Gumatj lands not to maraud, but to mine.

One evening after work, I was sitting with a friend of mine. I had a guitar and I was feeling sad for my family. My family didn't come with me at that time. They came afterwards; maybe two months after I was there on my own. I was sitting. I was thinking. I was worrying about my family and it was sundown. I was thinking about the lines in *djäpana*. I was thinking '*warwu*'. I was thinking '*djäpana, rräma, rrämani, dhurulaŋala* ['fading'], *galanğarri*'. I was thinking about all those names that make one sad and thinking about the family, because *djäpana* is about thinking back to your family. So I grabbed the guitar ... *Djäpana* ends a *manikay* series. It might take all day, and then at the end of the day, *djäpana* basically says goodbye. Goodbye to the day, to the people, and to friends, relatives and visitors from wherever they come. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' marked a new radical departure from Soft Sands' country and gospel idioms. It demonstrated how the rock idiom could be harnessed, as a *wakinju* ('kinless') resource that existed outside the strict protocols of Yolŋu ownership, to incorporate themes and materials drawn directly from hereditary *manikay* as a means of conveying and contemporising durable ideas grounded in Yolŋu tradition. It also followed and extended the Yolŋu practice of composing non-canonical *yuta* ('new') *manikay* items in which traditional subjects are related to contemporary events, such as funerals and family separations, which evoke *warwu* as an emotional response (Knopoff 1992, pp. 144–50; Toner 2000, pp. 35–7). Though certainly unconventional, Mandawuy's approach nonetheless sought to satisfy the Yolŋu ideals of following and honouring ancestral precedent.

Also at that time, there was a big movement in that most of the Yolŋu in the bands were into gospel songs. There was a big gospel movement happening and my objective was to say, 'Now listen guys, there are other avenues to think about your culture'. My struggle was to preserve my culture and the way that I wanted to do that was to write a song with all those Western elements so I came up with the lines and the lyrics as a modern way of describing what I thought about in the traditional way. On the day after composing it, I went to the band Soft Sands and asked them if they could play this song using their equipment. I was able to feel

it with the drums as well as the bass guitar, the lead guitar and rhythm guitar. I then worked out the chorus lines for it as time went on. We gave it a contemporary rock 'n' roll feel but still maintained that Yolŋu side to it. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' became a template for how many Yothu Yindi songs would be composed. The band's songs would typically express Mandawuy's responses to topical issues through lyrical references to *garma manikay* subjects that alluded to their themes. As the Yothu Yindi style developed, direct musical quotations from *manikay*, in addition to lyrical ones, became its hallmark. For example, later recordings of 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' (1991, tr. 3) augmented the song's traditional *manikay* content by quoting two entire stanzas, or *gumurr* (literally 'chests'), of the original *djäpana* over the band's throbbing four-beat (see Example 3).

This organic relationship between traditional *manikay* settings and the rock songs that they inspired is made even more apparent in the recording of 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' on *One Blood* (Yothu Yindi 1999, tr. 8). On this fifth album, the song is preceded by an entirely traditional performance of 'Rräma (Coral Sunset Clouds)' (tr. 7) that is sung by Galarrwuy Yunupinju with *bilma* ('paired sticks') and *yidaki* ('didjeridu') accompaniment. Aural coherence between the traditional 'Rräma' and the rock song 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' is established with the spoken vocables, 'Ap wi'. They are performed at the end of each stanza of 'Rräma' and are the first sounds of 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' heard in the following track.

chorus

8

Ap wi! Ap wi! Ap wi!

Mandawuy (multitracked)

Djä-pa-na wo-lu-tju Dhu-ra-la-ma ŋu-nha-warr-tji, ___

4

Ap wi! Ap wi! Ap wi!

8

djä-pa-na War-wu ga-laŋ-ga-rri ___

7

Ap wi! Ap wi!

8

Rre-pa ŋu-nha-warr-tji, djä-pa-na war-wu go-luŋ-nha ___

Example 3. Vocal parts of the first *manikay* section played in 'Djäpana: Sunset Dreaming' (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 3).

Three other original songs on *One Blood* are similarly introduced by traditional *manikay* items from different *manikay* series. While Yothu Yindi's earlier albums are abundant with traditional *manikay* items, this particular configuration is most prevalent on *One Blood*. 'Laykarrambu (Male Red Kangaroo)' (tr. 1) precedes the titular 'One Blood' (tr. 2). Its distinctive *bilma* pattern (see Example 4) is heard again in the *manikay* bridges of 'One Blood' in which Mandawuy sings of the male red kangaroo's demise on the Gumatj homeland of Gulkula at the hands of the ancestral *mokuy* ('ghost') hunter, Ganbulapula. Both 'Laykarrambu' and the bridges of 'One Blood' share the terminal phrase, 'Wo duwitj, wo duwitj, wo duwitj', which describes the bloodied 'twitching' felled animal's carcass. 'Tears for Law: Garrathiya Run' (tr. 13) references the ancestral preparation of bread from the cycad palm and is introduced by 'Miṅamiṅa (Cycad Nut Bread)' (tr. 12). Its melody uses the same pitch set as those found in the traditional melodic structure, or *dämbu* (literally 'head'), of 'Miṅamiṅa' (see Example 5). Finally, the *manikay* lyrics of 'Nyinyanyina (Anchovy)' (tr. 16) are again heard in the *manikay* bridge of the following rock song, 'Our Land' (tr. 17).

These are the only instances on Yothu Yindi's albums in which the organic relationships between traditional *manikay* settings and the rock songs they inspired are made so clear. Nonetheless, any original song incorporating thematic, lyrical or musical materials sourced from a traditional *manikay* item could potentially be introduced in this way. As Yolḷu logic dictates, though the deep roots of a tree are buried and unseen, they are there nonetheless.

The traditional materials presented on Yothu Yindi's albums are largely drawn from *manikay* series inherited by Mandawuy and Galarrwuy through their Gumatj patrilineage or *yarrata* (literally 'string'). They include derivative original songs such as 'Maralitja: Crocodile Man' (1991, tr. 5), 'Tears for Law: Garrathiya Run' (1996, tr. 1), 'Yirrimala (Hull)' (1996, tr. 12), 'One Blood' (1999, tr. 2) and 'Fire' (2000B, tr. 2). 'Yolḷu Woman' (1989, tr. 2) recounts a funeral ceremony that ended with 'the usual songs' (verse 3) on the Gumatj *manikay* subjects of *dīrrmala* ('northeasterly wind'), *gärrr* ('morning mist spider') and *wärranḡ* ('dingo'). Brief performances of Gumatj *manikay* items in their traditional settings also feature on the band's albums. Sung by Galarrwuy, they include 'Gany'tjurr (White-Faced Heron)' (1993, tr. 15), 'Bäpaṅ (Driftwood)' (1996, tr. 5), 'Lorrrpu (Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo)' (1996, tr. 10), 'Laykarrambu (Male Red Kangaroo)' (1999, tr. 1), 'Miṅamiṅa (Cycad Nut Bread)' (1999, tr. 12) and 'Bäru (Saltwater Crocodile)' (1999, tr. 14).

Early Yothu Yindi albums also feature Witiyana Marika singing traditional Rirratjṅu *manikay* items on the subjects of 'Gudurrku (Brolga)' (1989, tr. 8), 'Dhum'thum (Agile Wallaby)' (1991, tr. 6), 'Yinydjapana (Dolphin)' (1991, tr. 10) and 'Milika (Diamond Fish)' (1993, tr. 9). However, 'Timeless Land' (1993, tr. 1) is the band's only original song to incorporate direct quotations from Rirratjṅu



Example 4. The *bilma* pattern played throughout 'Laykarrambu' (Yothu Yindi 1999, tr. 1) and heard again in the *manikay* bridges of 'One Blood' (tr. 2).



Example 5. The dambu of ‘Minjamiŋa’ (Yothu Yindi 1999, tr. 12).

manikay. In the two *manikay* bridges of ‘Timeless Land’, Witiyana sings of the *mulpiya* (‘agile wallabies’) who inhabit the rocky escarpment on the Rirratjŋu homeland of Yalanbara. Later in the song’s coda, he juxtaposes this against one of his mother’s traditional *manikay* on the Gumatj subject of *mambulmambul* (‘rare kangaroo flesh’), thereby evoking the *yothu–yindi* (‘child–mother’) balance among the band’s members.

There are also several original Yothu Yindi that collectively cite Mandawuy’s lineage from his Gälpu *ñändipulu* (‘mother’s group’), and his Dhalwaŋu *märipulu* (‘mother’s mother’s group’) (see Table). Mandawuy’s continuing relationship with his late parents is celebrated in ‘Gapirri (Stingray)’ (1991, tr. 13), which personifies his father as the Gumatj Stingray ancestor and his mother as the Gälpu *waŋarr*, Baywara (‘Olive Python’). Mandawuy’s mother is also remembered in ‘Dots on the Shells’ (1993, tr. 13), yet ‘Baywara’ (1993, tr. 4) remains the only original Yothu Yindi song to quote Gälpu *manikay*. Its traditional *manikay* bridge cites the *bonbarr* (‘lightening’) spoken by Baywara as she founded the Gälpu homeland of Ŋaypinya. The *manikay* of Mandawuy’s Dhalwaŋu *märipulu* are similarly quoted in ‘Honey: Birrkuda (Bee)’ (1996, tr. 13) and ‘Macassan Crew’ (2000b, tr. 1).

An oblique reference to Mandawuy’s late father’s father, the prolific Gumatj leader known as Yunupiŋu, is found in ‘Our Land’ (1999, tr. 17) with its quotation of the traditional *manikay* ‘Nyŋanyŋa (Anchovy)’ (1999, tr. 16). Yunupiŋu was renowned for having held leadership responsibilities for both the Gumatj *mala* and the Wangurri *mala*, and as a *madayin* subject held by both, *nyŋanyŋa* represents this historical union (Williams 1986, p. 190). The barely perceptible rapidity with which these tiny fish dart about symbolises the deftness of Gumatj leaders as political negotiators.

Table. Yolŋu *mala* referenced in Yothu Yindi’s repertoire.

Gumatj	Mandawuy Yunupiŋu’s own <i>ñapawanditj</i> (‘spine-group’)
Rirratjŋu	The <i>ñapawanditj</i> of Witiyana Marika The <i>wakupulu</i> (‘woman’s child’s group’) of Mandawuy The <i>ñändipulu</i> (‘mother’s group’) of Mandawuy’s daughters
Gälpu	The <i>ñändipulu</i> of Mandawuy
Dhalwaŋu	The <i>märipulu</i> (‘mother’s mother’s group’) of Mandawuy A <i>yapapulu</i> (‘sister group’) of the Manatja’ <i>mala</i> , Mandawuy’s daughters’ <i>märipulu</i> , which was massacred by pastoralists at the opening of the twentieth century (Yothu Yindi 1996, cover notes and tr. 13)
Wangurri	A <i>yapapulu</i> of the Gumatj <i>mala</i> for which Mandawuy’s <i>märi’mu</i> (‘father’s father’), Yunupiŋu, held leadership responsibilities

Living in the mainstream

Mandawuy first set forth a response to the prevailing Anglocentrism of public schooling in Arnhem Land in 1986 in his third original song, 'Mainstream' (1989, tr. 1). By this time, he was in his final year of study towards a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Deakin University. The curriculum was dominated by a colonialist assumption that indigenous children were best served by a *mainstream* education with formal instruction in English, and this prompted Mandawuy to reconsider his own experiences of schooling under the Methodists.

Looking back now, I can see that the teachers probably saw things differently to me. Many of their demands were quite incomprehensible. They weren't just teaching me 'useful things'. They had a theory, an ideology. I see now that it was a curriculum driven by the ideology of assimilation. I marvel at the ways we knew how to resist it. I see now that a lot of what motivated those white teachers was the view that it was only when Yolŋu stopped being Yolŋu that we could be Australians. (Yunupinju 1994, p. 116)

Albeit predominantly in English, Mandawuy launched his counter-argument in a typically Yolŋu fashion. He wrote a song about it. When asked to write an assignment on educational outcomes for indigenous school students, Mandawuy instead composed 'Mainstream' and submitted it for assessment. It was awarded a high distinction.

Again, on first hearing, 'Mainstream' sounds like an innocuous rock ballad. It nonetheless set forth the central tenant of Mandawuy's revolutionary ideas on bilingual and bicultural education in indigenous schools. 'Mainstream' asserted that Yolŋu children should be entitled to learn all the necessary skills for participating in broader Australian society without having to relinquish their own traditions, and it sought to turn entrenched Anglocentric notions of what constituted a *mainstream* education upside down. The song's chorus contends that ancestral law forms the only 'mainstream' of thought in which Yolŋu have been raised and educated for countless millennia, and its only Yolŋu-Matha word, 'go' ('come'), beckons Yolŋu to continue in this tradition. The passage of Mandawuy's own Gumatj traditions from father to child in perpetuity – from the original *wanjarr* to his own children – is referenced in the first verse of 'Mainstream'. Here, *gapu* ('water') is evoked as the liminal medium through which souls migrate between the physical and meta-physical planes of reality (Berndt and Berndt 1988, p. 213). Thus, as Mandawuy sees his own daughters reflected 'in the water', he simultaneously hears the 'voices' of ancestral 'Yolŋu heroes' (Yothu Yindi 1989, tr. 1, verse 1).

'Mainstream' was my first challenge to *mainstream* education. Here I was, for the first time, sitting equally with third year students in the university system. So for me, as I was one of only five indigenous students there, this was my way of saying, 'Listen, I can come in. I can sit. I can learn. But still, I have my own traditions which are equal to yours'. So this song is not about assimilation. It's about my law being as equal as yours. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

Grounded in ideals of equality, balance, respect and dialogue between different peoples, Mandawuy's vision was for a school curriculum that incorporated formal instruction in both Yolŋu-Matha and English through which Yolŋu students would learn to be bicultural. To capture these ideals in 'Mainstream', he drew on traditional models for balance and cooperation between different *mala* which stem from the systemic diconstitutionality of Yolŋu society (Corn and Gumbula 2006).

All Yolŋu *mala* are organised under two discrete yet interdependent constitutions of *rom* known as Dhuwa and Yirritja. Each *mala* is constituted as either Dhuwa or Yirritja, and this arrangement forms the primary balance of powers in Yolŋu political life (Gondarra 2001, p. 19). The *mala* named in the coda of ‘Tribal Voice’ (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 7) are listed in an alternating order. Gumatj, Wangurri, Dhalwaŋu and Mangalili are Yirritja, while Rirratjŋu, Djapu’, Dätiwuy and Gälpu are Dhuwa.

Alignment with a constitution, like membership of a *mala*, is patrilineal, and Yolŋu are only permitted to marry someone born into a *mala* of the opposite constitution. Therefore, while Mandawuy’s daughters share his own Gumatj lineage under the Yirritja constitution, their mother is Rirratjŋu under the Dhuwa constitution. Similarly, a *mala* can only ever succeed ownership in the hereditary property of another under the same constitution. The cross-constitutional relationship between *waku* (‘woman’s child’) and *ŋändi* (‘mother’) is nonetheless fundamental to maintaining balance and order within Yolŋu society. It is the duty of *waku* to support their *ŋändipulu* (‘mother’s group’) by scrutinising all of their ceremonies and political dealings to ensure their legality (Morphy 1991, pp. 66–7).

Two distinct traditional models for balance and cooperation between different *mala* are referenced in ‘Mainstream’ to convey Mandawuy’s ideal of biculturalism. The first, *ganma* (‘converging currents’), is intra-constitutional, while the other, *yothu–yindi* (‘child–mother’), is cross-constitutional (Neuenfeldt 1993; Yunupinju 1994; Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994; Magowan 1994).

Firstly, *ganma* symbolises the relationship between *yapapulu* (‘sister groups’) of equal social standing under the Yirritja constitution. This is a diplomatic relationship of respectful distance and recognition of each other’s political independence (Morphy 1991, p. 70). Cooperation between *yapapulu* in mounting shared Yirritja ceremonies is likened to the meeting of independent currents, whether salt or fresh, in an estuary. The estuarine *ganma* site on the coastal Gumatj homeland of Biranybirany was a key inspiration for Mandawuy’s ideas on biculturalism. Here, freshwater flows from the inland out into the sea. The point where it meets saltwater is marked by the production of *djikunŋun* (‘yellow foam’) on the estuary’s surface, hence the reference to ‘yellow foam floating down the river’ in the first verse of ‘Mainstream’. In this *ganma* model, independent currents can never assimilate each other, yet will always be productive in their interactions. The *ganma* site at Biranybirany is also significant to the Gumatj for its sacred association with *gurtha* (‘fire’), and its symbolism of their historical accord with the Wangurri.

Ganma is a place where, when the water runs out, it’s empty. There’s no water and that *ganma* point is where fire is represented by the seaweed growing. It’s considered a symbol of fire where the dugong eats and rolls on it. *Ganma* also connects us with the Wangurri *mala*, my *yapapulu* or ‘sister group’. Our father’s father, Yunupinju, had responsibilities for Gumatj and responsibilities for Wangurri. It’s drawn from the very depth of our knowledge and practices that we consider as ritual between the *mala*. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

Mandawuy’s thinking on biculturalism was also inspired by the *yothu–yindi* relationship which promotes close familial cooperation between *mala* of different constitutions. In ‘Mainstream’, the lifelong bond between child and mother is therefore represented in the contrasting lyrical themes of the first and second verses. Mandawuy’s description of his daughters and their Gumatj patrilineage in verse 1 is juxtaposed against the second verse’s imagery of thunder rolling which is associated with their Rirratjŋu *ŋändipulu*.

So important was the *yothu–yindi* relationship to Mandawuy’s thinking in 1986, that it became his band’s name. After all, his two of his co-founders were his own sisters’ children: his Rirratjinu *waku*, Witiyana Marika, and his Djapu’ *waku*, Milkaynu Munungurr. Their relationships with Mandawuy came as consequences of the *yothu–yindi* bridge between Dhuwa and Yirritja. The band also reflected in microcosm the ethos of biculturalism that Mandawuy sought to introduce into Yolŋu school curriculum. From the beginning, its membership included both Yolŋu and Balanda (‘Anglo-Australian’) musicians, and its music incorporated both Yolŋu performance traditions and globalised popular styles. Like the graduates that Mandawuy hoped a bicultural education would produce, Yothu Yindi demonstrated how Yolŋu could engage with the broader world, while simultaneously remaining true to core ancestral values. This was the goal of a bicultural education, and this is what Yothu Yindi hoped to inspire.

The ideas set forth in ‘Mainstream’ were highly influential and swiftly inspired new bicultural approaches to curriculum development in Yolŋu schools (Yirrkala Community School Action Group 1988; Christie 1989; Marika, Ŋurruwutthun and White 1989; Harris 1990). Mandawuy became the first Yolŋu Principal of the Yirrkala Community School in 1990, and continued to theorise *ganma* as a collaborative space where new dialogues between Yolŋu and Balanda intellectual traditions could legitimately exist and generate new understandings. The hope of new understanding between Yolŋu and Balanda is the final theme presented in the third verse and coda of ‘Mainstream’. Here, Mandawuy envisions ‘reflections in the water’ of a nation in which ‘black and white’ Australians live, share and learn together.

A similar theme of unity between different peoples is presented in ‘One Blood’ (Yothu Yindi 1999, tr. 2) which Mandawuy composed in anticipation of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Here, a traditional Gumatj setting *laykarrambu* (‘male red kangaroo’) is quoted in the song’s two *manikay* bridges. The swiftness of this animal symbolises the peak physical condition of Olympic athletes, while the blood shed from its speared carcass represents the ‘one blood’ that beats in the hearts of all humanity. The lyrics, ‘one blood’, are heard at the end terminal of each formal section. In the chorus, they are preceded by the Yolŋu-Matha lyrics, ‘*Mittji mäypa, min-y’tji gulku, bata’yunmirri, ganydjarr-ŋupan*’, can be translated as ‘Different peoples, many colours, racing each other, racing’. ‘Timeless Land’ (Yothu Yindi 1993, tr. 1) reveals the traditional roots of Mandawuy’s allusion to the blood of *laykarrambu* as the blood of all humanity. Its traditional *manikay* coda describes how the Gumatj will share the *mambulmambul* (‘rare kangaroo flesh’) that they hunt with the peoples of all *mala*. The coda of ‘One Blood’ (Yothu Yindi 1999, tr. 2) also refers to the pursuit of precious ancestral knowledge, which the Yolŋu traditionally characterise as *guku* (‘honey’). Here, Ganbulapula, the ancestral *mokuy* who hunts *laykarrambu* on the Gumatj homeland of Gulkuḷa, searches for *guku* in the forest canopy above.

Written on a bark

Yothu Yindi’s quest to encourage better understanding between different peoples in Australia is grounded in the grave legacy of mining on the Gove Peninsula, and its devastating effect on Mandawuy, Witiyana and Milkaynu’s family. The Australian government’s refusal to recognise Yolŋu sovereignty over this issue is referenced throughout the band’s repertoire, and inspired the composition of its most famous song, ‘Treaty’ (1991, tr. 2).

In 1963, the Australian government granted a bauxite lease over the lands surrounding Yirrkala to the mining company Pechiney. Hereditary Yolŋu owners were locked out of all negotiations. Mandawuy's father, Mangurrawuy Yunupinju, was then a senior Gumatj elder at Yirrkala, and had recently finished collaborating with fifteen other elders to paint the 'Yirrkala Church Panels' (Marika *et al.* 1962–1963). Spanning two giant bark panels representing the Dhuwa and Yirritja constitutions, this extraordinary document was created as a symbol of contemporary Yolŋu solidarity. The two panels respectively incorporated the most sacred hereditary designs of six Dhuwa *mala* and three Yirritja *mala*. They were initially hung on either side of the crucifix inside the Yirrkala Church to demonstrate the equality of the Christian and Yolŋu faiths (Mundine 1999, pp. 24–5). Mandawuy was a young boy at the time of the panels' production, and Mangurrawuy cut fine hair from his head to make brushes for painting its Gumatj designs.

My father was kind in accepting the non-Aboriginal who people came to him. He also wanted to bring into the church his law, and I think I inherit that sense of balance from him. He wanted to give non-Aboriginal people, even the missionaries, a sense of 'Hey listen, we've been here a long time and this is what we know. This is our way of telling you that we go deeper, and our layers of knowledge go deeper than you thought'. His paintings on the right panel are of the saltwater crocodile, the Maralitja man, and the yellow ochre man, Wirrili, from Biranybirany, the same land where the saltwater crocodile discovered fire. He used my hair for that painting, so it's very significant and historic for me. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

The newfound solidarity of the Yolŋu elders at Yirrkala was soon tested when the lands to be mined were summarily excised from the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, and they acted swiftly to register an official protest in the form of the 'Yirrkala Petition to the House of Representatives' (Marika *et al.* 1963). Again spread across two painted bark panels representing the Dhuwa and Yirritja constitutions, this second document incorporated a statement in Yolŋu-Matha and English that beseeched the Australian government to spare their lands. Known colloquially at the 'Yirrkala Bark Petition', it is now on permanent public display in Parliament House in Canberra, yet it did nothing to change the immediate fate of the Yirrkala community.

When NABALCO obtained the Pechiney bauxite lease in 1967, the nearby Rirratjinju homeland of Nhulunbuy was instantly bulldozed to make way for a residential mining town. The mine itself went into production in the following year. Heartbroken, the Yirrkala elders issued a writ through the Supreme Court of the NT in an attempt to halt all mining activities (Mundine 1999, p. 22). Their case, *Milirrpum v. Nabalco* (Australia 1968), was heard by Justice Blackburn. It probed the restricted depths of Yolŋu *rom* and its provisions for property management among seven local *mala*.

I remember that time when my father gathered all the elders and they went out bush. They prepared for weeks before flying to Darwin, all the things one would want to think about in terms of law. These elders were there. They were serious about talking to the judge because they knew that they had to convince the Australian high courts. So they spent maybe two weeks in the bush doing what elders would do to initiate young men. In this case, they were preparing restricted things to show Blackburn. They took those things to court. And what did Blackburn do? (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

Mandawuy's father, Mangurrawuy Yunupinju, and Witiyana's father, Daḍayṇa Marika, both gave evidence on the plaintiffs' behalf. Mandawuy's older brother,

Galarrwuy, was also present throughout the proceedings as a court interpreter, and he witnessed the plaintiffs' eventual defeat in Canberra on 27 April 1971, when Justice Blackburn ruled that hereditary Yolŋu land ownership had 'never formed any part of the law of any part of Australia' (Australia 1971, pp. 244–5). Further insult to Yolŋu dignity came when Blackburn determined that the plaintiffs had not proven their descent from the indigenous people who had inhabited the Gove Peninsula when Captain Arthur Phillip claimed the Australian continent for the British Crown on 26 January 1788 (Australia 1971, p. 198).

That was the biggest disappointment. My father was devastated when we lost that court case, and I saw most of the elders, along with my father, saddened. We'll never forget that those aspects of our law, our strength and our unity were not seen as part of Australian culture, and the Australian way of life in the Yolŋu way. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

Blackburn's judgment (Australia 1971) is scathingly satirised by Galarrwuy in 'Luku-Wāŋawuy Manikay (Sovereignty Song) 1788' (Yothu Yindi 1989, tr. 15). Composed to coincide with Australia's 1988 bicentenary, the song parodies a federal parliament sitting. Its first three verses relate the strange tale of the Blanda, who claim to have owned the Yolŋu homelands ever since 1788, when Captain Phillip planted a Union Jack at Sydney Cove in the name of George III. That this singular act of succession took place some 2,500 kilometres away from the Yolŋu homelands, and 135 years before the first missionaries landed there was apparently of no consequence. In the four verses that follow, Galarrwuy asserts the continuation of Yolŋu sovereignty under *rom*, and retorts that Phillip would have been hastily repelled had he landed at Yirrkala. The humour of 'Luku-Wāŋawuy Manikay 1788' is further underscored by an offbeat acoustic guitar accompaniment that is reminiscent of Anglo-Australian revivalist folksongs.

By 1988, Galarrwuy was in his third term as Chair of the Northern Land Council (NLC), which had been founded alongside the Central Land Council (CLC) in 1976 to represent indigenous land interests in the Northern Territory. Australia's bicentennial celebrations presented the NLC and CLC an opportunity to revisit Blackburn's judgement against the Yirrkala elders, and to reaffirm the collective sovereignty of indigenous Australians. Prime Minister Robert Hawke's visit to the Barunga Festival that year provided the setting. There, Hawke was presented a new document called the 'Barunga Statement' (Yunupinju *et al.* 1988), which called on the federal government to enter into a formal Treaty with indigenous Australians in recognition of the prior ownership, continuing occupation and sovereignty of their homelands, and as an affirmation of their human rights and freedoms. To demonstrate the solidarity of indigenous Northern Territorians in this request, the 'Barunga Statement' took the form a single typescript around which was painted Yolŋu and central Australian designs.

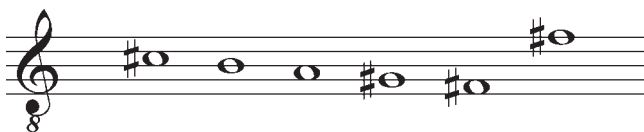
Hawke's initial response to the 'Barunga Statement' was surprisingly positive, and he promised that its call for a Treaty would be fulfilled within the lifetime of his parliament (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 2001). However, this was not to be. By 1990, when Hawke's promise of a Treaty had all but faded from public consciousness, Yothu Yindi intervened. The band worked with Peter Garrett of Midnight Oil, the iconic Australian balladeer Paul Kelly, and indigenous reggae veteran Bart Willoughby to create a song that would recapture the public's imagination.⁷ Willoughby and Garrett in particular had been among the first

musicians to sing out against the systemic injustices faced by indigenous Australians (No Fixed Address 1982; Midnight Oil 1986). The result of their collaboration was ‘Treaty’ (1991, tr. 2), and its Chorus was incisive: ‘Treaty yeah, Treaty now’.

1988 was when Prime Minister Hawke came to Barunga and, at that Barunga Festival, he made a statement. He said there shall be a Treaty between Aboriginal Australia and white Australia. Everyone was really excited about it. ‘Ah yeah, finally there’ll be a Treaty.’ Further down the track – 1988, 1989, 1990 – that’s when I started to get suspicious about this Treaty. There was no action being taken. So I teamed up with Paul Kelly, Peter Garret and Bart Willoughby, a few Australian musicians, and we wrote the song ‘Treaty’. It’s a reflection on the Australian government at that time, and the Australian people for that matter. When is the Treaty? What is the Treaty? How is it going to take form, and in what shape will a Treaty come into being in Australia? We wrote that song ‘Treaty’ as a reminder to us all. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

The first verse of this song recounts how Hawke’s promise of a Treaty in 1988 was broadcast worldwide, but then disappeared ‘just like writing in the sand’. The song’s music video (1992a, tr. 1) presents corroborating evidence. It shows the completion of the ‘Barunga Statement’ at the Barunga Festival, news footage of Hawke’s visit there, and the ravages of bauxite mining on the Gove Peninsula. The song’s second verse contrasts Hawke’s unfulfilled promise against the permanence of Yolŋu *rom*. It asserts that the Yolŋu never sold or ceded their ‘priceless’ homelands to the British Crown, and echoing ‘Luku-Wānawuy Manikay 1788’ (1989, tr. 15), declares that ‘the planting of the Union Jack never changed our [Yolŋu] law at all’. There is also a reference to *ganma* in this verse. Here, the unity that a Treaty would engender between indigenous and other Australians is described as ‘two rivers’ becoming ‘one’. The traditional song quoted in the bridges of ‘Treaty’ is not of the *manikay* tradition, but of a style known as *djatpaŋarri* that dominated as a popular musical form at Yirrkala from the 1930s to the 1970s (Knopoff 1997, p. 603). Composed by the Gumatj singer Rrikin Burarrwaŋa in the 1950s, its presence here evokes nostalgia for Mandawuy’s childhood years before the ravages of mining on the Gove Peninsula. The *dāmbu* (‘head’) of this *djatpaŋarri* is repeated in the opening phrase of each verse in ‘Treaty’ (see Example 6) (Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994, pp. 252–3).

Many other Yothu Yindi songs also cite the legacy of mining on the Gove Peninsula. The opening lyrics of ‘Our Generation’ (1993, tr. 14) – ‘someone in the city gets a piece of paper; someone in the bush holds the law in their hands’ – address the ontological schism between Balanda law and Yolŋu *rom* that coloured Blackburn’s judgment. ‘Baywara’ (1993, tr. 4) and ‘Gunitpirr Man’ (1993, tr. 11) were both composed in memory of Wiŋiyana’s father, *Dadayŋa Marika*, who had given evidence for the plaintiffs. Mandawuy explains how the events surrounding his passing are referenced through the *manikay* quotation of *bonbarr* (‘lightning’) in ‘Baywara’.



Example 6. The *dāmbu* of the *djatpaŋarri* by Rrikin Burarrwaŋa quoted in ‘Treaty’ (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 2).

'Baywara' is a special song because, in 1991, my uncle, who is considered to be the father of land rights, passed away. We were recording our second album, *Tribal Voice*, at that time and, when he passed away, we were at a mobile studio at Gunyanjara. We were sitting outside that evening, and there was lightning in the sea and in the freshwater talking. Two snakes were talking to each other in the freshwater and the saltwater. That inspired me to write this song about Baywara as my uncle was a master of that philosophy. He taught much of how Yolŋu are initiated with the Baywara philosophy so this song was specially written when he passed away. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

'Homeland Movement' (1989, tr. 3) recounts how, after decades of mission life, Yolŋu worked to establish outstations on their homelands in the aftermath of Blackburn's judgment (Australia 1971), while 'Mabo' (1993, tr. 8) celebrates the High Court's eventual recognition of native title in Australia (Australia 1992). 'Lonely Tree' (2000b, tr. 11) commemorates the last Gumatj banyan vine left standing in the vicinity of the Gove Peninsula bauxite plant, and in 'Gone is the Land' (2000b, tr. 12), Mandawuy reminisces about his early childhood, when his mother taught him to hunt the lands that were later lost to the mine. The fate of the 'Yirrkala Bark Petition', displayed behind glass in Australia's Parliament House, is lamented in 'Written on a Bark' (1999, tr. 9). Its opening lyrics evoke the heavy weight of Yolŋu suffering in Australia's recent history: 'A long time ago, they stood proud and strong. Singing the land; touched the ground, signed the deed that was taken away in the name of a king. Can you heal the pain?' (verse 1).

Hope for the future

Music is integral to Yolŋu life in Arnhem Land, and when Yolŋu are born, they carry that special gift in their blood. They are automatically exposed to it. I grew up in a situation where there were only a handful of missionaries, so my exposure to song and dance was immense at Yirrkala. When I wasn't going to school there, my father and mother would take me out hunting, following the seasons. There was that balance to my education. My exposure to the Western way in the classroom, learning Western musics and adjusting to the meanings behind them made me want to switch them around. Using my Yolŋu thinking, I combined the Western way with that of the Yolŋu to make it possible for others to understand. (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005)

This article has explored expressions of classical Yolŋu culture and values the music of Yothu Yindi, and Mandawuy Yunupinju's compositional intent in drawing on hereditary Yolŋu performance traditions to assert the continuation of ancestral Yolŋu agencies in the contemporary world. It has revealed the roots of Mandawuy's theories of biculturalism in his upbringing at Yirrkala and his work as a Yolŋu educator, and how Yothu Yindi, with its bicultural blend of Yolŋu and Balanda musicians and styles, reflected the balance and mutual respect between indigenous and new Australians that the band sought to engender in the world.

While 'Treaty' (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 2) became an influential anthem for the Aboriginal Reconciliation movement in Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 2001), few who today see the 'Yirrkala Bark Petition' or the 'Barunga Statement' on display at Parliament House in Canberra will know of the tragedy suffered by Mandawuy's family as their legal struggle against the Gove Peninsula mine was ultimately defeated, with their most sacred *rom* trivialised and rejected by the Australian judiciary in the process. Yothu Yindi's music nonetheless asserts that Yolŋu must continue to follow in the paths of their ancestors, and to keep on singing and

dancing their *rom* regardless. This affirmation in the chorus of 'Hope' (1991, tr. 12) – 'And we will sing and dance under the honey sun, forever and ever, day and day' – is not a statement of desire, but one of duty. It remains the sacred responsibility of contemporary Yolŋu to carry all that countless generations of their ancestors have provided 'into the future of another day' (Yothu Yindi 1991, tr. 7, verse 3).

Through its frequent references to traditional themes and materials, Yothu Yindi's music continually points local audiences 'back to culture' (1993, tr. 6); back to the ancestral values and practices that underpin Yolŋu society. Its resetting of these themes and materials in the rock idiom demonstrated how durable traditional ideas could be contemporised for younger Yolŋu audiences, and successfully draw their attention away from competing Anglophonic entertainments. This compositional approach has since become the accepted standard among many newer bands in Arnhem Land (Corn 2002) such as the highly successful Saltwater (1998, 2004; Yunupinju 2008), Nabarlek (1999, 2001, 2005, 2007) and Yilila (2005, 2006).

Finally, Yothu Yindi's music also demonstrated how the rock idiom could be commandeered to communicate durable traditional Yolŋu ideas across cultures, and to encourage audiences worldwide to dream of a future Australia in which 'the waters will be one' (1991, tr. 2, verse 2). Like the 'Yirrkala Church Panels', the 'Yirrkala Bark Petition' and the 'Barunga Statement', Yothu Yindi is a deliberate step in an intergenerational continuum of Yolŋu diplomacy across cultures. To echo Mandawuy's own words (Yunupinju from Yunupinju and Corn 2005), the continuing aim of this diplomatic effort is to 'make it possible for others to understand' why the Yolŋu continue to struggle for formal recognition of their sovereignty in Australia, and why this is crucial both to their very cultural survival and to building a more equitable Australia for all.

Endnotes

1. The accepted conventions for Yolŋu-Matha spellings are those of Zorc (1996).
2. All cited titles by artists from Arnhem Land are available from Skinnyfish Music (2008) with the exception of Yilila (2008).
3. Milkayŋu Munungurr passed away in 2007. It is strictly against Yolŋu law for forenames of deceased individuals to be spoken for some years (Keen 1994, p. 139). Please respect his family's wishes in this regard.
4. A *dhuni* is a traditional 'burial shelter' made of timbre and leafy boughs where sacred *bathi* ('baskets') are hung to focus their ancestral power around the deceased.
5. In the most widely spoken Yolŋu language, Dhuwal(a), suffixes differ between *matha* spoken by Dhuwa *mala* and *matha* spoken by Yirritja *mala* differ. Dhuwa leaders are therefore called *liya-ŋarra'mirr* and Yirritja leaders *liya-ŋarra'mirri*.
6. *Gakal* are also the leaders of chorus dancers in ceremonies. As highly proficient dancers, they are entrusted with handling important sacred artefacts such as *bathi*. Though translatable as 'power', *likan* is also a class a sacred name sung in *dhuni* invocations by *liya-ŋarra'mirr(i)* men to mark the passage of *garma* ceremonial actions with ancestral authority. Its literal translation is 'elbow' as the angles found in the repeating patterns of each *mala*'s most sacred designs as the same as those made by dancers with their arms when accompanying invocations (Keen 1994, pp. 94–103).
7. Late in 2007, Peter Garrett was elected to the Australian House of Representatives as the Labour Member for Kingsford Smith, and became Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

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