Where the Clouds Stand: Australian Aboriginal Relationships to Water, Place, and the Marine Environment in Blue Mud Bay, Northern Territory

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I certify that this thesis is my own original work unless otherwise acknowledged.

Marcus Barber
Dedicated To:

Wakuthi Marawili, Mayawulk Wirrpanda, Bakulangay Marawili

and

John Pryn
Preface

It is a privilege to have the time to write human life, perhaps somewhat presumptuous to assume that it can be written, and yet more presumptuous to eschew writing one’s own life and instead try to write about other people’s lives with brevity, truth, and poetry. And every so often, when things somehow inexplicably fall into place, it is fun. An awareness of the complexity and changeability of our own lives necessarily provokes many doubts about the validity of trying to represent the lives of others in a single text. The truth claim that, at some level, we are all human has been for me both a reassurance and a caution. I feel there must be some basis for connection and commonality, indeed, to put it more strongly, to give up hope of this is simply to give up entirely. Yet the ‘otherness’ of others can be overwhelming at times, even when they are the people who are closest to us. When the complications of textual representation, cultural differences, a history of colonisation and racism, and the peculiar, idiosyncratic nature of anthropological fieldwork are thrown into the mix, the exercise becomes fraught to the point that for some it should be abandoned. For many reasons I did not make that decision. Perhaps the strongest was a simple, even naïve faith in the importance of shared humanity.

To seek the phenomenological, to emphasise the everyday sensations and activities of human life, is a dominant aspect of the contemporary academic zeitgeist. So much so that someone without undergraduate schooling as an anthropologist can find themself instinctively wanting to adopt such a stance. My sense is that, amongst my own generation, the popularity of phenomenology may be partly due to eroded faith in either the search for and even the very existence of structures and truths at a higher level of abstraction. But, on a more pragmatic level, this popularity may also be due to the fact that anthropology now has an extended history, and in some important cross-cultural contexts, of which the Yolngu people are certainly one, the basic parameters of society have to a large degree been mapped out. The focus now is on critiquing the validity of those structures and representations, examining how they are changing, sometimes radically, and emphasising the moments of social life from which they were distilled. However to assume that previous generations of anthropologists somehow did not research the everyday seems to me implausible. Good anthropology must always have concerned itself with the experiences and anecdotes of everyday life. What has changed is the greater textual priority given to that level of specificity, rather than to the formal structures and holistic accounts of previous generations.

Yet what follows could be construed as an attempt to provide a structural and holistic account. I would perhaps plead more guilty to the latter than the former, but admit to neither in the strong sense of those terms. Rather than claiming holism, I have tried to trace a single strand through different areas of human life, or, to express a similar idea in language that perhaps has greater currency today, I have selected and illuminated particular fragments and positioned them in relation to each other. This had far more to do with what interested me personally than it did with any explicit theoretical commitments, but through the process of researching and writing, it somehow gained a more substantial theoretical cast. Perhaps that is the way that much theoretical positioning in anthropology ultimately emerges. I found Weiner’s description of the rationale for his 1991 ethnography ‘The Empty Place’ particularly resonant:
“The Empty Place…is the attempt to see the whole of something in each of its parts, which is of course the only “place” we can find such a whole. If to be “structuralist” means that one cannot meaningfully appeal to fluidity, process, fragmentariness, or incompleteness without a tacit acceptance of the whole against which phenomena acquire such characteristics, then of course the analysis is structuralist, as are most of our anthropological analyses” (Weiner 1995).

Perhaps the most curious aspect of anthropology is the expectation that the foundations for such academic diversions are best created by spending 18 months in a tent in Arnhem Land. I am quite sure there are easier ways to answer such questions. But I know that my life is that much richer for having attempted the task.
Acknowledgements

Judging the order in which to thank people seems in some ways the most fraught aspect of this whole exercise. Like many before me, I will start with those with whom I spent the most intense 18 months of my life, and who are both the subjects of and the inspiration for the work that follows. A greater sense of who some of these people are will emerge in the pages that follow, so I will limit myself here to naming those who contributed most to my knowledge and my enjoyment of life in Blue Mud Bay. My thanks go to Djambawa Marawili, Nuwandjali Marawili, Mayawuluk Wirrpanda, Julia Wirrpanda, Waka Mununggurr, Bakulangay Marawili, Gumbaniya Marawili, Ngulpurr Marawili, Gawirrin Gumana, Dhukal and Wuyal Wirrpanda, Bangawuy and Boliny Wanambi, Malumin, Batja, Amos, Mulawalnga, Wurrandan, and Muypirri Marawili, Cathy Wirrpanda, Dhupilawuy, Wanyipi, and Waninya Marika, and Bandipandi and Binninydjirri Wunungmurra. Last, but by no means least, my thanks to the old, invalid, blind man of whom I saw very little but whose vision and wisdom helped create and then sustain the community of Yilpara for so many years. My thanks to Wakuthi Marawili.

Turning my attention to the non-indigenous people who were integral to the production of this work, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my two supervisors, Professor Nicolas Peterson and Professor Howard Morphy. They were brave enough to take on a marine biologist with a rather disparate, Honours-less Arts degree containing no anthropology or indigenous studies subjects, and then trust that he could make the switch from a minor thesis about fish otoliths to a PhD about coastal Aboriginal people. Whether that judgement was successful entirely depends on the attitude the reader has to this text, but there is no doubt that I owe them both a great debt for their trust, knowledge, enthusiasm, and support over the course of my studies. From my first day at ANU, Nic has been extraordinarily generous with his time, comments, and encouragement, and has gracefully accepted my need for narrative flights of fancy amongst the empirical work he values so much. Howard’s comments were always very perceptive and he was unfailingly generous with his extensive existing Yolngu material, his financial resources, and with his time in a very busy schedule when I needed it. I should also acknowledge the substantial personal risk that he and Frances Morphy took in endorsing the presence of an untried student in a community of people with whom they have deep relationships going back more than thirty years. I am most grateful for the trust that they showed in me. Although not part of my supervisory panel, Frances certainly could have been recognised as such, for her intellectual and personal contribution to the work presented here is considerable. I am grateful for her support, ideas, criticisms, and insights. She and Howard are an incredibly daunting act to follow, and in a number of important respects, I have not presumed to try.

This PhD was unusual for anthropology in that it was part of wider project containing a number of researchers. I am grateful for the quiet community and PhD student solidarity provided by Patrick Faulkner over the years. Remote fieldwork in demanding conditions tests many things, and he passed them carrying burdens that would have brought down strong people living in the most comfortable of conditions. For that he will always have my greatest respect. Together with Dr Anne Clarke he provided me not only with the comforts of a communal camp in the dry seasons, but with a better understanding of the challenges and rewards of archaeology. I am grateful to them both.
for their generosity with the resources that they purchased for their work and allowed me to use, not least the laptop on which the bulk of my fieldnotes were written.

The second aspect of the wider project was the involvement of the Northern Land Council and its staff. I would particularly like to thank Mick Reynolds and his wife Tania for their friendship, support, and hospitality, and also Philip and the staff at the NLC offices in Nhulunbuy. Thanks to Jeff Stead and Ben Scambary, who were very supportive of the project in the early years, and to Penny Creswell, Phillipa Hetherton, Ron Levy, and Belinda Oliver.

Other people who provided invaluable assistance in the Northern Territory included Will Stubbs at the Buku-Llarngay Arts Centre, Leon White at Yirrkala school, and Craig Massie, Anders, and Jonetani Rika at Laynhapuy Homelands Centre. Dr Helen Larson provided expert fish identifications, and Janet Simcock at the North Australia Research Unit also provided important assistance. Thanks also to ‘the archaeology volunteers’ Rebecca Morphy, Allison Mercieca, Sarah Robertson and Ian Faulkner who were great fun to have around during the weeks they were at Yilpara.

Of the ANU students I was fortunate enough to get to know, Yasmine Musharbash’s contribution to this work could not be understated. Now long graduated, she has been a source of friendship, support, advice, gossip and wise criticism over more than five years. Her deep anthropological training provided me with the perspective of a young, female, well read, and experienced desert anthropologist, and for someone trying to come to grips with the discipline for the first time, this was a valuable gift. I only wish I could have reciprocated to an equivalent degree!

Thanks to the members of staff at the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at ANU, who made the place such a pleasure to work in, particularly Sue Fraser, David McGregor, and Marian Robson. Dr Melinda Hinkson and Dr Margot Lyon provided valuable criticisms and insights, and Dr Jon Altman and Dr Deborah Bird Rose gave me important early encouragement. Thanks also to Pip Deveson and Katie Hayne at the Centre for Cross-Cultural research for their time and support.

Thanks to friends in both Melbourne and Canberra who helped along the way: Suzy Emison, Michael Kachel, Lauren Bain, Virginia Sprague, and David Slattery in Canberra, and particularly Tom Nicholson, Alice Gaby, and Bec Miller in Melbourne, the last three of whom know first hand what doing a PhD is like. Isolde Lueckenhansen was also an important source of support when I needed it. Thanks to my aunt and uncle in Canberra, Hal and Jan Hay, who greatly eased my arrival there, and without whom the last six months would have been much more difficult. My gratitude also to my fellow students, including Stephan Lorenzen, Ludger Dinkler, Christiane Keller, Blair Palmer and Josephine Wright amongst many others. Thanks to the thesis working group members, whose criticisms were sometimes hard to hear but were always valuable! Lastly, my heartfelt thanks to Antonella Diana, whose lively presence was a bright light at a difficult time.

My thanks to Keren Adams, whose incredible support and loyalty down the phone during the fieldwork was far more than anyone could reasonably have expected. I am deeply sorry that we were unable to complete this journey together, but I shall never forget her contribution to the first three and a half years. Perhaps the greatest measure of that contribution is the real sadness amongst her sisters at Yilpara, who know that their chances of seeing her again in the years to come have greatly diminished. Thanks also
to Keren’s family, for Jerry, Suzanne, and Karly supported Keren and I in so many material and non-material ways. Their welcome and generosity made the distances our career choices created much more bearable, and I very much appreciated their real enthusiasm for the research that I was doing.

Lastly, I wish to thank my own family in Melbourne. I know that it feels to all of us that I have been away for a long, long time. Thanks to my grandmother, Marjorie, and to my grandfather John, one of the people to whom this work is dedicated. Thanks to Elspeth, who spoke so often of how much she missed me, and to Fran and Dave, who were there offering support when it counted most. Dave and now little Samuel have joined our family since I left, but it is now very hard to imagine it without them. Most of all I thank my parents Leonie and Bruce. Their patience, encouragement, wisdom, and guidance throughout my life have enabled me to do something that is hard to do, and yet because of this, they have had cause to worry. I know that this marks a return to calmer waters for all of us.
Explanatory Note: The Blue Mud Bay Project

The PhD research outlined in what follows was part of a larger project involving five other academic researchers and the Northern Land Council as an industry partner. When it began, such a sizeable project containing formal involvement by non-academic parties was unusual in the humanities, indeed it was the first of its kind in the Anthropology program at the Australian National University. Now, more than five years on, such projects are far more common, and seem likely to become even more prevalent in the years to come. Two concerns are sometimes raised about such projects. One is whether the graduate student is operating sufficiently independently from the other researchers on the project to the extent that their work is worthy of a postgraduate qualification. The second is the degree to which involvement by non-academic parties has affected the nature and outcomes of the research. The first of these concerns I would address by stating that where elements of this text rely on the work of others, in particular Howard and Frances Morphy, then it is acknowledged accordingly. Material that is not so acknowledged is based upon my own independent research.

Addressing the second concern about industry partner involvement requires a little more time and space, for it touches on some potentially complex issues. My first response is, perhaps unexpectedly, to relate an anecdote. In September 1999, before I had heard of Blue Mud Bay or considered working in Aboriginal Australia, I contacted the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at ANU about their Masters program, thinking that the discipline of anthropology might be a good way of shifting my research focus from biological science to an interdisciplinary context. A brief explanation of the research I had in mind resulted in a recommendation to email Dr Nicolas Peterson, whom they believed would be interested. Without any real knowledge of why he would be, I sent an email to Nic in which I explained my strong desire to undertake interdisciplinary research about the way that human beings relate to the marine environment across a number of areas of life. I envisaged that such research would use my skills and knowledge as a quantitative marine scientist, but also my background in the humanities, which had not been required to any significant degree in my Honours research. Not long before my email arrived, Nic and Howard had been awarded 3 years funding from the Australia Research Council to investigate precisely this question in Blue Mud Bay. In other words, taking on the scholarship that was part of the Project determined the location and focus of a research topic I had already decided upon. It is often assumed that a student working on an industry partnership project has not had complete freedom to choose their topic, but instead has accepted one that has already been constructed for them in some way. In my case the opposite was largely true; I chose my own topic, the Blue Mud Bay Project just happened to fit it.

This history is relevant when considering the role in the research process of the Northern Land Council and of the Native Title sea claim that the Council was overseeing on behalf of the Blue Mud Bay people. Native Title refers to the rights in land, and to a far lesser degree in the sea, which indigenous Australians can claim by following certain legislative and legal processes. It has been and remains a dynamic and highly controversial area of Australian law and public policy. Under the Blue Mud Bay contract, the Northern Land Council supplied a 4WD vehicle and some research funds
to assist in my research, and their expectation was that my component of the wider project would produce information about resource use and ecological knowledge amongst the Yolngu living in the area. I did obtain such information, and it was documented in a report to the Federal Court of Australia, in order to assist in the Court’s deliberations regarding Native Title in Blue Mud Bay. Appendix 1 contains information from that report relevant to this thesis.

The fact that Blue Mud Bay people had decided to undertake a Native Title claim certainly encouraged them to talk to me about the places that mattered to them, to take me to visit such places, and to reflect on how they could best articulate the importance of them to outsiders. They wanted to talk about their ‘Sea Rights’. Yet the timeframe on which anthropological fieldwork is conducted made maintaining any kind of pretence or façade in their articulations very difficult, for 18 months is far too long for any overstated claims about the role of the sea in people’s lives to survive without being exposed. There are simply too many other things to attend to in life in a poor and remote Aboriginal community to spend every minute worrying about how things might appear to the resident anthropologist. The claim was a factor in my time in Blue Mud Bay, and in my interactions with its residents, but it did not always, or even often, loom large. A thesis about coastal life at Yilpara was the preeminent objective of my research, and it was the major outcome. Yet it is also true that this course was taken in the knowledge that a work which successfully examined Yolngu relationships to the coastal environment would facilitate the conduct of any Native Title proceedings. Achieving such complementary aims seems to me to be the intention of such collaborative research projects.
Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between people, water, and places in the everyday life of the Yolngu people of Yilpara in northeast Arnhem Land. In the Yolngu world, a sophisticated understanding of the fluid and dynamic relationships between fresh and saltwater is given a greater priority than the division of the coast into land and sea. These waters are continually moving and mixing, both underground and on the surface, across an area that stretches from several kilometres inland to the deep sea, and they combine with clouds, rain, tides, and seasonal patterns in a coastal water cycle. Yolngu people use their understanding of water flows as one basis for generating systems of coastal ownership, whilst water also provides a source of rich and complex metaphors in wider social life.

Describing this coastal water cycle provides the basis for a critique of the way European topographic maps represent coastal space, and also for a critique of common formulations of customary marine tenure (CMT). However as a methodological tool, I use maps to provide a detailed analysis of people's connections to place and as part of a wider examination of how places are generated and sustained. In this way the thesis contributes to anthropology, marine studies, and indigenous studies as well as touching on some issues of coastal geography. The approach I adopt has a phenomenological emphasis, since it enables me to show how Yolngu concepts arise out of and articulate with their experience of living in their environment and of using knowledge in context. This perspective contributes fresh ethnographic insights to some ongoing contemporary debates about people and place.

The paired tropes of flow and movement are used as a gloss throughout the work, as each chapter takes a different domain of human life at Yilpara and explores how water, place, and human movement are manifested in it. Such domains include subsistence hunting and fishing, group and gender distinctions in presence on the country, food sharing, memories of residence and travel, personal names, spirits and Dreaming figures, patterns of coastal ownership, and interactions with professional fishermen. Together, they provide an account of the different ways that people relate to water, place and country in contemporary everyday life. ‘Where the Clouds Stand’ is predominantly an ethnographically driven work from one locality, but within that approach, it also explores broader considerations of phenomenology, anthropological inquiry, and human life more generally.
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ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION

The orthography used in this dissertation is based on that used by Keen (1994:xiv-xv) and following him, Toner (2001:viii). The short vowels are \( i, u, \) and \( a \), while long vowels are \( e, o, \) and \( å \). A single \( r \) is pronounced as in rung, and \( rr \) is rolled. The consonant combinations \( dh, th, \) and \( nh \) are pronounced with the tongue between the front teeth, and the retroflex letters \( d, t, \) and \( n \) are pronounced as if with the letter ‘\( r \)’ in front of them. The combination \( ng \) is pronounced as in ‘rung’, whilst \( n.g \) indicates that the letters should be pronounced separately. The combination \( ny \) is the same as the ‘\( ni \)’ in the English word ‘companion’.
Chapter 1

Coastal Flows: Water and Movement, Place and Country

It is bulunu, the wet season, and thick clouds move quickly from the sea towards the land. Some are grey, some are almost black, and their speed makes them seem alive. They change shape again and again as they move closer, merging, separating, reforming. The first raindrops fall fat and heavy, and the downpour follows in seconds. It is the height of the cyclone season, and it is raining on ground already wet.

The land reacts to the water in different ways. Some places have white-brown clay that sucks the water in, holding it so that weeks later the clay will still be soft. Elsewhere, on the hills, the downpour soaks through the red, gravelly ground, so that it is nothing more than damp and clean minutes after the heaviest storm. In other places there is dark earth that becomes slippery mud as the rain falls. The water flows overland and underground, feeding tiny rivulets on the surface and seeping into aquifers deeper down under the soil.

The rivers begin to grow. Their waters go from clear, dark brown to milky tea as the silt of the land fills them. Fed from tributaries and underground flows, the rivers burst their banks, flooding the paperbark stands growing on the low-lying land beside the river. The waters flow downstream, natural foam collecting in eddies and clumps behind barrages of trees and branches across the path of the river. Roads turn into rivers, and are eroded and cut away.

The water flows down and fills the floodplains, saltmarshes, and mangroves beside the sea. Here river, sea and land merge, the divisions fade, and all is wet, salty earth. The water flows on, past the roots of mangrove trees growing in the salty shallows, out over beds of grass under the sea. The water is brown, for it carries the land in it. Shards and messages from the forest float on its surface. Land has become water. The rivers flow out over the top of the saltwater, and canoe paddlers can drink from the surface of the sea several miles from shore.

Under the ground, things are changing. The saltwater, which has pushed kilometres inland underground during the dry season, is pushed downwards into the earth and backwards to the sea by freshwater pouring into the aquifers. Waterholes and sinks appear near the coast, and in some places, underground water bubbles up through the sea shallows in miniature fountains and submarine springs. The people who live here have already moved to the beaches, taking advantage of the temporary freshwater bubbling up, and the stingrays, turtles, parrotfish and other sea creatures that grow fat during the rains.

Slowly the storm subsides. The clouds move on, and the hot sun and humidity take hold of the stillness. The air is dense with water, and the slightest exertion leaves a sheen of sweat. As the tide lowers it takes the river water, leaves, silt and debris from the land out into the deep. River and sea mix and become one. The clouds follow the movements of the tide, floating out to sea to reform and replenish before returning again when the tide is high. Low tide, when all is still and the clouds are at sea, is a good time for spear hunting.
Brackish water at Yathikpa

Mangroves at Ngärri

Fishing on high tide at Yarrinya

Inland clouds at Gangan
To the south, out of the arms of the landlocked bay, the sea stretches to the horizon. South is the only place the horizon can be seen. Out there where the waters have mixed, a new cloud is forming. Framed by the twin points of the bay, a fragile wisp, like campfire smoke, rises from the water. The wisp starts thin, then at a point it widens to the growing, massive lightness of a new cloud. River and sea have become sky. The new cloud circles and merges with those that have retreated on the tide. The clouds stand over the sea, waiting.

They are waiting for the tide. When it turns, it will gather the silt and debris from the land and bring it to shore, to a different place from its origin. The clouds will follow the tidal flows and approach the beach once again. Once over the land, sky will become water and the clouds will let their rains fall, for high tide is rain time. Perhaps it will rain on the coast, or perhaps the clouds will push further inland to stand over the hills, sending a fresh pulse of water down the rivers to the sea.

The rhythm of rain, river, sea and cloud is the rhythm of the wet season. Slowly, as the days pass, that rhythm changes and the season begins to turn. The rains falter, the humidity falls, and strong, cold winds blow off the sea, stirring it to white foam. The winds dry and flatten the grasses grown high in the wet season rains. Yolngu hunters begin to light bushfires in the grass, creating a smoky haze across the sky and turning the sunsets to blood orange. The smoke causes fogs, which form in the sea at night and then creep onto the land in the early morning, condensing to droplets on the spiders' webs in the dry grass. No longer replenished by the rains, the waterholes and billabongs of the coast begin to dry out. The rivers start to slow, the saltwater emerges from beneath the ground and pushes in from the sea. The freshwater retreats, and in time, the first taste of salt in the rivers will be kilometres inland.

The freshwaters shrink, and the fish, tortoises and aquatic creatures are concentrated in the deeper river pools, making them easy prey. The marine species of the wet are no longer 'fat', and the beachside water sources have dried up. The clouds of this season are high, white, and rainless. Long, baking days of hot sun leaves the bush stale and dusty, and the floodplains cracked and bare. The tide is visible on the floodplains for there is no freshwater to disguise it. It creeps over the dried out mud and seeps out from beneath the ground, a thin film over the earth.

Slowly, the cycle begins to move again. The heat increases, and the moisture in the air gets thicker. The first rainclouds form inland, the rain falling on the hills and flowing into the rivers. The salt has reached inland as far as it will go. This new pulse of water makes the rivers flow again, and when it reaches the sea, noiseless lightning begins to flicker in the evenings above the sea horizon, flashing in forks and sheets. The lightning is a sign to the crocodiles to begin the journey back to brackish places to lay their eggs, for the rains make mud that they can slide over easily. As the lightning grows, the new water off the land flows out, transforming into sea clouds. Weeks of silent lightning is followed by thunder, and the colours of the clouds darken. Yet still they remain at sea. The humidity keeps rising, and the whole world becomes hot and still.

The first rains come to the coast, just a spattering break in the intense humidity of the buildup. A brief coolness, then nothing. The new growth begins from this sprinkling, but there is a pause, a moment of waiting. The sharks and rays are starting to fatten. The clouds build bigger and darker. The wet season is coming, and the cycle will begin again.
Yarrinya road, dry season

Yarrinya road, wet season

Looking west to Yilili: dry season sunset through bushfire smoke

Looking west to Yilili: wet season
After the bushfires

Floodplain and shell mounds, dry season

Spear hunters under dry season clouds

Wangupini: Sea Cloud
Aqueography: Mapping water

This thesis asks a basic question: What does it mean to live in a world of water? To stand on a beach in the shallows, skin wet with the humid air, clouds moving overhead, groundwater bubbling up from below, rivers flowing beside, and the sea stretching to the horizon? If everyday life in such a place is sensitive to water flows and transformations, how does that affect movement and perceptions of space? Furthermore, what happens to people and to social life if that overwhelming physical reality then underpins or exemplifies a number of important social forms, not least, the ownership of country? These questions, amongst others, will be addressed in the chapters that follow. It is in some ways a unique story, specific to the people of Blue Mud Bay, yet in other respects it speaks directly to regional, national, even international concerns.

In adopting a focus on water, it is important not to overstate the differences from a worldview more familiar to the Western academy.1 Many elements of the physical and hydrological picture painted above might be found in different places in the scientific canon of the West; a meteorologist would understand cloud formation and the rain cycle, a hydrologist might have a map of the rivers or of the ground water, and an oceanographer might predict the water currents, river plumes, and tides in Blue Mud Bay. Yet the whole would rarely appear in such accounts, each vision is only partial. When the whole cycle is integrated and presented, it is still a further leap to then use such a deep knowledge of water flows as a basis for understanding and representing important social forms. This leap is a major topic in the chapters to come, but as a first step, looking at a map of Blue Mud Bay in the light of the 'aqueography' described above makes clearer some of the basic contrasts being drawn here.2

A map of Blue Mud Bay (1A) shows us much. We can see the shape of the bay itself, the contour lines and heights of the ranges, and the kinds of vegetation growing on the land. We can see the communities, the path of the roads, and the route of the rivers as they flow to the sea. We can find islands, and sometimes, a submerged reef marked. We can locate ourselves on the map and immediately see how far we are from other places, and the terrain we might have to cover to get there. It is a view from an omniscient height, and a powerful way of representing the world.3

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1 I share Ingold’s frustration (Ingold 2000:6-7) at using the term ‘West’, yet like him, find it necessary in this context, whilst at the same time remaining aware of the ways in which it requires significant qualification.
2 Before going further, it is important to note that what follows has the status of a textual device rather than a comprehensive comparison. There is no suggestion that Western peoples’ complex relationships to coastal space are fully accounted for by a map any more than the opening physical and environmental description was a full account of Aboriginal relationships to that same environment. Rather, these contrasts are a means of eroding some common presuppositions that, from my own experience, many readers are likely to bring to the text. Such presuppositions can easily inhibit a proper understanding of the much broader exploration of people and coastal space that follows in subsequent chapters.
3 This is power in the most literal sense, for maps have been heavily associated with historical processes of colonialism and domination. For example, see Black (1997), Harley (1988), and Wood (1992). Close attention has also been paid to the way maps represent space, albeit in a different way to the approach taken here (Robinson and Petchenik 1976:4,86; Sack 1980:6).
Yet despite its power and seemingly omniscient perspective, immersion in the water flows and transformations above reveals absences in this representation. The detail of the land is contrasted with the flat blue of the ocean; no depth, no variation in colour showing different water bodies or movements. No sign of distinctions in the seabed, such as are made on land. Rocky reef is not differentiated from mud, nor seagrass from sand. This is partly a reflection of the capacities and deficiencies of remote mapping systems, yet it is also the result of a difference in perspective, an assessment of what is important to know. Such seabed differences are fundamental to the subsistence hunting of the people who live in this place, and they are at least as important as distinctions on land.

Similarly, there is no great attempt to represent the vast changes in water that occur over the course of a year. The map is understood as largely representative of the terrain regardless of season, and perhaps a passing note regarding the etymology of ‘terrain’ is of value here. Water is dynamic. It changes and moves in ways that make static representations hard to produce with any accuracy. Boundaries in water are rarely distinct, and even transition zones are movable and hard to identify. Making maps usually involves lines, definition, and decisiveness about representation. The flux of water, its capacity for change, resists these tendencies. Thus representing the great flows of water across this space is limited to the identification of intermittent streams and floodplains on land, and nothing is said of the great changes in the sea.

The map is also missing a critical third dimension. The aerial view provides a powerful perspective, yet, aside from the hill contours, there is no height. There is no map of the clouds, no signs of the sky in such an image. From such a view, the sky itself is rendered not just unimportant but invisible. Yet as the reader will already realize from the description above, to remove the sky is to destroy the system, to prevent a fundamental physical order from being made apparent. It is no accident that clouds feature heavily in the paintings of the Yolngu people who live here. A seemingly omniscient image, produced by removing the obstacles to vision that might greet the naked eye looking down from on high is in fact blind because of that removal. To look at a map of Blue Mud Bay without being aware of the absence of depth is to lose the sense of seeing from the inside, of living in the midst of the flows.4

A description of water flows, an 'aqueography', also blurs the distinction between land and sea asserted so strongly by Western maps. Water demonstrates the dynamism and change that constantly occurs between land and sea, indeed, it redefines that division as salt and fresh. In the wet season, the 'rivers' flow kilometres offshore, carrying freshwater, silt and debris from the land out into the deep sea, whilst in the dry season, the salt pushes into the rivers and comes up from beneath until it is found many kilometres inland. There is no distinction between seawater and saline groundwater, for they are one and the same, saltwater. Coastal swamps, floodplains, and mangroves are places where land, sea and river merge, where such divisions are much harder to make. Water erodes a distinction fundamental to the presentation of a map, as the clear black line dividing sea blue from land brown becomes a zone sometimes kilometres wide. Water flows constantly cross and recross that zone, moving underground, on the surface and in the sky, revealing an arbitrariness in a division seemingly so clear.

4 The comparison here clearly has echoes of Ingold’s ‘globe’ and ‘sphere’ perspectives (Ingold 2000). His dualism has been widely debated, and I am not proposing to accord it the theoretical weight that he does in his formulation. Rather this comparison is a useful way of disorienting and then reorienting readers used to ‘seeing’ the sea in a particular way.
Fig. 1E: Satellite Image of Northern Blue Mud Bay

Scale: 1cm = 2.3km
However there is one way that at least some of these flows can be represented in maplike ways. Modern technology has now given us the view from space, and the gaze of a satellite has much in common with the map (Fig 1E). Yet it can also do more. In such images, the ocean currents are manifested in sweeps and swirls of artificial blue, the colours reconstructed and reimagined, but nevertheless giving some sense of the oceanic movement and diversity that was lacking in the map. The slow transition from river to deep sea is clearer, for there is less of the sense that the river ends and the sea begins at a black line separating the two. The image comes closer to representing some of what needs to be represented, suggesting ways in which sea and land engage one another and that each is changed by their proximity. Demarcating and distinguishing different bodies of water in the sea itself seems less strange, for they can clearly be seen, as can the places where those bodies mix and merge. The satellite only captures flows in the sea at a particular moment in time, but like the map, it is useful in certain ways, and indeed it goes one step further than the map in what is required here. But again, it is not omniscient. The sky and clouds are still missing, and so are the water flows under the ground. It is a vibrant but static snapshot, a moment in time, or rather, in season, that suggests the dynamism in the sea, but not the full diversity of the coastal flows.

The striking thing about the above comparisons is that they were limited, superficially at least, to considering water in physical and environmental terms. It was a conscious separation that allows the map to be judged fairly, to be assessed doing what it was intended to do. The absences in its vision that have already been identified should alert us to how greater differences might occur when this physical emphasis is no longer maintained. Maps appear at a number of points in this thesis, but if they are to serve their purpose, the vision they suggest must be both undercut and augmented. However by undertaking that initial process, a further question presents itself. If the physical world can be represented so differently when water is made central, what might be the result if such flows are ingrained in human life in multiple and highly meaningful ways? This question is a central thread in the chapters that follow.

Flows and Countries

The coastal flows outlined above represent a general pattern, defining the limits of Dholupuyngu country. Dholupuyngu literally means ‘mud people’, and it is a useful general term for those people who live around Blue Mud Bay or who claim to own country within it. In everyday life, social groupings on smaller scales are far more important than this regional descriptor, and like any grouping it can be quickly qualified by internal rivalries and external allegiances, but this chapter is not primarily concerned with those scales. Rather, it describes a way of seeing and being that is common to the people who live there, but which contrasts with the dominant conception of coastal space in wider Australian life.

There is no Yolngu word for this pattern of coastal flows. Rather, there are a multitude of words for specificities within that pattern, words for clouds, rain, currents and floating objects that can express group relationships and individual identities in varied and flexible ways. The opening description was ‘environmental’ in appearance only, for the underlying structure of the flows, the way they interrelate, and the specificities identified within them, were far more than that. In saying that the flows outline the limits of ‘Dholupuyngu country’, the second of these terms is as carefully chosen as the first. The English language is certainly not well equipped to discuss the interrelationship of land, waters, and sky generally, or in Aboriginal Australia in particular. What is
critically important to emphasise is that what the flows encompass, which includes sea and sky, is owned, humanised, and integrated. This is particularly important when referring to the sea, which is more often seen as ‘open ocean’ and ‘boundless nature’, and the sky can also be viewed in a similar way.

However for most non-indigenous people, ‘country’ is basically a synonym for ‘land’. This orientation is revealed by English phrases such as ‘in the country’ and ‘countryside’, and by the current need to modify it to ‘sea country’ when it is used for Aboriginal marine domains. Yet ‘country’ and ‘land’ are not the same, for country can include water without the same level of contradiction as land, opening up possibilities for its redefinition. Along with the associations between country and land, which are negative in this context, it also has two other senses, both of which are valuable. One is that it is the word most commonly used by Aboriginal people when referring to the places they own in English. For them it precisely means land and sea that has owners, stories, songs, and Ancestry5 attached to it; it is a humanised realm. The second sense of country has very different origins, but is equally important. The redefinition of country to include the sea is not just necessary for a better description of life in Blue Mud Bay, it is already a practical reality on a much wider scale. In 2001 the process for declaring Australian maritime boundaries 200nm offshore was completed, meaning that, quite literally, over 50% of the ‘country’ of Australia is now sea.6 The same is occurring elsewhere across the globe, as under the Law of the Sea process countries increasingly become land and sea together, albeit with some distinctions drawn about differing rights in each of those zones (UNCLOS 1983). The delineation and defence of these offshore ‘countries’ is growing fast, as arguments about resource depletion, fishing rights, and illegal immigration increase in intensity. In practical terms, ‘countries’ are already land and sea, and so there is much more momentum involved in redefining the term than simply an adequate characterisation of people and places in Blue Mud Bay. In very different ways, both of these senses emphasise the humanised, owned nature of the sea, and sky to a lesser degree, as an integral part of ‘countries’. We are reminded of the power and significance behind the Aboriginal use of ‘country’, but are equally reminded of how open sea is now a part of countries on wider scales, owned out to distances far beyond the region defined in Yolngu claims, beyond ‘where the clouds stand’.

**Landscapes and Places**

There is a vibrant series of discussions going on in contemporary anthropology about how people relate to and constitute the worlds in which they live. Phenomenology has been a notable thread within these debates, which have circled around terms such as ‘landscape’, ‘place’, and ‘environment’, and whilst ‘landscape’ has been a popular term in recent streams of British and European social anthropology,7 ‘place’ has been equally prominent in works by American anthropologists (Merlan 1998; Myers 1986; Myers

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5 Following Morphy, (Morphy 1984; Morphy 1991) I adopt the term ‘Ancestry’ and its derivatives (Ancestor, Ancestral) to refer to what is often called the ‘Dreaming’ in Aboriginal Australia. At this point it is sufficient to say that the term describes the beings which Yolngu people believe created the country in the distant past, and which are still present in a less overt form in the present day. The Ancestral realm is the source of spirituality, identity, power, and indeed, of life itself.


7 A significant number of references could be cited here. Some of the more important ones include: (Bender 1993; Bender and Winer 2001; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Flint and Morphy 2000; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995b; Ingold 1993; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Strang 1997; Strang 2004; Tilley 1994).
2000; Weiner 1991). Much of the work addresses the kinds of questions that are of interest here, namely what relationships and engagements exist between people and the spaces/places/lanscapes/environments they inhabit, and what important things determine the nature of those places. There has been some common theoretical ground in the analyses of both landscape and place, and many of the insights developed surrounding each term can be applied to the other. In many respects the same is true here for the way in which ‘country’ has been defined in terms of the coastal flows. The debates are asking similar questions using different terminology, and these are the kinds of questions that are also being addressed here.

There is a precedent for talking and writing about the spaces and places of coastal Blue Mud Bay. Morphy has, in numerous publications, articulated important dimensions of Yolngu life and society, and in a number of key texts has used the analytical term ‘landscape’ (Morphy 1991, 1993, 1995). These texts are part of the wider scholarly examination of the value and implications of ‘landscape’ which has defined and redefined the term in complex ways. Recent phenomenological approaches have emphasised landscape as process (Hirsch 1995a:5) and in a similar phenomenological vein, additional work by Ingold has focussed on ‘dwelling’ and its relationship to landscape (Ingold 2000). Such approaches have assisted in redefining the term away from its historical origins in Western painting, through which it derived an emphasis on vision from a particular perspective. These emphases are inappropriate in many cross-cultural contexts, including Yolngu ones.

Yet as should already be clear, the emphasis on vision is not the major reason why ‘landscape’ cannot be used here. It both implicitly and explicitly prioritises ‘land’ in the non-indigenous imagination, a prioritisation that is an important part of wider Western attitudes to space. ‘Landscape’ also emphasises the separation between land and sea that is being actively argued against, and whilst adding ‘seascape’ addresses the overemphasis on land, it does not address the issue of separation. Another possible modification is ‘waterscape’, a term that is perhaps accurate for the coastal flows, but is an overstatement for a wider argument about human life. Water is critical, but it is not the whole, for like most human beings coastal Yolngu people live much of their lives on ‘land’. ‘Coastscape’ is another, somewhat ungainly possibility, for ‘coastal’ appeared in the title of this chapter and ‘coast’ appears regularly in the work that follows. It must be understood here in the broader sense, as a region rather than as a ‘coastline’, an area rather than a border, incorporating zones inland of the beach and of the waters beyond the shore. ‘Coastscape’ is perhaps the best of these alternatives, but aside from its awkwardness, the emphasis on vision that remains a part of ‘scape’ terms, combined with the general tendency to envisage the coast as the boundary between land and sea, suggests that the best approach may be to absorb the insights from landscape studies, but use other terms to express what is being referred to.

American anthropologists are prominent in recent writings about ‘place’ (Myers 1986) and a similar phenomenological emphasis is evident in some of these works, particularly the influential collection of essays entitled ‘Senses of Place’ (Feld and Basso 1996), and more flexible and extended definitions of the term have been developed through such analysis. The term ‘place’ is useful in what follows for a number of

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8 White has noted a greater sense of ‘panorama’ in paintings from coastal Yolngu groups compared with their inland relatives, with whom he works (White 2003). He further notes how inland groups are not interested in ‘views’ or gaining a perspective on wider areas of country from high places. The coastal Yolngu I worked with did appreciate being able to see the ocean, to look across the Bay and see other islands. In other words, they did appreciate land and seasapes.
reasons. Firstly, it does not automatically imply land, for like ‘country’ it is capable of incorporating sea space. Secondly, place emphasises human involvement in its generation, a critical element in writing about sea spaces that are not often seen in that way in the West. Thirdly, the Yolngu word for place, wänga, can refer to both land and sea areas. Williams (1986:86) notes that it carries some of the generality of the English word ‘place’, as it requires other descriptive terms to give it a more specific meaning, and in fact it has a range of uses, including home, house, camp, homeland community, and country. Translating ‘wänga’ as ‘place’ diminishes some of the full resonance of the former, but there is some commonality between the two, and the recent writings on place have lent the term considerable sophistication, pushing its meanings and resonances closer to the Yolngu word. Such writings have also had a phenomenological cast, an important influence on the work here.

As well as its analytical value, place can also perform an additional function in relation to this particular text. ‘Flow’ and ‘movement’ are important tropes in what follows, and one aspect of place is that, at least in its conventional sense, it suggests a degree of stability in time and space. Noting such a contrast, and the sense of stability suggested by place, does not deny its capacity for change; places can be created or fade to insignificance, can alter their relationships to each other or cease to exist. Flows and places are mutually implicated in constituting one another, for places have initial stability but are made permeable by the flows and tracks that pass through them. Indeed, that movement itself is perceptible by the changes of place. So place tempers the textual trope of flow, whilst that flow simultaneously provides a richer and more dynamic account of place.

Hunting and Phenomenology

Country and place, and indeed landscape and environment, are terms that appear in an important ongoing conversation in the recent anthropological literature, a conversation represented in the work of Casey (1996), Ingold (2000) and Myers (2000). However the major focus of that debate is not the distinctions between the different terms, a point made clear in passing by Myers (2000:79) when he refers to “place/space/country as territory, life-space, or dwelling”. Rather what is being discussed are the factors involved in the creation or generation of places, country, and landscape. Ingold’s recent writings on this subject have been very influential, his central argument being that the physical and practical activities of human life are central to this creation. His phenomenological approach emphasises the study of hunting and gathering as critical to avoiding the distinction between nature and culture suggested by the cultural construction of space, or, in his language ‘the environment’ and/or ‘landscape’. Eroding the division between nature and culture has been a central theoretical and practical concern in Ingold’s writings over a long period of time (Ingold 1987, 2000).

Casey’s 1996 essay in the popular book ‘Senses of Place’ recommends a similar phenomenological approach to researching people and place. It, and the book itself, have both been highly influential in recent discussions, not just in anthropology but also in related disciplines such as human geography. Casey argues that place is primary over space, rejecting a formulation that assumes a neutral ‘space’ onto which places are inscribed or constructed by human thought and action. Myers (1986) produced a

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9 Myers’ lack of concern about precision in these terms stems in part from his own ethnographic context. The Pintupi word ngurra can be translated as home, place, camp, or country.
celebrated ethnography about Aboriginal people from the Western Desert and both Ingold and Casey have critiqued his work, Casey in terms of Myers inscribing place onto a neutral space and Ingold, in a similar vein, suggesting that he gives primacy to culture and construction in the ‘culturalisation of space’ (Myers 2000:76). In Myers’ detailed response to these criticisms, he argues “that the practices of placemaking and the experiences of place, must be understood as socially and politically organised. This may or may not give primacy to the concrete activities of hunting and gathering” (Myers 2000: 104). Although the argument is about places and how they come to be, it is at its core also a debate about how best to do anthropology.

This work is about how people relate to and constitute the coastal countries in which they live. Although first and foremost an ethnographically driven account of life in Blue Mud Bay, it can be positioned within this debate and simultaneously contribute fresh perspectives to it. The phenomenological influence is clearly evident methodologically, for what follows incorporates a strong emphasis on everyday movements and practices, including an extended analysis of hunting activities. It emphasises how an understanding of coastal flows ‘makes sense’ given the local conditions, given how people moved and lived in the past, and how they continue to move and live in changed but related circumstances today. Yet making this point does not of itself argue for the primacy of hunting and gathering, or movement more generally in constructing places. Rather it argues for their importance in a dialectical process, in which they inform and sustain other aspects of human life, aspects that in their turn inform and sustain hunting and movement.

It is this process, then, that is most heavily implicated in the creation of place and country, and more specifically, in an idea of country in which sea, land, water, and sky are part of an integral whole. What is emphasised is the way that everyday engagement with country across lifetimes has been critical in the development and maintenance of such a complex and coherent way of understanding it. For people do not develop such sophisticated accounts of their surroundings without actively, practically, and frequently engaging with them, but that does not mean that the only basis on which those surroundings are constituted is through that practical engagement. Such accounts are communicated to others in all sorts of ways, the most obvious in an Aboriginal context being the Ancestral songs, stories, and paintings which inform, and indeed can alter, subsequent practical engagement.

So phenomenology and hunting and gathering play critical roles in what follows, but the way in which they are contextualised and interpreted may differ from Ingold’s formulation. Similarly, Myers’ response to his critics is considered and persuasive, and yet his methodological emphasis on ritual life colours his account in ways that will not be so evident here. In his response to Ingold’s criticisms he strives to overcome this emphasis, but it remains, and one comment in particular reflects this: “people do not simply ‘experience’ the world; they are taught - indeed, disciplined - to signify their experiences in distinctive ways. Moreover, ritual life is highly valued as the means through which this orientation is most adequately secured - an orientation in which ‘what is’ (to use the language of metaphysics) is interpreted as a sign of prior sentient, ancestral activity” (Myers 2000:77). Were the underlined word to be replaced with ‘a

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10 The debate about the best term to describe subsistence activities is longstanding. Ingold notes how ‘forager’ was chosen by some as it is free of the gender implications in the term ‘hunter-gatherer’, then suggests ‘procurement’ as a better term (Ingold 2000: 58-59). I have chosen to adopt the local usage, which is that the English word ‘hunting’ covers any kind of activity that involves getting food from the surrounding country.
fundamental’ or ‘a critical’, the sentence would have been unremarkable. Nor indeed is it ‘wrong’, with the assertion of the fundamental nature of ritual orientation softened by ‘most adequately’. Yet, after working in Blue Mud Bay with a different research orientation, it is not how I would have expressed it. I have regularly heard the significance attributed to actually having been to a place, to having seen it, and this entailing a critical level of knowledge. Myers would of course agree, indeed his article contains many examples of people visiting places, and he notes that he is not really sure how far apart he and Ingold actually are. Yet the debate is a real one, and is part of a much wider anthropological conversation about people, phenomenology, and place. The work here is positioned closer to Myers in a number of important respects, but with a research and methodological emphasis that shares some significant common ground with Ingold’s approach, and from an ethnographic and geographic context in which neither of them work.  

One brief example relevant to this opening chapter shows how some of these questions can be explored ethnographically. The opening description was of the flows within and constituting Yolngu country, but in terms of Ingold’s phenomenological account, the ‘country’ of these flows does not all have the same status. If the critical elements in the generation of humanised country are found in the everyday activities of hunting and gathering, of ‘dwelling’ in the country, what can be said about country that people almost never travel to? The clouds and the deep sea are integral to a Yolngu sense of country, yet until the advent of aircraft, it was a space visited very seldom, if at all, by these canoe travellers who usually hugged the coast and bays. Yet they have names and songs about these places, about the clouds there and about the Ancestral creatures who journeyed from there. They see it, but they do not dwell there; it becomes part of phenomenological practice only as song, gaze and reflection. In this way it is the part of Yolngu country that is, in the most literal sense, a seascape. Perhaps for Ingold the gaze is enough, and ‘seeing it’ in the acts of hunting and gathering in the more sheltered environs of Blue Mud Bay sufficiently constitutes ‘dwelling’ in his terms. He certainly argues against separating hunting from singing and storytelling (Myers 2000:77). Nevertheless, the qualitative difference in phenomenological terms between the local waters in the bay and the deep sea on the horizon does point to ways in which an account of the relationship between movement and hunting needs to incorporate domains beyond immediate practical activities.

Water and People, Movement and Flow

Edvard Hviding notes how the trope of ‘flow’ is inherent in any study of maritime practice, for it connotes the movement of people and sea (Hviding 1996: xiv), and a mere glance at the chapter titles of this work shows the truth of this observation. Inspired by the importance of water in the physical environment and in Yolngu peoples’ understanding of their world, ‘flow’ is an important motif in what follows. However when making his point, Hviding immediately relates ‘flow’ to ‘movement’ and it is really this pair of closely related concepts that are critical to the content of this work. Using ‘flow’ alone is too limiting, and even at times inappropriate, for not all, or even most, of human life can be characterised in terms of the smoothness and continuity that the term suggests. Breaks and discontinuities, or random and unpredictable movements,

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11 Ingold (2000:54) himself notes that comparisons between Australian Aborigines and other hunter–gatherers are fraught with difficulty, but nevertheless argues that “there are genuine similarities in the ways that hunters and gatherers apprehend the landscape, and their own position to it”.
must necessarily be a part of the story. Movement encompasses flow, and so could be used alone, but this would mean losing an important ethnographic and aesthetic aspect of a work about water and coastal country. It is worth reflecting on the noticeable effect on the contents page when ‘flow’ is replaced with ‘movement’ in the chapter titles. Suddenly an outline that has, on one critical reading, the timeless appearance of a structural functionalist account, is rendered as dynamic and energetic: Coastal movement, people movement, resource movement, and so on. Yet the same thesis could be presented under such headings without significant adjustment, questioning how significant the analytical content behind such a move would actually be. Both terms are useful and so both appear in what follows.

Movement and flow are important, but so are water and people, and a central theme is the role that water plays in the content and shape of everyday life. More than this, water is a powerful and flexible tool to think with, providing ways of understanding broader social realities, and the integration of land and sea into coastal country is a particular emphasis in what follows. The meaning of water, and the roles it plays in people’s lives, have recently received careful ethnographic treatment elsewhere, albeit in a very different ethnographic context from the one outlined here (Strang 2004). Strang’s account shows how an anthropological approach can shed new light on issues ranging from practical water conservation and management to symbolic meanings, and demonstrate the ways in which the two are mutually implicated. Strang also notes that water is a fundamental component of all human life, something “which opens the door to a useful cross-cultural comparison of the various themes of meaning that emerge” (Strang 2004:5). The characteristics of water give it the potential for all kinds of meanings in a Yolngu context. Water is dynamic, yet it also follows regular patterns and rhythms, so it can simultaneously represent change and structure or repetition. It can move between places, carrying people and floating objects far from their point of origin, linking those places, people, and objects in multiple ways. Waters can mix or separate, or both simultaneously, allowing for different social realities to be expressed within the unity of a single form. The changeability and fluidity of water also allows for relationships expressed through it to be reinterpreted in new circumstances, yet for that reinterpretation to still be seen as part of an overall pattern. Water flows integrate land, sea, and sky into a coherent whole, providing a basis for owning country, and they also drive the fertility and regeneration of that country, as the rains bring lush green growth to the land and the rivers pour nutrients into the bays. Water can regulate time, for the seasons structured everyday life in the past and people's vagueness about the name of the month in contemporary life still contrasts with their precision about the name of the season. Human movements can be shaped by water, both on the seasonal cycles of wet and dry, but also on journeys where water sources determine destinations and stops along the way. Therefore, such water and its flows can express movement, change, repetition, connection, separation, mixing, place, fertility, and time, to name just some possibilities. This is why, in a Yolngu context, water is important as an inspiration, exemplar, metaphor, and justification for thinking about human social forms and human relationships to the natural world.

However this is also a thesis about human life, and many other things beyond water and movement are involved in the places and patterns of everyday existence. Some balance is required between a focus on the coastal flows and adequately accounting for the complexities of Yolngu people and places. The solution chosen here is a thematic one, in that it does not pretend to provide a holistic account of each of the wider domains of human life implicated in generating ‘country’. Rather it traces water and movement through those domains, emphasising their interrelated significance to each other, to
country, and to human life generally. Aspects of people, places and country that are considered in what follows include: the specificity of individual personalities and experiences of country, how relationships between people and country are expressed through sharing food, how people use different places in contemporary everyday life, how the past has shaped and sustained those places as well as created new ones, how people and places are fused through names, how places are understood to be actively involved in human life, and how patterns of ownership emerge from that life. The final chapter examines how the people attitudes to owning the country emerge when confronted with a lack of recognition of that ownership by professional fishermen. Of course this does not exhaust the way that people, places and country interact, but it does point to some of the linkages and relationships between them. Therefore what follows is an exploration of some aspects of everyday life in Blue Mud Bay, and concurrently, it is a description of the way that this life reflects and inspires an understanding of the world and a sense of ownership over it. However before undertaking that ethnographic exploration, it useful to consider how non-indigenous people have viewed sea spaces, not just in Aboriginal Australia but more broadly, and this is the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter 2

Flows from the West: Sea Spaces, Customary Marine Tenure, and Aboriginalist Anthropology

“That expanse of water which antiquity describes as the immense, the infinites, bounded only by the heavens, parent of all things; the ocean which the ancients believed was perpetually supplied with water not only by fountains, rivers, and seas, but by the clouds, and by the very stars of heaven themselves; the ocean which, although surrounding this earth, the home of the human race, with the ebb and flow of its tides, can be neither seized nor enclosed; nay, which rather possesses the earth than is by it possessed.”

Hugo Grotius, Mare Liberum: The Freedom of the Seas (Grotius 2004, first printed 1609).

Over the past 30 years there has been a growing awareness of the claims of indigenous peoples to ownership of sea space (Hviding 1996; Johannes 1981; Peterson 1998, Cordell 1991). These claims have thrown up a challenge to Western understandings of sea ownership, a challenge that Western legal processes have struggled to deal adequately with. Research into what is now called 'Customary Marine Tenure' is ongoing, covering such issues as navigation rights, resource ownership, the demarcation of owning groups and estates, and so on. This thesis directly addresses the issue of indigenous ownership of the sea, but it is not just a description of 'Customary Marine Tenure' in a particular location. Rather, it is a response that first tries to engage with the ideas and practices present in Blue Mud Bay, then to assess how they relate marine tenure as it is currently framed, or, more importantly, how it can be reformulated. The reader may already be able to see how one aspect of this reformulation has begun. One danger of focussing on marine tenure systems as a counterbalance to their previous neglect is that the researcher simply 'turns around and faces out to sea', and this is particularly likely when the question is framed, as it normally is, in terms of 'Customary Marine Tenure'. A more fruitful approach is to be sensitive to the articulation of land and sea, to the ways in which a more integrated account might be produced, and the vision of water flows outlined above is a first step in this process. However before turning to a specific analysis of the situation in Blue Mud Bay, a second step needs to be undertaken. This is to critically examine the development of Western conceptions of sea space, providing a broader context in which both this study and issues relating to marine tenure can be placed.

The Sea Spaces of the West

The focus of this account is on the historical development of legal and ownership patterns on a broad scale, for it is in that arena that the idea of the sea as open commons and the general division between land and sea is most clearly articulated. It is also the domain that has the biggest impact on the claims of indigenous people for sea rights. Such a focus on the legal domain does not deny that there are many other ways in which

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12 In Aboriginal Australia, this research has been largely driven by legal requirements, either from legislation restricted to the Northern Territory (Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 and the Aboriginal Land Act 1978 (NT) or the Federal Native Title Act (1993).
non-indigenous people think about or engage with sea space, for the sea is a site of work, recreation and inspiration for people across the globe. Yet rather than attempt to review the complexities of those engagements, the aim here is to explore the major forces that have shaped Western ownership patterns, demonstrate the impact of those patterns on Western attitudes to sea space, and assess how they have affected the ability of researchers to be sensitive to the way people from other intellectual and cultural traditions regard the sea.

Sharp has powerfully analysed Western sea space in more detail than can be attempted here, and the short discussion that follows draws heavily on her work (Sharp 1996, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2002). The basic question to address is how, and why, does the West see marine spaces in the way that it does? Three major tenets of the Western conceptual framework are the public's right to fish, the freedom to navigate, and the integrity of territorial waters held by nation states. Sharp describes the historical genesis and progression of these concepts, showing how there have been other models of the ownership of sea space in the past in Europe, particularly local communal forms of marine tenure and fishing rights, and many of these had characteristics in common with the marine tenure regimes of indigenous peoples in Australia and the Pacific. Sharp traces how these European tenure systems were actively suppressed from the time of the Magna Carta onwards (1215), in favour of broader scale regimes driven by different priorities. A full account of these processes is not possible here, but some examples show the key points in that progression and the forces driving them.

The Magna Carta was a document signed by King John in 1215 in order to appease the demands of noblemen dissatisfied about a range of issues (Howard 1964). Amongst its many topics, it contained a statement to the effect that English people had an equal right to fish anywhere in England. Notice here that the right is expressed as a universal one across England, rather than one operating at the local communal scale, where nearby residents exercise control over the foreshore. This change in scale marked a transition stage in Western sea space, and subsequent transitions occurred in the following centuries, as a right which tried to limit the reach of the king was reinterpreted in terms of citizenship rights in a modern nation state.

Sharp (2002:158) notes that the idea of a sovereign exercising control over waters, as distinct from fishing rights, had not yet found legal form at the time the Magna Carta was signed. Two influential Italian jurists, Saxoferato Bartolus and Albericus Gentilis, played a key role in the progression of these ideas from 1200AD onwards. Bartolus argued that the waters contained by islands up to 100 miles from the coast could come under the jurisdiction of the sovereign, and later, Gentilis included the sea within the meaning of the definition of ‘territory’, such that after Gentilis it is correct to speak of territorial waters in international law (Fenn 1925:78). These changes followed the lead of the Magna Carta, overwriting local, communal marine tenure regimes with systems conceived on a much broader scale. At first, many of these were based on ideas of royal sovereignty, but later the rise of the modern nation state shifted their character. The process of absorbing and erasing local tenure regimes into state territorial seas in which all citizens had the same rights was largely completed by the 1700s, leaving only

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13 This can be seen as either an attempt to prevent the King from exercising the control over waters that he possessed over land identified as the King’s domains, or to prevent him from granting further private fisheries. A significant number of private fisheries existed at this time and have been allowed to continue up to the present day if they predated the signing. Sharp (2002: 156) identifies this aspect of the Magna Carta having its origins in a reassertion of a communal right to fish that had precursors in Roman and perhaps Saxon law.
remnants of local communal systems in some locations, most of them not formally recognised by the law. Over time, territorial seas became an important aspect of the how nation states were conceptualised and defended.

A counterposed process occurred during the final stages of the establishment of the doctrine of territorial seas. Of critical importance here was the work of the Dutch legal theorist, Hugo Grotius (2004). In his influential treatise, Mare Liberum (Freedom of the Seas) first printed in 1609, he outlined the arguments for “a case which concerns the high seas, the right of navigation, [and] the freedom of trade” (Grotius 2004:5). Using powerful and emotive rhetoric, he argued for the belief that the oceans were a gift from God to all people and underpins his case using the writings of the classical tradition; Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, and Seneca. However where Seneca argued for the sea as commons and against it being used for commercial purposes, Grotius was acting as a legal adviser to the Dutch East India Company, a large colonial international trading conglomerate (Sharp 2002: 16). Their interests were at that time greatly jeopardised by the intention of the Spanish and Portuguese to claim the earth's oceans for their exclusive navigation, in other words, as a form of territorial waters, leaving only the northern seas for the rest of the world. Here we can see how the doctrine of the ‘freedom of the high seas’ was generated in response to tension between rival colonial powers, tensions that conversely had also contributed to the establishment of territorial waters in Europe. Grotius was explicit about the economic aspect of his argument, noting that a ‘self-evident and immutable first principle’ of the Law of Nations was that “every nation is free to travel to every other nation, and to trade with it” (2004: ). The doctrine of the high seas was brokered as a political compromise between rival nation states, and it subsequently played a vital role in justifying colonial expansion, travel, trade and exploration, providing a legal basis on which the colonial powers of Europe could undertake these activities and on which European naval supremacy could be exercised. Whilst seemingly counterposed to the development of territorial seas in some respects, both doctrines demonstrate the important role that the growing power of European nation states had in the development of Western perceptions of sea space. Waters close to home were protected as a component of national borders, whilst the open ocean was clear for commerce, trade, exploration, and colonial expansion. In both cases, economic forces and the requirements of the nation state overrode other forms of tenure that might have existed in the past.

The last fifty years have seen a further shift in the way that sea spaces are conceptualised by the West, and again, the driving forces are the sovereignty of nation states and economic considerations. Grotius 'Freedom of the High Seas', characteristic of the period of rapid colonial expansion, has been progressively wound back over the preceding decades by the growth of nation state territorial waters, most notably by the declaration of the Law of the Sea in 1982 (UNCLOS 1983). At the start of the twentieth century, state territorial waters were often less than 3 nautical miles offshore. At then end of that century, most nation states had claimed Exclusive Economic Zones extending 200 nautical miles from shore, and claimed seabed rights out even further. This effectively reduced the area of the 'high seas' by one third in a massive increase in 'owned' sea space. A key driver of this development has been the huge commercial opportunities offered by improvements in marine technology. Mechanisation, freezers, and the rise of factory fishing vessels made deep-sea fishing financially lucrative, whilst changes in exploration technology made seabed hydrocarbon reserves accessible. Sonar developed to locate submarines in wartime inadvertently provided a means for exploring minerals in the seabed, and later for locating deep-sea schooling fish, whilst the concurrent development of SCUBA revolutionised human capacities to work and
observe underwater. Now the needs of nation states to secure the valuable resources made available by such technologies has overridden the previously pre-eminent freedom of the high seas. Significantly, the new zones are economic, meaning that the rights of navigation and trade are relatively unaffected, further underlining the economic drivers in conceptualising sea space. Nevertheless, the result of these processes over the past few decades has been a massive increase in 'owned' sea space, where the owning body is the sovereign nation state.

Within territorial waters, a further development has taken place which is of relevance to this discussion. Across the globe, commercial aquaculture is becoming an important industry, as fish cages, sea pens, mussel ropes, and artificial oyster beds take their place amongst industrial scale marine industries. This development has, for the first time in modern history, resulted in fully demarcated sea areas that are owned by private corporations and individuals, and from which citizens are excluded from navigation and fishing rights. Although small in terms of area, these new spaces are often highly visible and present a further development in the argument in which strategic economic considerations are a key driver of the ways in which sea spaces are constructed.

The above paragraphs sketch a very broad canvas, emphasising the relationship between economics and ownership patterns. Much could be said about absences or qualifications, notably the affective and emotional responses that people have to the sea, and its importance as a space for recreation. However what this account does demonstrate is that the Western construction of sea space is not an innately 'natural' one based on the inherent physical characteristics of the oceans. Rather it is the product of distinct, ongoing historical processes, processes that are still reorienting sea space in the present day. Factors such as the move from local to nationally constituted rights, the rise of nation states, imperialism, the requirements of colonial trade, the need for a legal basis for exercising naval power, and the growing importance of marine and seabed resources have all been important in the changing nature of Western sea space. Economic and political motivations were and are the major driving forces behind such changes, and behind the justifications for ownership that go along with them. To choose just one local example of any number that make this link explicit, in 2004 the chief Australian government scientific research body\textsuperscript{14} had as one “National Goal” for its marine research “to generate sustainable wealth from our marine resources, thereby underlining our sovereignty over our large ocean territories”.\textsuperscript{15}

The most recent phase of Western sea ownership, where the 'high seas' have been progressively wound back by an increase in national territorial waters, is also the phase in which the first academic literature on indigenous marine tenure appears. In other words, when Western culture began to reassess the value of sea space and resources, and decrease access to them, a literature on the way other cultures restrict sea spaces also emerged. Of course this was part of a much greater movement towards recognition of indigenous rights in many countries around the world, but nevertheless the correlation is important to note. Much of the literature on indigenous marine tenure has focussed its capacity to act as a conservation or resource management tool (Aswani 1998; 1999; Dahl 1988; Davis and Jentoft 2001; Foale 1998; Foale and McIntyre 2000; Ganter 1996; Hviding 1994, 1998; Johannes 1998; Ruddle and Akimichi 1998; Ruttan 1998; Thomas 2001). Such recognition can be seen as part of the same historical strategy, of reconfiguring sea space in order to facilitate economic or resource

\textsuperscript{14} Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
\textsuperscript{15} This was taken from the 2004 CSIRO website. The link is no longer current.
objectives deemed desirable by the West. However this is only one aspect of a more complex development, as indigenous peoples themselves have actively promoted the cause of their rights in the sea, often out of concern about the overexploitation of marine resources.

This correlation between the recognition of indigenous marine tenure and the large increase in national territorial waters is an important one to make, because it goes some way to addressing the issue of the ethnographic 'blind spot' with respect to marine tenure identified by a number of authors (Peterson 2005; Peterson 1998: 2). How is it that so little evidence of indigenous marine tenure systems appears in the work of earlier ethnographers? Why is there so little evidence in their writings of other ways of conceptualising sea space? The discussion above provides some clues to the mental framework that earlier ethnographers took into the field; sea space as either territorial waters or as vacant ocean, the former open to the vast mass of the citizenry of nation states, the latter open to the world. Although economic and historical forces were emphasised above to demonstrate the historical contingency of the framework, this was not the only way in which this system was justified. As the quote that opened this chapter amply demonstrates, Grotius also emphasised the physical characteristics of the oceans, their immensity and boundlessness, to support his argument.

As well as justifying citizens rights and international trade, the openness or freedom of sea space would have seemed ‘natural’ to Western ethnographers, who were usually concerned with other pressing questions about indigenous peoples. The complex and varied ways in which the West constructed ownership systems on land provides a stark contrast to sea space, and emphasises the ideology of space that those early ethnographers were carrying. As we have seen, there were strong connections between colonial and imperial aims and free sea space, and anthropology has its intellectual origins in that period. The lack of discussion about sea tenure in the ethnographic literature for such a long period is not fully explained by Western attitudes to sea space, but it is a key factor. Having sketched some of the key characteristics of such a view, it is now possible to look more carefully at what ethnographic literature does exist, about sea spaces in this region and about the Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land.

**Customary Marine Tenure**

‘Customary Marine Tenure’ (hereafter CMT) has existed as a disciplinary term for less than 30 years. Loosely defined, it has come to stand for the systems by which indigenous peoples exercise ownership or control over sea space and sea resources, and to some extent the relationships between indigenous peoples and the sea more generally. Pannell (1998) has produced a critique of the term, noting how it has been used to speak of widely disparate things, and that it is more an anthropological construct grouping these things rather than a useful analytical tool. Her critique is important, and indeed one intention here is to redefine ‘the question of CMT’. The term will not be used often in the coming chapters, largely because, as should be already clear, the word ‘marine’ does not adequately convey in English what is being discussed. However that is not the case when analysing the existing ethnographic literature on sea tenure, much of which uses the term CMT and conceptualises it in those terms, so it does accurately refer to the subject as defined within the disciplinary discourse. Its ethnographic accuracy in a Blue Mud Bay context is a separate question, one that this thesis engages with directly.
The origins of ethnographic sea research in the Australia-Pacific region can be traced to Johannes’ work in Micronesia during the 1970s (Johannes 1981). Although focussed predominantly on fishing and ecological knowledge, Johannes work cleared the way for a number of projects on Pacific island sea resources and sea tenure from the 1980s up to the present day (Hviding 1996, Foale 1998, Aswani 1999). As the references cited in the previous section indicate, indigenous tenure systems in the Pacific have largely been recognised by island governments, and so academic research is often focussed on how marine tenure can contribute to appropriate resource management in areas with dense and increasing coastal populations.

This resource-focused research is reported in academic papers rather than book length ethnographies, and so many do not engage to a substantial degree with wider reflections on the relationships between people and sea to the degree that will be undertaken here. One notable exception in this regard is the only book about sea peoples from the region, Hviding’s 1996 work, ‘Guardians of the Marovo Lagoon’. Based on extensive fieldwork during the 1980s and early 1990s, Hviding’s account is the most sophisticated ethnographic exploration of a sea people from the Asia-Pacific region, and explores in detail the relationship between people and Marovo’s distinctive maritime environment. He examines history and tradition, social organization, sea knowledge, resource use, the customary marine tenure system, and contemporary political issues surrounding the sea.16 Although not based in indigenous Australia, Hviding’s model was a fruitful one to reflect upon in constructing a research program for Blue Mud Bay, as a comparison with the thematic contents of this thesis and that of his work makes clear. Hviding (1996: 6, 24-25, 27-28) also acknowledges his debt to the ideas of Ingold, and the methodological influence of Ingold on the work undertaken here has already been expressed. However pursuing some similar fields of inquiry in coastal Aboriginal Australia can sometimes lead to different outcomes, as subsequent chapters will reveal.

Aboriginal Sea Tenure

The renowned anthropologist Stanner noted in 1965 that Aboriginal anthropology had had a clear focus on Aboriginal people of the remote interior of the continent (Stanner 1965), and he ascribed this to the belief amongst non-indigenous researchers that the people of the interior had had been the least disrupted by European influence, and therefore represented the most authentically traditional forms of Aboriginal life. The focus on the interior was despite the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people lived, and still do live, around the coast.17 As was noted earlier, non-indigenous legislative and legal requirements have been critical in generating non-indigenous public discourse about Aboriginal sea space, although there was one analysis of estates in the sea carried out before that impetus was fully felt (Chase 1980; Chase and Sutton 1981). Keen (1984) reviews the process by which sea closures became incorporated into rights legislation in the Northern Territory (1978 Aboriginal Land Act (NT), and although it offered only extremely weak rights18 and few claims were pursued, the process was

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16 Hviding has also explored forestry issues on land in a later book (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000).
17 This is partly because all bar one of the Australian capital cities are on the coast. The majority of Aboriginal people now live in cities.
18 Keen notes the political compromise brokered between Aboriginal claims to sea ownership and the strong resistance to those claims from non-indigenous fishermen. The compromise favoured the fishermen, as sea closures were only allowed to a distance of 2km offshore, had to be applied for on a case by case basis, and holders of existing fishing licenses were exempt. As a result only four claims were ever researched and only two pursued to conclusion.
important in generating the first research and writing on sea ownership (Davis 1984, 1988; Keen 1984; Memmott and Trigger 1998; Morphy 1977; Palmer 1984, 1998).

No legal avenue for sea claims existed outside the Northern Territory for pursuing sea claims, and thus the national debate remained focussed on significant land rights developments in continental Australia. The only significant publication to arise in the period after the mid-1980s was focussed on the Torres Strait, and was generated to address the lack of information about local indigenous fishing in the area, given the treaty between Australia and Papua New Guinea (Johannes and MacFarlane 1991). Although focussed predominantly on fishing activities, it did address questions of CMT, but did not consider in great detail the wider relationships to place that will be explored here. However the Mabo No. 2 Native Title decision in 1992 and the subsequent legislation (Native Title Act 1993) reawakened non-indigenous Australian interest in Aboriginal sea tenure. The decision, and the subsequent legislation, had implications for indigenous rights across Australia, and provided a potential avenue for achieving new rights over sea space. Indigenous demands for control over sea space began to receive renewed attention, represented by such events as the ‘Turning the Tide’ conference in 1993 and the launching of the first Native Title claim over the sea by the Croker Island people in 1997. The legal and management processes that were set in train required information about Aboriginal systems of sea ownership, particularly in north Australia where the bulk of the legal activity was concentrated.

In 1998 the first major ethnographic publication on Aboriginal sea tenure appeared (Peterson and Rigsby 1998). It brought together existing CMT and sea research in Aboriginal Australia, with a strong emphasis on the north. Reflecting the historical focus of Aboriginal sea research, many of the papers were based upon applied research conducted under the auspices of Land Councils and other Aboriginal institutions. Peterson and Rigby’s volume successfully provided a survey of the major existing anthropological knowledge about indigenous sea tenure in northern Australia at a time when the nature of indigenous rights in the sea were being closely examined by the legal system for the first time since the early 1980s. However, as the introductory papers by the editors indicate, the volume was predominantly focussed on property theory and tenure issues rather than a description of the overall relationships between Aboriginal people and the sea. Some of the papers notably dealt with broader connections to sea country (Bradley 1998), but overall the volume reflected the urgent necessity to examine questions related to tenure in the light of the developing legal situation at the time.

Bradley’s paper in the 1998 volume was based on his extensive ethnographic research with the Yanyuwa people, who live on the southern coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria, approximately 400km south of Blue Mud Bay. The paper summarises key points from his PhD thesis (Bradley 1997) an extremely detailed account of Yanyuwa relationships to their marine and coastal environment, which emphasises the importance of that environment to broader Yanyuwa identity. Dugong and turtle hunting is a key feature of Bradley’s account, but he also describes the history and coastal geography of the area, the tenure system, the transmission of maritime knowledge and skills, and the pressures on the Yanyuwa people that are affecting that transmission. Despite being in reasonably close geographic proximity to Blue Mud Bay, the Yanyuwa and surrounding groups

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19 The case itself was actually restricted to land, but as it was a Federal Court case, it had implications for waters controlled by the national government.
20 One paper related to fishing in New South Wales (Cane 1998).
21 The two exceptions to this were (Sharp 1998b) and (Bradley 1998).
have experienced much greater levels of colonisation from missions, cattle stations, mining, and tourism, and the engagement between this history and Yanyuwa maritime traditions is a critical focus of Bradley’s account. His work is extremely detailed, running to over 500 pages, so cannot be depicted in depth here, but on a theoretical level he intends to show that ethnobiological studies need to incorporate other dimensions of human life, aiming for a “valuable convergence of anthropology, ethnobiology, and ethnoecology” (Bradley 1997:1). Nevertheless, he does remain within a biological framework to a greater degree than do the chapters that follow, and this is perhaps best summarised as the difference in emphasis between the key term ‘environment’ in his work, and the emphasis on ‘place’ and ‘country’ here. Although Bradley began living and working with the Yanyuwa in the early 1980s, long before the advent of Native Title processes, his focus on the sea is more recent, and he notes the value that it may have in that context (Bradley 1997:444). This again reflects how political and legal applications have had an important impact on the development of research about Aboriginal relations with the sea.

In 2002, Sharp published a book that attempted to engage more broadly with Aboriginal relationships to the sea, and the book arose out of an extended research program in north Australia and overseas. Whilst it had a similar geographic focus to the 1998 volume and had a similar intent in terms of communicating indigenous relations to sea space to a wider audience, in other respects Sharp’s work was significantly different. Rather than being restricted to a survey of existing literature and research, Sharp was able to undertake considerable fieldwork herself, investigating both the origins of Western sea space as well as the multiple Aboriginal forms of sea space amongst peoples across north Australia from the Torres Strait in the east to the Bardi and Jawi peoples of Western Australia. Her book is structured thematically rather than geographically, and emphasises the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and historical connections that indigenous peoples have with sea spaces. It therefore attempts to engage with the issues in broader terms, rather than through a focus on property relations.

The breadth and scale of Sharp’s work, which includes a discussion of Yolngu sea space, could lead to the conclusion that there is little left to say on the subject, save to fill in some more ethnographic detail from particular locations. Yet along with some strengths, Sharp’s account also has some substantial weaknesses, and two main ones will be noted here. One is the oblique, at times almost opaque, thematic structure of the work, which diminishes the book’s capacity to communicate key ideas clearly and convincingly to a wide audience. This is a critical weakness in a book that is attempting to promote indigenous rights and is in part addressed to fisheries managers, government bureaucrats, and academics.

The second, and more substantial in analytical terms, is that the respective sea traditions, Western and indigenous, are discussed and analysed in different ways. Western sea tenure is the subject of a powerful investigation and critique, based upon detailed investigations of changing political, economic, and property relations, and the way that they drove changes in Western sea tenure. However indigenous forms of sea tenure discussed in the same book are not assessed in similar terms. Little attention is paid to the way that power, politics, and negotiations about resource distribution have their own roles to play in the appearance and maintenance of indigenous sea tenures. In giving such weight to the spiritual and emotional attachments that indigenous people

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22 However it should be noted that Bradley does use these terms, and indeed uses the word ‘countries’ to describe Yanyuwa land and sea estates (Bradley 1997:155).
have, in attempting to differentiate their sea traditions from those of the West so strongly, Sharp runs the risk of creating an image of an indigenous ‘other’, an unattainable or idealised form of indigenous existence. The last paragraph of the book is revealing in identifying the potential consequences of such a path: “In an overexploited world, sea tenure - where each group of residents takes responsibility for its patch of foreshore, reef, and home seas - may be a godsend. There is an intimate connection between joint or common ownership of land or sea and knowing well that particular area and other people who share it. For those of us who live in the mainstream of competitive individualism, understanding those who live otherwise can help renew our own humanity.” (Sharp 2002: 266).

There is no doubt that local forms of sea tenure and communal ownership like those in indigenous Australia are one way of negotiating the challenges of the overexploitation of resources. However to describe them as ‘a godsend’ or as a way ‘to help renew our own humanity’ is to load them up with far greater expectations than they can reasonably bear. This is perhaps one consequence of not clearly noting how political, economic, and resource control issues are as real and important in indigenous sea tenures as the undeniable spiritual and emotional links that indigenous people possess. The danger of such heightened expectations is that when indigenous sea tenure fails to ‘deliver’ in the expected ways, it might then be discarded in disappointment. Indications of such a progression can be noted in the Pacific sea tenure literature, where in the 1980s it was identified as a critical tool in marine resource management efforts, and in recent publications, more questions have been asked about its value in delivering conservation outcomes (Aswani 1999; Foale and McIntyre 2000).23 Indigenous sea tenure, like Western sea tenure, is partly the result of historical, economic, and political processes, operating first in indigenous Australia in isolation, then under the continuing pressures of colonialism and modern global capitalism. A failure to clearly identify these aspects means that disappointment in what it can deliver is almost inevitable.

The word ‘deliver’ in the previous sentence points to a deeper underlying problem with arguing for indigenous sea tenure on the basis of benefits to resource management, arguments that are explicit in some of the Pacific literature and implied by Sharp in the quote above. ‘Deliver’ what to whom? The danger here is a colonialist attitude to CMT, in which it then becomes another resource to achieve ‘higher’ goals, and if it does not achieve them, it ceases to be of major interest. This is not to ascribe such an attitude to Sharp, whose commitment to indigenous peoples’ rights is clear in her writings, nor is it to suggest that indigenous peoples themselves are not concerned about the overexploitation of resources. Rather it is pointing to the consequences of a particular line of argument if it is not pursued in a careful way.

There is another approach, which is not necessarily counter to Sharp but neither is it explicit in the key final section of her book. This is to argue that Aboriginal sea tenure derives its legitimacy from the fact that it existed prior to and continued through colonisation, and its removal or lack of recognition was therefore illegal. Whether it actively contributes to resource conservation objectives or not is secondary under this framework. Instead sea tenure becomes part of the matrix of factors that impact, both positively and negatively, on the natural environment and the work of resource managers, both Western and indigenous. In many instances, recognising indigenous sea tenure could well result in better conservation outcomes, but when it does not,

23 However questions were being asked in this regard the 1980s (Polunin 1984).
indigenous sea tenure still retains its legitimacy. This argument will be developed further later in the thesis, but does address a weakness in Sharp’s account.

In a number of ways, the work outlined here is sited in the spaces between the two recent works on Aboriginal sea tenure. It engages directly with indigenous ownership and tenure patterns, yet does so only after exploring individual, experiential and historical connections, to name some of the topics in coming chapters. The structure of this work tries to emphasise the thematic fluidity that Sharp is striving for, without forgoing entirely the descriptive and analytical clarity of the 1998 volume, something that is necessary in communicating ideas about indigenous sea space effectively to a wide audience. The work here is a geographically focused account from one place, like the papers in Peterson and Rigsby’s volume, yet is based upon new field research, like Sharp. Placing this account between the two recent works on Aboriginal sea tenure certainly does not exhaust how it can be viewed, but it does demonstrate the ways in which it can contribute to their discussion. However as has already been made clear, this is not just a thesis about sea space. The nature of Blue Mud Bay and its people suggests different possibilities, different ways of conceptualising the connections between people and the places they live in.

Water, Sea, and the Ethnography of the Yolngu

Anthropologists have extensively studied the Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land over the past 80 years, producing a multitude of works about key aspects of Yolngu social life, and providing important foundations for this and many other later works. The earliest ethnographers, Warner and Thomson, worked within the structural functionalist theoretical paradigms of the time, which, when combined with the absence of pre-existing information, meant that their focus was broad (Thomson 1949; Warner 1958). In more recent times, and building upon those foundations, the orientation of Arnhem Land ethnography has been towards the richness and complexities of ritual, kinship, ceremony, Ancestry, land tenure and art (Magowan 2000, 2001a; Morphy 1991; Williams 1986). The contribution of each work to Arnhem Land ethnography will not be reviewed here, but the recent orientation is noted because this work strives for a degree of contrast, or perhaps more accurately, a complement to it. This is achieved by coming at the question of ownership from a different direction, emphasising the practices and movements of everyday life and how they generate particular understandings of country. As was made clear in the first chapter, such a complementary approach not only contributes at a local ethnographic level, but feeds into wider debates within the discipline about phenomenological approaches to people and place. Both levels are relevant when reviewing the wider literature in terms of the specific research topic pursued here, namely water, place and people’s engagements with country.

Water and the sea are occasionally mentioned in ethnographies of the Yolngu, but usually only in passing. The most striking ethnography in the light of the initial discussion of water flows and coastal space is in fact the earliest, Lloyd Warner’s ‘A Black Civilisation’ (Warner 1958). At first glance, the importance of Warner’s work to the argument here could easily be missed. ‘Sea’, ‘marine’ and ‘ocean’ neither appear in his contents pages, nor even in the index, and he does not ever refer to Yolngu ownership of the sea. ‘Water’ is also absent from the contents, and the only reference to it in the index directs the reader to two pages out of over five hundred pages. Yet closely reading the text for the signs of water reveals a different picture. Three quotes
succinctly summarise how Warner’s fieldwork observations in the 1920s connect to arguments being made in the subsequent century:

The outstanding general natural phenomena are the great seasonal changes which produce heavy rainfall and floods for five months, and for seven months an extremely dry season in which there is no rain and many of the streams, lakes, waterholes and inlets dry up (Warner 1958:378).

The other fundamental natural phenomenon which is always dramatically before ones eyes is the relation of the land to the ocean, tidal lakes, and rivers. The great tides pour inland for scores of miles, reaching into the flat coastal plains which stretch back to the broken and difficult highlands in the interior (Warner 1958:378).

It is small wonder that with the food and drink of life dependent on the water holes (in the dry season) and possible death resulting from the great floods (in the wet season), the native has made water his chief symbol of the clan’s spiritual life (Warner 1958:20).

Despite his assertions of its importance, it is easy to miss the significance of water in Warner’s writings. The last quote comes in the midst of a ten-page section entitled ‘The Clan’. The former two quotes come under a more suggestive title, ‘The Wawilak Configuration and the Seasonal Cycle’, but are found over 350 pages into the work. Yet the text of these passages underscores the importance of water in Warner’s thinking about the Yolngu people he was attempting to represent. He worked at Milingimbi, northwest of Blue Mud Bay, and a regional map shows that there are some geographic similarities between Blue Mud Bay and areas to the north; large, semi-enclosed or enclosed bays with river systems pouring into them are common features along the Arnhem Land coast. Warner was a structural functionalist whose emphasis on water in spiritual life has been criticised as oversimplified in certain ways but his writing demonstrated considerable sensitivity to the role water plays in everyday life and in shaping the natural environment, as well as its importance in symbolic terms. The sensitivity to water and the interconnectedness of the coastal environment that emerged from a close reading of Warner’s work significantly informed this study prior to fieldwork, and provided important avenues for subsequent reflection and writing.

A second book critical to reflections about water has some similar themes to Warner but also contrasts sharply, because it is neither old nor an ethnography. It is ‘Saltwater’, the catalogue for a collection of art from Blue Mud Bay and wider northeast Arnhem Land that was designed to educate the general public about Yolngu knowledge of and ownership over sea country (Saltwater 1999). Now permanently housed at the Sydney Maritime Museum, this collection was produced by the artists from the region in response to the desecration of an important Ancestral area by professional barramundi fishermen. It is a unique document and a powerful attempt to educate, for it contains artistic images, the words of the artists themselves, explanations of the significance of

24 Warner’s concept of spiritual regeneration through ‘clan wells’, where unborn souls reside and where the souls of the deceased journey back to, has been criticised as too simplistic by later authors (Keen 1978:202; Morphy 1984:151 note 8). These authors noted that people talked about the deceased spirits returning to the country in a more general way, not just to water sources.

25 Lloyd Warner does not refer explicitly to sea ownership, but does describe songs and ceremonies which involve the sea, whale harpooning, and engagements between salt and freshwater (Warner 1958: 419-21). Such songs and ceremonies are fundamental to Yolngu ownership systems (Williams 1986).
the paintings, and a map of the territories they represent. The Yolngu artists directed it to a non-indigenous audience, whom they know do not necessarily accept their claims to sea space. Two quotes from the statements of senior leaders at the beginning of the catalogue illustrate both the poetry and the politics of their message:

**Duña Ngurrwuthun:**
First I will talk about Gapu-Dha-yindi, the place of the open sea. It is Dhäpuyngu (clan). Their sacred design has the tantalising taste of the Green Turtle. It has the pattern etched by the smell of the sea around Walirra, Garrawandhu, and Mapindawurruryu. Sacred art that has been etched by the sea where the ocean named Wulamba roars. The open sea, Dhukthukpa, Yidingimirri, Barrwarlandji.

Yes, the sound of the roaring waters is called Wulamba. The wide-open sea has a huge tail of waves. Water that roars. This water existed in ancestral times and the cycle continues. It is massive, ancient, endless, infinity. We call this water, Gapu-Dha-yindi.
(Saltwater 1999:9) Translated by Raymattja Marika, assisted by Will Stubbs.

**Djambawa Marawili:**
In the sea country, there are ritual ceremonies. They teach us who the country belongs to, who is spiritually linked to that sea country. This is for every individual, tribe and clan. This is just for you to know. This book will publicly explain and show you, so that you can read it yourselves…This is letting you know so you will learn from us. Learn from these words like we have learnt from you…

So if we are living in the way of reconciliation, this is how we should live. Also you must learn about Native Title and Sea Rights. This is how we learn. Through things like this book and also one way is through me telling you. About the homelands, the paintings, the floodwaters, the hunting grounds, the everlasting old dwelling places, the sovereignty, the places, the shades, the shelters. You will learn of these. Both sides, Yolngu and Balanda knowledge. This will be done through the publishing of books, not just through bark paintings but also through print literacy. This talk is for wherever you are or whatever clan you are. That’s all.
(Saltwater 1999: 14-15) Translated by Raymattja Marika, assisted by Will Stubbs.

The full title of the catalogue accompanying the collection is ‘Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country’. This emphasis reflects its intentions to communicate the importance of the sea, and to identify the art as coming from the former mission of Yirrkala, an acknowledged source of fine Aboriginal art. Yet for the purposes of this thesis, it is more important to emphasise other facets of the collection, facets that are masked or understated by the title. The first is that these are not just paintings of saltwater, but of water. They are paintings of clouds, of rivers, of beaches, of the brackish places between salt and fresh, and of places out in the deep sea. They are a part of the world of water, and depict the creatures who live in those coastal places and the Ancestral events that happened there. That they include saltwater is a critical part of the message that is being communicated in the context of the exhibition, but it is not all that they are about, even in a restricted geographical sense. This is something that would be clear to a Yolngu person, but is easy to miss as an outsider reading the catalogue or looking at the artworks as ‘Saltwater’ paintings.
A second aspect of this work is also slightly obscured by the title, and this is the reference to Yirrkala. The motivation for producing the collection was the desecration of a sacred site in Blue Mud Bay belonging to the Madarrrpa clan people, residents of Yiilpara where this study took place. The art in the collection covers many hundreds of kilometres of coastline stretching from Blue Mud Bay to Yirrkala and then around to Arnhem Bay, but its origins are in Blue Mud Bay, and a significant proportion of the works come from there. Northern Blue Mud Bay residents are an integral part of the extended regional ‘Yirrkala’ community, but they also assert a degree of independence from Yirrkala, occasionally referring to themselves as the Dholupuyngu, ‘mud people’ closely related to but differentiated from people living closer to Yirrkala.

Lloyd Warner’s reflections about water and the underlying thrust, as opposed to the title, of the Saltwater catalogue are critical in the reformulation of Customary Marine Tenure in terms of water flows and coastal space undertaken here. Furthermore, Saltwater allowed Yolngu people to express their Ancestral knowledge and coastal ownership in their own terms, significantly augmenting the already extensive anthropological literature on Yolngu art, Ancestry, ceremony, and religion, and augmenting it in precisely the area of interest to this research. Warner’s work and Saltwater suggested a fruitful avenue for reorienting space in terms of water flows, and the richness of Saltwater suggested a complementary and contrasting approach to existing emphases in the literature would prove most valuable. The approach developed concentrated on movement, travel, hunting, subsistence, naming and memory in everyday life, illuminating coastal ownership and relationships to place and space from a different direction.

Chronologically, Warner and Saltwater are at opposite ends of the literature about the Yolngu, and although they were critical in the foundations of this account, in between them are other important works that contribute to an understanding Yolngu coastal space. Ronald and Catherine Berndt worked in Arnhem Land during the 1950s, and one product of their research was Djanggawul, a book transcription of the song cycle of the Djanggawul (now Djan’kawu) Sisters, major Ancestral figures in north-eastern Arnhem Land (Berndt 1952). The songs were translated for Ronald Berndt by Wandjuk and Mawalan Marika, and although the bulk of the events in the Djan’kawu narratives Berndt recorded take place outside of Blue Mud Bay, the words from the songs provide powerful images of water, the oceans, and coastal life. Berndt himself recognised the importance of these images in his accompanying commentary on themes in the song cycle:

The third theme relates to water, in its fresh or salt manifestations. The pattern is set during the initial stage of the Djanggawul’s (canoe) journey to the north Australian mainland. The movement of the sea is brought about (or intensified) through their paddling, and the presence of fish and marine creatures. This causes the ebb and flow of the tides. When the Djanggawul leave the sea to travel inland, and later along the coast, this theme is continued in the well waters rising and overflowing in conjunction with the tidal fluctuations. Even when the wells predominate, however, the sea is not forgotten; the original theme is recalled again and again throughout the cycle (Berndt 1952: 303-304).

26 The Djan’kawu narrative is important in the Bay, as they are said to have travelled through and created a number of places. However the narratives Berndt recorded relative to Ancestral journeys and activities closer to Yirrkala.
Berndt not only transcribed the Djanggawul stories, but also, in response to the Gove mine controversy, he produced a now relatively little-known paper that discussed the tenure system and specifically identified sacred sites in the sea around Yirrkala (Berndt 1964). This paper is interesting in the way that it highlights the importance of sites in the sea and simultaneously reveals the ethnographic ‘blind spot’ about marine tenure referred to earlier. Berndt documents a great many sites that are in the sea and/or relate to stories and myths about sea creatures, including kingfish, stingrays, fishermen, whales, and so on. Indeed one site is explicitly identified as a reef split open by ‘wangarr’ water flowing out from a river into the sea (Berndt 1964:282). Yet in the text, he never directly states that the Yolngu own the sea, despite referring many times to the ownership of land and occasionally to the ‘coast’. One of the few direct mentions of the sea, which follows a discussion of important sites and the travels of wangarr beings generating the ownership of country, is revealing:

But over and above the land in a religious sense, there is the issue of the land and its adjacent sea as a natural resource or repository- as an extension of the mythico-totemic complex. The living creatures available for hunting and food-collecting are, in fact, secular representations of the wangarr, although not the wangarr themselves: the wangarr are responsible for them, their spirits released through ritual and song to meet the needs of human beings. From the Aborigines point of view, the fact that they themselves are becoming increasingly less semi-nomadic is an irrelevant issue, which does not appreciably alter their relationship to the land (Berndt 1964: 269).

Berndt then goes on to quote Warner about the clan and ‘the land’ being one because the clan has certain totems. Noticeable here is that despite his extensive documentation of Ancestral sites in the sea, Berndt only includes the sea when he begins talking of the exploitation of natural resources. When discussing sites of Ancestral significance and ownership, which he does through most of this paper, he only refers to ‘the land’. A further quote from this critical early paper demonstrates that this ambiguity is not an accident of word choice. Discussion of the sea arises through considering resource use:

[These maps of sacred sites] indicate quite clearly the importance the land has for these Aborigines. The north-eastern Arnhem Landers were primarily fisherfolk who lived for most of the year on the coast and around the adjacent swamps and rivers. Consequently, most of their sacred sites are concentrated there rather than further inland. Nevertheless they exploited the products of the land just as frequently, or almost as frequently, as those of the sea and the fresh water. Their overall diet was a balance between sea and bush foods, with meat highly desirable but perhaps less plentiful than fish. Basically, and most consistently, it depended on what women collected in the jungles, swamps, and bush in the form of a variety of vegetable foods and smaller creatures. The focus on the sea is, however, underlined by the clustering of sacred sites in the immediate vicinity of the coast, enshrining the mythology of the jiridja and dua moiety people who traditionally occupied this land (Berndt 1964: 288).

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27 The decision was taken by the Australian government in the early 1960s to excise a small part of Arnhem Land near Yirrkala to allow for a mine to be built. The mine was constructed in the late 1960s.

28 Wangarr is the Yolngu word for the major Ancestral creators.
Here he begins with the land, but in considering resource use, ends up asserting a ‘focus on the sea’ and sacred sites ‘in the immediate vicinity of the coast’, then, when talking of occupation reverts to ‘the land’, which is used throughout the rest of the paper. At no point does Berndt say explicitly what seems to be implied whenever he mentions the sea, namely that the Yolngu claim to own it. Given that this paper was written in the shadow of protests about mining and claims of indigenous ownership, this is a notable omission. In terms of broader water flows, his paper also contains many sites related to clouds, rain, tidal flows, and water, and also to creatures such as the Rainbow Serpent who are intimately associated with these phenomena. Like Warner, he has not explicitly stated what seems clear from the ethnographic data, namely that Yolngu claim to own the sea as well as the land. Berndt had published the Djanggawul song cycle by this time and had done additional remote mapping of substantial stretches of the northeast Arnhem Land coast, making the absence of an explicit statement about sea ownership in this paper even more striking. Nevertheless, Berndt’s work is the first ethnographic work where Yolngu ownership of the sea can be directly implied, even if it is not explicitly stated.

The first explicit statements about Yolngu sea ownership were part of the processes related to the NT Land Act. Howard Morphy and Ian Keen, who later produced major ethnographies of Yolngu art and religious knowledge respectively, both wrote unpublished documents about Yolngu sea tenure as part of that process (Keen 1980; Morphy 1977). Keen (1984) subsequently evaluated the sea closure legislation and reviewed some ethnographic information from his own unpublished work, raising issues such as the economic and religious significance of sea spaces, sea ownership, and non-indigenous fishing access. As an example of how far things had shifted from Berndt’s work 20 years earlier, at the conclusion of this paper Keen was able to write “that it is probably universal for systems of tenure of coastal Aboriginal peoples to encompass the foreshore and coastal waters”(Keen 1984: 436). Other publications of sea closure research included Davis’ work about the Millilingimbi-Castlereagh Bay area (Davis 1984) and Palmer’s about the Wessel Islands (Palmer 1984). In his paper, Palmer notes how Yolngu ‘country’ comprises land and water, a definition echoed and then extended in the first chapter. However although such writers were clearly aware of both sea ownership and the continuities between land and sea, the level of interrelatedness assumed in their writings is not as high as that being asserted here. Nor did that brief period of publication lead to significant further research on Yolngu sea tenure in the latter part of the 1980s.

The first major book by Howard Morphy (1984) also appeared during the period immediately following the sea closure processes. The book accompanies a film of a Mådarrpa funeral ceremony (Dunlop 1984), and is based upon fieldwork undertaken jointly with Frances Morphy at Yirrkala and in the surrounding region in the 1970s. The

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29 During the 1940s Berndt also did detailed, unpublished remote mapping of the coastline between Blue Mud Bay and Yirrkala, using maps drawn by informants at Yirrkala working from memory, and these maps contain many sites and places in the sea.

30 David Turner worked on Groote Island in the late 1960s. He visited Woodah Island and recorded details of a dugong hunt there, as well as mapping place names along the coast of Woodah. He notes that the island is owned by Aboriginal groups from both Groote Island and the Yolngu mainland, but does not refer explicitly to the ownership of sea (Turner 1974).

31 Outside of Yolngu territory, but still in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Trigger noted how the inland limit of the saltpan marked the boundary of ‘saltwater country’, a boundary that could be up to 10km from the beach. This description resonates strongly with the linking of saline groundwater and seawater in the first chapter. Trigger does not draw out the consequences for coastal ownership in great detail in this paper, but the implications of such an understanding of coastal country are clear (Trigger 1987: 72).
Morphys worked intensively with people from Blue Mud Bay, including a number of people who also contributed to this study. The book provides important insights into Yolngu social life, but in terms of this discussion it also demonstrates the significance of saltwater, freshwater, rains, tides, and coastal creatures such as crocodiles, snakes and turtles. Although not its main intention, a careful reading shows how a ceremony in everyday life also expresses the ownership and social importance of the foreshore and seas. This is not surprising given Morphy produced the first account of sea ownership early in his research career (Morphy 1977), a career which subsequently generated seminal work on Yolngu art and symbolic meaning (Morphy 1978, 1989, 1991). Howard Morphy has collaborated with Frances Morphy throughout his research amongst the Yolngu people, and genealogies kindly donated by Frances Morphy were critical in generating the naming data that is the basis of Chapter 6.

Soon after Morphy published his book on the Madarrrpa funeral, Nancy Williams produced a critical ethnography on Yolngu ownership (Williams 1986). Working mostly around Yirrkala and motivated by the failure of the 1970 Gove Land Rights case, she focussed on describing the system of land tenure and its relationship to Ancestry, naming, and land management, to name just some of the major topics. The title of her book, ‘The Yolngu and their Land’, is both revealing and accurate, for given its emphasis on tenure systems and ownership, the work contains relatively little mention of the sea. In some respects this is surprising, for the sea closure processes in the Northern Territory had begun several years earlier and Berndt’s earlier work cited above suggested the importance of sea sites around Yirrkala. However Williams was no doubt aware of the importance of the sea, so the absence can perhaps be attributed to the semantic problem of using ‘land’ too frequently rather than terms like ‘country’ or ‘territory’ which are more conducive to redefinition. One of the few passages that directly refers to the sea is particularly suggestive, not least because it specifically mentions the area of interest here:

> The choice of Balamumu [Dhuwa moiety saltwater] emphasises the flow of water and the directions of currents that provide the vehicle for symbolising the links between people via the land that they own. Groups that own land from which the rain flows down the watercourses, ultimately to empty into the sea are linked by the directions of the waters’ flow from and through their lands. Having reached the Gulf, the currents continue to carry the Balamumu water as it touches the lands of other peoples from Blue Mud Bay to lands south of Cape Barrow, and to points on the perimeter of Groote Island, and on a number of lesser islands (Williams 1986: 68).

The links between this passage and the argument being pursued here are clearly evident. Despite the lack of significant discussion of sea spaces, Williams’ more general account of ownership and tenure systems in the area was an important contribution to scholarship about the Yolngu. Whilst land and sea tenures are not necessarily identical and nor is Yirrkala identical to Blue Mud Bay, much of her analysis, and the principles of ownership and tenure she outlined, are both applicable and appropriate to the coastal and sea spaces in Blue Mud Bay.32

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32 Williams also uses an example of sea ownership in her 1987 book about dispute resolution. The dispute was about Aboriginal visitors from Groote hunting turtle and spearing fish at an area close to Yirrkala without permission. As recompense, the offenders took turtle and fish to the owners.
The most significant publication about Yolngu sea spaces that appeared during the 1990s was the Saltwater catalogue already described (Saltwater 1999). However Bagshaw (1998) did produce an account of Yolngu sea tenure from the Crocodile Islands region, in which he critiqued a number of non-indigenous assumptions, namely that local saltwater estates are simply projected offshore from land estates, that the saltwater and the seabed beneath it are the same in ownership terms, and that there is a conflation between ancestral activity at particular sites and the ownership of sea or seabed at those sites.33 One aspect of coastal estates in Blue Mud Bay is the way land boundaries are projected offshore, but the picture is indeed more complicated, as will be described in chapter 9.

Magowan (2001b) published her own thoughts on aspects of Yolngu sea cosmology in a dense and wide ranging paper. She makes the point that previous analyses of the human-ancestor-land complex in Aboriginal Australia do not explore the idea that “the landscape is in perpetual motion, as they focus more on topography than oceanography”. She writes that “the sea is never still”, and in analysing sea cosmology, which for her also refers to freshwater, she posits such movement or kinesis as an important means of understanding the associations and transformations between people, places, and ancestors. Such associations are expressed through the shapes, forms, colours and sounds of water movements, and she uses song lyrics to highlight this, lyrics which include the sea, rain, clouds, sea and rivers. The paper also relates water and human identities, noting the way that water bodies, mixing, and the continuities in water relate to individual and group identities. Magowan’s tone and approach is very different to the one adopted here, and indeed differs in important respects from the work of other recent ethnographers such as Morphy and Keen, but it can also been seen as part of the wider emphasis on ceremony and religion that is characteristic of Arnhem Land ethnography, and which this work attempts to complement.

However, the focus here on coastal or sea space has omitted another relevant strand in Arnhem Land ethnography, and this is research on hunting, gathering and general resource use. A long-term survey of hunting and subsistence related movement was a critical part of the research reported here, and there have been some important accounts of subsistence activities in the past (Altman 1987; Meehan 1982; Thomson 1949) and so such literature was relevant to its generation and subsequent representation. Thomson was an important early ethnographer of the Yolngu, and although he did not publish a formal resource survey from his work in Arnhem Land between 1935 and 1943, he was interested in the subsistence technology and economy of the area.34 Meehan worked adjacent to the western edge of Yolngu territory in the 1970s and undertook a detailed survey of shellfish use at an Aboriginal outstation.35 Finally Altman (1987) undertook a detailed economic study of outstation life, working at a bush outstation near Maningrida in the early 1980s. As is clear from chapter 4 and Appendix 1, the emphasis of my research was on the use of coastal space for subsistence and social variations in hunting

33 In the same volume, Palmer (Palmer 1998) reported on work from Groote Island which was conducted during the 1980s. Although not part of the Yolngu language group, the people of Groote Island have extensive links to the people of Blue Mud Bay, and the two groups share jurisdiction over Woodah Island in the middle of Blue Mud Bay.

34 Thomson’s work with dugong hunters in Cape York is also relevant to this account particularly given the emphasis on turtle and dugong hunting in the early chapters (Thomson 1934).

35 This focus on shellfish meant that her work was less relevant to this study than was initially expected, as Blue Mud bay residents did not heavily exploit shellfish during the fieldwork. According to Blue Mud bay residents, this was because the shellfish beds were wiped out by a cyclone some years previously and had yet to re-establish themselves. A similar event occurred during Meehan’s work (Meehan 1982:162).
movement rather than outstation economics, but Altman’s systematic approach to resource use at outstations influenced the development of this research.

First and foremost, the work outlined here is an ethnographically driven account of aspects of everyday life in a remote homeland in Blue Mud Bay. However it also participates in broader conversations within the anthropological literature in a number of ways. As was noted in the previous chapter, it contributes to a broader discussion about phenomenological approaches to the generation of place and country, represented here in the ideas of Ingold and Myers. It also provides an alternative orientation to research about the ownership of country amongst the Yolngu, choosing domains of life that are represented in that extensive literature (hunting, sharing, movement, memory, Ancestry, and so on), but not necessarily framed in the way that they have been here. Finally it critiques common formulations of CMT in the anthropological literature, suggesting how sea space can be reconceptualised in the light of new research from a context in which water cycles are fundamental. The three steps taken above involved describing the foundations of Western conceptions of sea space, reviewing the literature on CMT, and exploring how water and the sea are represented in ethnographic writings about the Yolngu. These steps have provided important bases for representing coastal life, and also suggested ways in which this study can contrast with and complement existing emphases in the contemporary literature.

**Fieldsite: Yilpara Homeland and Dholupuyngu Country**

The homelands of Blue Mud Bay lie on the south-eastern edge of the large area of indigenous-controlled land known as Arnhem Land (Map 2A). They are a long way from the nearest town with large numbers of non-indigenous inhabitants, which is Nhulunbuy, 200km by road to the north. People from this area were encouraged to move to the Christian missions of Numbulwar, Groote Island, and Yirrkala from the 1940s onwards but a number spent considerable time living independently out of the missions after that point. They began moving back onto their country and establishing independent communities during the early 1970s. This was partly a response to the wider Land Rights movement in Australia, but was also due to local pressures, for the establishment of the bauxite mine and town of Nhulunbuy in the late 1960s made alcohol freely available, causing significant social problems and pressures at Yirrkala mission.

Yilpara is the largest homeland in the local area (Map 2B), with an average population of approximately 100-120 people. It has an airstrip, at least one working telephone, a bore water supply, and sporadic electrical power from small private generators. Housing is directly or indirectly government funded and built out of concrete and sheet metal by contractors. A number of communities have a school, with indigenous homeland residents employed as assistant teachers and external non-indigenous teachers flying in for regular visits. Yilpara has a small shop stocking non-perishable items, which in 2001 began to be managed by a non-indigenous storekeeper who lived at Yilpara approximately 60-70% of the time. Smaller homelands rely on air or road transport to bring non-subsistence food in, and hunting and fishing provide the substantial proportion of meat for all homelands. Access roads into each community usually require a 4WD, and communities are regularly cut off for periods during the wet

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36 Other homelands range in size, with some having a regular population of less that 20 people.
37 A large diesel generator and powerlines were finally installed at Yilpara in 2004.
Map 2A: Regional Map of Northeast Arnhem Land
Map 2B: Local Map of Blue Mud Bay
season. Despite this mobility can be high, although perhaps not as high as in many other remote Aboriginal communities, particularly during times when ceremonies are being conducted. Employment is scarce, with social security the main form of income, but the region boasts a number of nationally and internationally significant Yolngu artists, and the additional income derived from art sales is important to many families.

With the exception of the Yilpara storekeeper, no non-Yolngu people permanently reside at any of the homelands in the area. Indeed, other than Chapter 10, a noticeable characteristic of what follows is the relatively small direct role that non-indigenous people play. Despite the huge indirect changes brought about by colonisation, and the critical role that welfare and other state support plays in community life, people do live in a remote area in the midst of Aboriginal controlled land, and so have a degree of autonomy in everyday life that is not easily attained in more heavily colonised parts of Australia. A further important factor is that the homelands are alcohol-free, something that greatly reduces the amount of violence and social dislocation when compared with many other remote Aboriginal communities.\(^{38}\)

Social groups and identities in Yolngu society are extremely complex, and patterns of kinship and marriage have been researched and debated in the anthropological literature from Warner onwards. Such distinctions are not the main focus of the approach taken here, but it is nevertheless important to note that Yolngu people can be grouped in different ways in different contexts, and that people can identify at a number of levels. These levels stretch from a basic universal division between two moieties (Dhuwa and Yirritja) down to the level of the specific kinship links of a single individual. Other than the moiety level, the most important one to note at the outset are the major exogamous patrilineal groups, which in this area include the Madarrpa, Dhudi Djapu, Dhalwangu, Manggalili, and Gupa Djapu.\(^{39}\) Often called clans, the appropriateness of that term to describe these groups has been the subject of considerable anthropological debate (Keen 1995, 2000; Morphy 1988, 1997; Williams 1999). That debate has been carefully reviewed elsewhere recently (Toner 2001) and will not be discussed in great detail here. There is no dispute that such patrilineal groups exist, and where the word ‘clan’ does appear in the text that follows, Morphy’s definitions, generated through extensive work with Blue Mud Bay people, is a sufficient gloss on the meaning of the term. He provides two related definitions in his major ethnography:

A clan is, rather, a group which acknowledges joint ownership of madayin (sacra)\(^{40}\) and adheres to patrilineal ideology, but which contains within its structure the raw materials of fission and fusion: through internal segmentation, through its mythological links with neighbouring groups, and through the differential control over the system of knowledge exercised by its members (Morphy 1991: 46).

The groups to which I apply the term clan are named patrilineal descent groups which acknowledge common ancestry, hold in common rights over land, and have the same madayin, that is one body of sacred knowledge, or sacred law. Clan names are the ones most frequently given when an individual is asked what

\(^{38}\) Kava has recently been introduced into the area in substantial quantities. It does not have the same social effects as alcohol, but is having an effect on people’s health and general activity levels.

\(^{39}\) The people who feature most often in the pages that follow come from these clans, but other important clans include the Munyuku and Marrakulu.

\(^{40}\) Madayin refers to the paintings, songs, ceremonies, and objects which tell the story of, and express the power of, the Ancestral figures associated with a particular group, and with a particular country.
group/clan/tribe/people he or she belongs to. The surnames recently adopted by Yolngu for bureaucratic purposes correspond to the individual’s clan, although they are not the names of clans (Morphy 1991: 47).

The homelands themselves are based around these patrilineal clans, or sometimes around a segment or major lineage of a larger clan, and are usually sited on country belonging to that a particular clan; Yilpara is on country belonging to the Madarrpa, Djarakpi to the Manggalili, Dhurupitjpi to the Dhudi Djapu, and so on. Yilpara is notable for the high proportion (approximately 60-70%) of the total number of clan members who live there (Frances Morphy, pers. comm.). However, because the clans are exogamous and because of other demographic and life history factors, members of a number of clans reside at each homeland. The groups at the different homelands in Blue Mud Bay form an interrelated, intermarrying set that stretches back through generations. Changes due to colonisation and high personal mobility have increased the number of marriages outside of this set, but the relations between the groups, and between individuals within them, remain dense, complex and important. The focus now moves much more strongly in the direction of those individuals, towards the people who are at the heart of this story.
Chapter 3
People Flows I: On a Hunt

No people appeared in the first ten pages of this thesis. The Yolngu, famous in anthropology and in wider Australia as archetypal Aborigines, were not mentioned by name. Yet they were present. Present in their words, in the way the flows in Blue Mud bay were described, structured, integrated, and experienced. Without disregarding the problematic processes of translation and representation, they were there. But what does it mean to say ‘the Yolngu’ here, when one is writing about a small part of that broad language group, spanning many thousands of square kilometres? A better word, Dholupuyngu, was introduced in the first chapter, yet the integration of water outlined in the first chapter is not unique to this group alone, even if their local descriptions are emphasised, and so difficulties still remain. This is not a thesis explicitly about identity, a critical discourse in modern anthropology, nor does it delve deeply into related debates about the definition of the clan or of other social and kinship groups. However it is about people; who they are, where they move, how they relate to one another and to the places around them.

Therefore, in what follows, people appear in the spaces and flows described earlier. They are Yolngu people; they are part of groups, clans, lineages, and families, but they are also individuals, with all of the specificity, particularity, and personality that this entails. Such specificity can easily be diminished in cross-cultural encounters, or rather, diminished in the subsequent attempts to represent such encounters in succinct ways. Describing important ‘cultural differences’ through a text can necessitate collapsing internal differences, standardising, smoothing, and selecting common elements for further exploration and analysis. As should no doubt be clear, such a process has already begun here, and it will continue in the coming pages. However as it does so, efforts will be made to provide a counterpoint, to retain a sense of the specificity of individual personalities and of individual experiences. This is not done in order to champion the cause or the pre-eminence of the individual over the group, for to do so would be a difficult exercise in a context in which kinship, group and clan identity are driving forces in social life. In part, rather than being a profound theoretical stance, it is perhaps an instinctive response to a colonial Australian context where too often Aboriginal people have repeatedly been popularly described through coarse, even racist caricatures. The 21st century writer is afforded the luxury of this kind of writing, for where the broad parameters of social life have already been mapped out, it is possible to trace a thematic approach, which at least in part addresses the particularity of people as much as their collective Aboriginality. Therefore this work is about the Yolngu, the Dholupuyngu, and the Madarrpa, but it is also about Djambawa, Mayawuluk, Julia, and Guypungura. It is their lived reality, shared with me in many places in Blue Mud Bay and beyond, that underpins what is written here.

Flowing around and through such an emphasis are other important themes: water and space, people and place, movement, presence, hunting skill, gender, knowledge, travel, technology, the physicality of experience, and my own research methodology. It is an account of one type of hunting activity at Yilpara, which although not the most common, is critically important, not least because of the large amount of fresh meat it

41 However such writing is also preceded by the earliest ethnography of Arnhem Land. The final chapter in Warner’s account is a moving personal tribute to his friend Mahkarolla (Warner 1958: Chapter 25).
produces in a place where the economic and subsistence contribution of hunting foods is still fundamental to everyday life. Furthermore, it is the form of contemporary hunting that is the least familiar to wider non-indigenous Australia, and an exemplar of the political intersections and potential clashes between the concerns of environmental conservation and those of indigenous rights.

* * *

“What about we go hunting today? Catch a turtle!”

I glanced down at the beach from my tent on the rise. Calm water, rippled slightly by a gentle breeze blowing from Djarrakpi. On the other side of the peninsula, it would be glass flat. Djambawa had a glint in his eye and a half smile on his face. It was Saturday and he was restless after a week of decisions and responsibilities. His eyes flicked from the water back to me, and the smile deepened.

“You got any fuel?”

“I got one can.”

“Ma! I got one too. That’s enough. We go eh?”

“Sure. Are we taking my truck? Is yours still broken or finally fixed now?”

“Yo! Fixed now. That mechanic flew down here yesterday. Dhangayal will drive my mutika. Families coming, big mob families. I go with you”

“Ok, I’ll get ready. I’ll meet you at your house”

As he walked away, Djambawa gestured the hand signal meaning ‘turtle’ towards the veranda of the house next door to my tent. His younger brother Nuwandjali was sitting there, and as I readied my gear, he wandered down to my tent. He was a fisherman rather than a turtle hunter, and wanted to get some cigarettes from me before I headed out for the day. He said he would meet us down the beach later on, when we returned.

Ten minutes later my troop carrier was heading northwest out of Yilpara on the dirt road through the bush. Djambawa’s arm rested on the open passenger side window as he smoked a cigarette. Every now and again a snatch of song resonated out of his deep chest. He was in a good mood. His 10-year-old daughter Guypungura sat between us, chewing grape bubble gum and watching out for buffalo.

At the place where the main road forked we turned back southwest. An elaborately painted bark sign fixed to a tree at the fork told us we were on the road to Dholuwuy. Nuwandjali had painted that sign, as he had painted others around the community itself. He was a shed builder, a handyman and tinkerer, and I had seen these carefully made signs on straight, white painted saplings evoke smiles of genuine delight from non-indigenous visitors; ‘Welcome to Yilpara, Please Slow Down’, ‘Mapillari rd’”, ‘Dirrpu rd’. Nor was delight their only impact. Standing by the airstrip one day, one of the less-enlightened pilots who was a regular visitor had grudgingly conceded, “they take a bit of pride at Yilpara”.
“Waa-nnguuu-pinni-i-i”. Djambawa stopped singing and looked up at the clear blue sky. “No wangupini up there now. We should see that turtle easy. Maybe later on those clouds might come.”

I turned off the main road and drove along a narrower, winding track through the trees. It opened out at the beach, near the sheds, ropes, boats and general mess of the professional crab fishermen’s camp. It was deserted.

“Where’s Bun?” I asked.

“I seen him yesterday taking crabs to town.” Bun was a Cambodian fishermen who lived on Madarrpa country and fished the bays for mud crabs, paying a royalty fee to do so. Crabbers and the crabbing industry was a very regular topic of conversation between Djambawa and I.

Djambawa pointed to a messy clump of rope, lying in the dust by an old crab crate. “Stop here. I need a raki for that harpoon.” He jumped out and grabbed the rope, as well as a discarded old float lying next to an empty diesel drum.

On the beach near the crabbers’ camp, the big aluminium community boat sat on the sand, the anchor rope tied to a casuarina tree. As we untied it, a ragged, noisy, smoky troop carrier drove up and men, women, and several children piled out. The kids ran to the shoreline, shouting. Two of the men, Dhangayal and Batja, lifted an old outboard motor from the back of the vehicle and carried it over to the boat. Batja was Djambawa’s half brother; Dhangayal was Djambawa’s son, and through the windscreen I could see Mayawuluk, Djambawa’s mother and my adoptive one, sitting in the passenger seat. I headed over to her.

“Waku, you got any hooks?” she asked me when I got close to the open car window.

“Sorry ngändi, I didn’t bring my fishing box. Are you going fishing?”


“There might be a hook or two in the glovebox. I’ll have a look.”

Yesterday had been a big fishing day throughout the community, but I remembered Mayawuluk had been sick. The turtle meat would dominate the day’s catch if we were successful, but hunts were not always so. Mayawuluk loved her fishing in any case, and at the least she wanted a parrotfish for lunch. I had seen her fish all day in the hot sun, always suspecting there was a big fish just waiting to be caught by one more cast. Mayawuluk had a glass eye, a legacy of an eye infection that went untreated out in the bush for too long, and she hobbled now when she walked, stooped by old age and arthritis, her emphysemic, asthmatic lungs gasping for breath. Yet her voice was still strong, and could scythe across the distance between her house and a car waiting on the road 30 metres away. Her arm was still strong too. I had seen her whip a stone at an errant dog more accurately than I could hope to do, and sling a fishing line further than I could. She was kind, and generous to a fault, particularly with her own sons and grandchildren, and her care for me had been very important in my surviving the tough early days at Yilpara.
Along with that care and compassion came a degree of bravery and principle. One story told to me great respect, even awe, was of her facing down an armed man at a ceremony, a man who was one of the more powerful leaders of the region. She had told him what she thought of him and his actions, ignoring his threats to spear her. And yet she was gentle, greatly valued at funerals for her knowledge, her empathy, her prayers, and the security that a strong Christian faith provided to her and to those around her. When she died, as she did soon after I left Yilpara, many hundreds of people travelled long distances to attend the last day of her funeral and pay their respects.

I rummaged in my dusty glovebox and found a couple of hooks to give her. Batja’s wife Dhuranggal was staying to look after Mayawuluk and her own young baby. A brother-in-law of Djambawa’s I knew only slightly looked set to take the wheel to drive them there.

I tied the anchor rope from the boat to my truck towbar and dragged the boat down to the water, making a deep groove in the sand. The trailer for the community boat was a wreck due to neglect and the corrugated roads.

“Oil, oil!” Djambawa called from where he was sitting on the beach, untangling the rope he had picked up.

Dhangayal waved a bottle of oil at his father. “Lingu!”

Batja bent over the outboard motor, fiddling with the fuel line and the frayed rope starter. He pulled the cord several times, until with a smoky cough the engine hesitantly rattled into life. He stayed at the tiller and with shouts, hurry and general laughter people piled into the dinghy. I looked at the registration plate: ‘Maximum six persons’. A surreptitious glance around told me we had 11 on board, 6 adults and 5 children. I smiled inwardly. The best we had managed on one of these trips was 13, including a baby and a toddler. I began noting down who was crowded into the low-riding boat: Djambawa, his youngest wife Cathy, his young adult daughter Rosita, his adult son Dhangayal, and his two youngest children Ningiyama and Guypungura. Batja’s wife Dhuranggal was staying on shore to look after her young baby and Mayawuluk, but his children Yinikarrkpathi and Gurrundul were with us. Mayitjpirr, the daughter of Djambawa’s youngest full brother Malumin had also tagged along, as she often did. These were some of the kids I was most familiar with, the ones who often came out on hunting and fishing trips, mostly by car. Getting on the boat was a rare treat for them.

The boat nosed out across the calm water, labouring south. I looked back at the beach and saw Djambawa’s 4WD on the move along the foreshore. The fishers were heading to Yarrinya, an area further south along the peninsula which offered good fishing spots from the shoreline reefs. We were heading in the same direction.

“We drop this mob at Woodah Island for oysters.” Djambawa slung the words over his shoulder from where he was sitting near the prow. We certainly would find it hard to chase turtles at the speed we were going now. It was going to be a slow trip to Woodah.

It was mid-morning, and the dry season sun was hot, glaring off the water as we travelled. Smiles all round. Everyone enjoyed getting out on boats. Guypungura sat next to her father at the front, face into the sun and the spray, her bubble gum gone. In the distance, seabirds swooped at a shoal of fish, diving at the sea and rising with silver
flashes in their claws. Getkit. A snatch of the getkit song drifted back over Djambawa’s shoulder. He painted those birds. He had named me after them, when on my first hunt I had seen them fishing in the distance and asked what they were.

I looked back towards the beach we had just left. It was part of an area called Yathikpa, the major Ancestral territory of the Madarrpa clan, of which all on the boat except Cathy were members. The Madarrpa sang of an Ancestral Dugong hunt, of the hunters Wukar and Borra, and in one version they return successful, in another, the harpoon misses and they must try again another day. We often hunted for dugongs and turtles at Yathikpa, amongst the green seagrass beds growing in sheltered estuaries of grey-blue mud. Today, with a full boat, the hunt would begin once we had dropped the women on Woodah Island, and out on Woodah, the wind and surf was too strong for the seagrass to grow, so there were no dugong. We would only see turtles feeding on brown seaweeds growing on the rocky reefs along the blue water coast. But it was still a rich hunting ground, and Djambawa was the best harpooner in the community. Our chances of success were good.

The boat churned on. The water beneath changed from the river-fed, opaque, olive green of the Yathikpa bay to the deeper blue of the straight separating the island from the coast. The kids were poking each other, excited to be out and about.

We slowly passed by Gunyuru to the west. Round Hill Island in English. It was a striking landmark, a red rock far higher than anything on the Yathikpa peninsula we had left behind. It was the last hill of a rocky range on the peninsula on the opposite side of Yathikpa bay, but was cut off from the rest by a shallow strait. The tallest hill of this range was called Garrapara, and the whole area belonged to the Dhalwangu clan. The Dhalwangu sang of how Gunyuru was made by the parrot, Laytj laytj, dropping stones taken from Garrapara to make a nest for itself. There were strong kinship, political, and ceremonial links between the Dhalwangu and the Madarrpa, and gazing at the island, I remembered the time we had met Bandipandi Wunungmurra, a Dhalwangu clan man who lived away to the southwest of Gunyuru. He had been travelling to Yilpara by boat with his family and we had met him by chance out on the reefs off the island, his boat more laden down than even we were today. He travelled back with us and stayed with Djambawa to hunt turtle, catch up, talk politics, and reminisce. The two men had played together as boys and had been circumcised side by side more than forty years before. Now they were leaders in their clans and regional representatives to the Northern Land Council, caught up in complex local clan politics and in issues affecting indigenous and non-indigenous relations in the whole of the Northern Territory. I had not seen Bandipandi for a while. I had heard he was in hospital with bad heart trouble. He was only fifty.

We curved around Gunyuru, heading to Woodah Island beyond. Batja kept a half smile on his face where he sat beside me. He was a nice guy, but he didn’t talk much. Nor did Dhangayal. If I were going to get a lot of notes from today’s hunt, they would come from my own observations or from Djambawa, now seated front and centre in the boat.

Djambawa was a big man. He took up a lot of space physically, psychologically, and socially. He was the eldest son of the oldest man in the region, a structural position of power and influence that was further enhanced by his intelligence, his hunting prowess, his bravery, and his political acumen. At fifty he was in some ways at the height of his powers, the virile executive arm of the moral and spiritual authority wielded by his father Wakuthi. Wakuthi’s strong mind had long been trapped in a blind and
increasingly invalid body, withdrawn from many of the concerns of the world, and Djambawa had begun as his father’s translator. Now he assumed the role of the day-to-day leader of the community, of spokesperson to the outside world, and, increasingly, of ceremonial leader within the region. His bombast was undercut by a keen sense of humour, his political hardness by a genuine concern for the future of his people, his hubris by the humility of knowing how much the old people who had gone before him knew that he did not. Yet he was proud, smart, and strong, and knew that he was these things. He asserted what he judged as his rights as a leader of his people, and tried equally to fulfil what he saw as his responsibilities. An artist of renown, his works hung in state and national institutions within Australia and across the world. He was chairman of the school council, of the Yirrkala art centre, and of the Aboriginal art association representing the whole Kimberley and Northern Territory region. He was a driving force in the Native Title sea claim being run in Blue Mud Bay, and a member of the governing council of the Northern Land Council, which along with the Central Land Council, were the peak indigenous organizations in the Northern Territory. Whilst I was at Yilpara he was anointed as the new djirikay, the ceremonial leader for the whole Blue Mud Bay region. The title was given to him by the old djirikay on his deathbed, who had judged him the most knowledgeable and the most worthy of his generation. Hunter, father, politician, artist, husband, religious leader, community manager, grandfather, Aboriginal activist, friend and anthropological informant: I had witnessed him juggle all of these roles in his daily life. And this was a man who, according to the social security system, was technically unemployed.

Somehow, across the years and across the cultural divide, he and I had connected. He was the person who had adopted me as a brother when I first arrived at Yilpara, and our relationship was brotherly: robust, masculine, jesting, competitive, conducted in the eminently suitable vocabulary of his rough and functional bush English. I knew that I got away with saying things to him in my language that no one my age could say to someone like him in his, and knew that he enjoyed jousting with someone who was not scared, who was as interested in talking about the outside world as he was, who could be a sounding board to help him negotiate the myriad responsibilities he had to fulfil to the world beyond Yilpara. He demanded a great deal of me and got it, perhaps with less complaint than others got because I liked him so much and found it so hard to resist the sparkle in the eye and that mischievous grin. Djambawa’s adventures, planned and unplanned, were always the most work and the most fun. He was the kind of man who was happy to get bogged up to the axles, because it gave him the chance to figure out how to get out again. We both loved being out and about, both loved the ocean and its moods, both loved seeing new places and revisiting old ones. There was a restlessness in him, combined with an intellectual curiosity, and both of those emotions I could relate to. I was lucky to know him and lucky in how I knew him, for I saw him at his happiest, his most relaxed, out on his country chasing a turtle, revelling in the world and his place in it. Free. Others knew him in a more serious mode, the humour still there, but the boyish enthusiasm veiled by the cares and concerns, and by his need to fulfil serious roles.

The island slowly drew nearer. Wangurrarrrikpa. Woodah Island. Known as the place where turtles, turtle eggs, oysters, and goannas are found in abundance. Known as the place where Maŋa the Shark Ancestor travelled. Known as the place where Dhäkiyarr speared Constable McColl in 1932, a colonial encounter famous on both sides.

Mayawuluk spent the first days of her marriage to Wakuthi on Woodah Island.
The island was long, thin, and flat, but still the biggest in the bay by a considerable margin. It was in the past, and was still, an important way station for boat journeys across the bay, and for journeys further south to the former missions of Groote Island and Numbulwar. Bandipandi had underlined the importance of boat and canoe travel to me once when we were on a mapping trip at the southern tip of Blue Mud bay. It had taken us two long days of 4WD travel on rough bush tracks to get from Yilpara to the small communities on the southern bay coastline. To go home again on his boat would take less than two hours, with Woodah Island providing food, freshwater, and shelter along the way.

We reached our destination, Balmarrawuy. The boat eased close to the rocks at the end of a long beach, and the women and children climbed out. Many carried files, picks and hammers to knock oysters off the nearby rocks, and plastic containers to store the collected oysters.

“Yaka!” Djambawa’s youngest wife Cathy overrode her daughter Guypungura’s grumbling complaint about wanting to stay on board. Cathy pushed the boat away from the rocks as Guypungura jumped into the shallows. Batja turned back out to deeper water, the boat running in the slow, meandering idle that was the search mode of a hunt. Directly offshore of the oysters was the rocky reef where turtles could be found feeding on seaweeds and algae. The reef ran patchily along the long coast of Woodah, and we would follow it south, searching as we travelled.

Djambawa took his shirt off, exposing the deep rich brown of his back, chest, and ample belly. He was not tall, but his large overweight stomach and powerful shoulders meant that he was heavy. The saltwater peoples sometimes called themselves Gumurrmarrwalami or Wanamarrwalami. Crosscutting clan groups, the names meant ‘chest paddlers’ or ‘arm paddlers’, emphasising how, in the past, their saltwater status was inscribed on the muscles of their bodies.

Djambawa climbed onto the small front deck at the prow of the boat, standing with his legs apart, absorbing the rocking of the waves. He leaned slightly backwards, bracing against a rope tied to the prow, and held a long harpoon in both hands, angled across his hips. The stance was mildly Napoleonic, something that was not out of place in some ways. But it was always undercut by his humour and his enthusiasm for the hunt.

A rope led from the nail harpoon point to his closest hand, then tumbled down to a loose coil on the floor.

“Raki, raki!” said Batja, pointing at the jumbled mess of another rope. Dhangayal began coiling it, ready for the second strike if and when it came. I noted the time, the weather, and the GPS location of the boat in my notebook.

Everyone scanned the sea around the boat. Djambawa’s harpoon was now pointed downwards, tracking the movement of his eyes as he identified rocks, seaweed, and shapes under the water. The younger men watched on either side, Batja piloting the boat according to Djambawa’s hand signals from the prow. We moved over the water slowly for a few minutes, everyone alert.

Suddenly Djambawa shaped to strike, but halted the harpoon before the point of release.
“Maranydjalk” he said, gesturing to the left to indicate the direction in which the stingray was fleeing. I had not even seen the shape in the water, let alone been able to identify it. Most of what the men saw under the water I could not see. I had to rely on shouts, on pointing arms, on the speeding direction of the boat to tell me where our prey might be. Even then I was usually wrong.

The boat idled on, moving down the coast. After a couple of minutes more searching, Djambawa gestured to cut the engine. Suddenly it was quiet, except for the lap of the sea against the aluminium hull. The light breeze did not quite dull the heat of the early afternoon sun. The men remained alert, listening as much as watching, waiting for the exhaling sigh of a turtle surfacing to breathe. We were in a feeding area, rocky reef dotted with red and brown algae, two hundred metres offshore. In the distance the oyster gatherers were brown specks dotted over the rocks. Djambawa motioned to a thin, faint wisp of smoke on the distant mainland to the north.

“Ngândi is there waiting for us”

Mayawuluk, ‘the old lady’ as she was also known, was fishing where the smoke was, waiting for the turtle hunters to return. Ngândi meant ‘mother’, as she was for Djambawa, for Nuwandjali, and now for me.

A thin, quick, rasping sigh cut through the silence. We all turned to see a turtle head disappear under the water thirty metres behind the boat.

“Yituwala” said Djambawa, in an unexcited tone. A small one. He motioned to Batja not to turn the engine back on to pursue it. He did not hunt the small ones unless it was late on an otherwise unsuccessful day. However the men grew yet more watchful. There were turtles in the area. I wrote down the time, and the point where we had sighted the turtle.

Minutes passed. Cigarettes were lit, and burned down to the filter. When the breeze blew us close to the beach, Batja restarted the engine and resumed a slow cruise along the reef, following the shoreline south. Djambawa climbed up on the prow again, harpoon poised.

“This place is Wang…. Dhuwa place.” Djambawa, facing forwards, was almost inaudible above the sound of the engine I wrote down my best guess of what he had thrown out the side of his mouth as he kept his eyes on the water. The name of the owning groups I could get as they were familiar, but the exact place name for this stretch of coast I would have to check later. I took a GPS of where he had said the name. I might have it from another hunt. I knew that pretty much the whole side of the island we were on was Dhuwa, the other side Yirritja. Up ahead in the distance I could see we were coming to a place I did recognise, Ningari.

Ningari was a shallow bay, sheltered by a rocky point coming out from the coast. It was a favoured place for hunting turtles and we approached in a slow, roundabout way, scanning the reef that scattered the seafloor. Batja slowed to just above an idle, the boat coasting into the main patch of reef which traced the curve of the point, heading out to sea. I noted the time, as Batja lifted the petrol tank, hefting it to see how full it was. Enough for now.
Without warning Djambawa snapped alert. The harpoon point tracked quickly across the prow of the boat before he drove it hard into the water. He let go of the rope and the harpoon as he stumbled slightly. The coiled rope began whipping into the water of its own accord and as Djambawa shouted Dhangayal leapt forward, grabbed the remaining rope and the float and tossed them overboard. The rope uncoiled rapidly in the water and the float began moving away from the boat, generating a small wake as it drew away. The harpoon nail was embedded in a turtle shell.

Djambawa watched the receding float for a moment, and then turned his attention to the harpoon. It was floating nearby. Batja swung the boat around, and the harpoon came alongside. It was just out of reach of the men at the front, but I managed to grab it as the boat eased by. The men rapidly readied for another strike. Djambawa grabbed the second nail, rope and float, fitting the nail to the end of the harpoon. Batja drove the boat more quickly towards where the first float bobbed slowly in the water. The turtle had slowed after the initial shock of being struck. Dhangayal reached out and carefully picked the float out of the water. He shot a questioning look at his father.

“Manymak! Däl!” said Djambawa, a hand gesture underlining that he had struck the nail through the shell hard and well. Dhangayal began to pull more confidently on the rope, slowly drawing the animal to the surface. Djambawa stood on the prow, harpoon poised, waiting for the shell to emerge. When it did he struck hard, embedding the second nail deep in the shell. The turtle dived again, but Dhangayal kept hold of the rope, the muscles in his arms taut as he prevented the turtle from swimming too far away. The pull lessened as the turtle reached the bottom and recovered from the strike.

There was a pause now. With two nails in it we would not lose the turtle, even if one nail pulled out. I got the second rope as Djambawa laid the harpoon in the boat. Dhangayal and I pulled hard on the ropes, drawing the turtle alongside. It was a big green, dhalwatpu, Chelonia mydas. It took a huge gasping breath as it surfaced, then held it, as if still underwater. Djambawa slipped a noose of rope around the front two flippers and all three of us grasped the front flippers and hauled hard. It came up the side, but we did not get it into the boat.

“Bulu bulu!” said Djambawa his voice straining along with his muscles as the turtle threatened to slip back into the water again. Batja jumped up to help and a last effort saw it balance on the side momentarily, then slide abruptly into the boat as we jumped clear of the falling weight. The turtle scrabbled its flippers on the wooden floor, moving a short distance until its head rested in a quiet dark corner of the boat. Except for an occasional rasping breath it was silent.

We all paused again for breath. Turtle hunting was mostly waiting, but the bursts of activity were usually frenetic.

“I almost thought he was a rock, then he started running away”. Djambawa gestured with his hand, a grin on his face. He sat on the bench for a moment, assessing the turtle. I wrote down the time we brought it in and looked at it myself.

They are amazing animals. The skin that is both reptilian and marine, the slow-blinking, jet black eyes, the shell with its intricate patterns of greens, browns, yellows, and tracings of grey and black. The powerful flippers were capable of knocking someone out if they suddenly flailed in the open air, and I had been warned away from the powerful jaws more than once. Turtles can bite after the shock of capture, and the
results are not pleasant. The most striking thing about them in the boat was their silence, their seeming calmness in the face of what had happened to them. They did not thrash around like a fish. The occasional one could be described as restless in the bottom of the boat, nothing more. And they made no sound. Combined with a striking physical grandeur and my knowledge of how old the mature adults were likely to be, the overwhelming impression was one of dignity.

Dhangayal pulled out the harpoon nails, using small pieces of torn cigarette packet to stop the blood trickling out of the two holes in the shell. The turtle did not visibly react. Djambawa recovered one nail and fitted it again to the harpoon, coiling the rope. He was already focussed on catching a second turtle. Yilpara was a big community, and it would take two turtles for him to be able to distribute some meat to every family. He always tried for two if he could. With one in the boat so early in the day, our chances were good. Our search time had been shorter than usual, our travel time longer because of the overloaded boat.

The sun had shifted, but was still very hot, and sweat trickled down my nose from the exertion of hauling in the turtle. A seagull arced overhead, a bigger bird than Getkit, my namesake. This was Ngurula, Dhuwa moiety, from the opposite half of the Yolngu classificatory universe. Djambawa’s wife Cathy was Dhuwa, as marriage always crossed the moiety boundary, but the children were all Yirritja moiety, their Madarrpa clan identity coming from their fathers. The seabird swung away towards the beach and then inland across Woodah Island, perhaps heading for the freshwater that could always be found there.

“Waa-nguuu-pinni-i-i” Djambawa sang again as he climbed onto the front deck. He was happy. Turtle hunting was his favourite recreation as well as an important means of feeding his large family. The big green turtle lying on the deck meant that the job was half done.

The search continued. Ningari was a good place to hunt, and I was always surprised by how the turtles did not seem immediately frightened by the sound of a boat motor in the area, although it did seem to have an impact after a while. Batja moved the boat in a shallow arc, curving towards the shore. Djambawa tracked across the water with the harpoon point, his legs absorbing the rocking of the swell stirred up by the afternoon breeze.

Turtles underwater were faint, dark, flickering shadows, which began dodging and tacking at high speed when they were pursued. I scanned the sea but did not hope to see them. The hope was more that I would be looking in the right direction when a turtle broke the surface to breathe. With the engine on, the rasping sigh was inaudible unless we were very close.

Djambawa signalled to cut the engine. The silence was, as always, a surprise and a relief. The motor becomes such a part of the scene that it is forgotten, until its absence announces its presence. Suddenly the motion is different, floating rather than speeding. Quieter, slower, more physically demanding on the paddlers, more localised in space. Yet not more skilful. I had seen hunters balanced on the prow of a speeding boat in rough seas, directing the pursuit with one hand whilst wielding a ten foot harpoon poised to strike in the other, driving it at a flickering shape two metres underwater as the hunter leapt overboard. This image was too firmly imprinted in my mind for me to fully
Djambawa

The strike

Bringing the turtle up for a second strike

Pulling it on board

Blocking the harpoon holes

Dhalwapu: green turtle

**Fig. 3A: Turtle Hunting**
believe that the hunting heroes of old loomed larger in every respect, no matter what the
polite stories told to anthropologists might say. The canoe was stealth where the dinghy
was speed, the canoe hunter rolled with the swell, delicately, patiently balanced on his
narrow craft, whilst the dinghy hunter prepared for sudden turns and surges of
acceleration, bracing for the shock as the boat pounded the waves. Both had their art.

I wrote down the time, recorded the GPS location, and watched the sea. Dhangayal lit
another cigarette and handed it to Djambawa, then lit one for Batja. The afternoon
breeze blew the smoke over the side as Batja exhaled. The heat, the floating, the
stillness, and the silence made the time pass slowly.

“Plane” said Dhangayal in his quiet way. Naturally it took me another 30 seconds to
hear it. A single engined 5 or 6 seater, one of the ‘taxis’ of northeast Arnhem Land,
heading from somewhere east of us towards Groote Island. People took what seemed to
me to be an unusual amount of interest in planes overhead, given how frequently it
occurred. Perhaps just part of a wider interest in arrivals and departures, in the comings
and goings of daily life in the intensely social world of remote Aboriginal Australia.

Batja restarted the engine, but it coughed and died. He picked up the fuel tank, and I
could see it was light in his hand. There was always dirt lying in the fuel at the bottom
of the tank. He reached for the other full jerry can lying at his feet, and I found the
makeshift funnel cut from a Coke bottle and held it in place whilst he poured the fuel. It
slopped over my hand as the boat rocked in the swell. The look, the smell, the feel, even
the taste of petrol and diesel is inescapable in remote Arnhem Land. I washed my hand
unsatisfactorily in the sea. The petrol would stay on my skin until we landed and I could
scrub it with sand.

Batja cleaned the fuel filter and restarted the rattling engine. Djambawa was less
talkative on this trip than on some others. Sometimes I would return to shore with
copious notes in a spidery, swell-induced scrawl, the pages wrinkled and prematurely
aged with spray, the names garbled by hearing them over the sound of the engine. Small
boats on the open ocean were not always the best places to record details of
anthropological discussions.

I wrote the time and the location as we motored a little faster along the shoreline,
tracing the reefs back the way we had come. The turtle shifted uneasily at my feet,
keeping its head in the shadow of the corner of the boat. I took some biscuits from my
backpack and handed them around. One of the things that was hard for me about turtle
hunts was that no one ate much until they were over, even if that meant no food all day.
My stomach was now better conditioned, rather than immune, to such a schedule.
Yolngu hunters seemed to be able to cope fine, aware that a large meal usually awaited
them at the end.

“Miyapunu!” Dhangayal pointed further offshore as Batja quickly swung the boat in
that direction. Dhangayal had spoken in a normal voice rather than a shout. He was so
quiet that a normal voice was a shout to him.

“Oh!” said Dhangayal, quietly, by way of explanation. He had seen a
big green turtle.

“Ganga ganga” said Djambawa from the prow, directing Batja to slow down. His eyes
began flicking over the sea as the boat neared the place where Dhangayal had pointed.
The boat coasted through the area, then began to circle around. Suddenly Djambawa tensed and the harpoon point tracked away from the boat out of range, following the flight of the evading turtle.

The next twenty seconds was a blur. Batja accelerated, and Djambawa bent his legs, absorbing the bumps as one hand gestured the direction he wanted to go. I could not see what Batja now clearly could, the green shadow in green-blue water. He angled the boat towards the shape, keeping to the ocean side of it as it swam parallel to the shore. With a flick it changed direction, angling back towards the shore then changed again to head back behind the boat. Djambawa was shouting instructions I could not understand, but his pointing told me where to look. Batja swung around and Djambawa leaned into the turn, harpoon indicating the direction he wanted to go. The prow came around just as the turtle tacked back towards the shore again. Batja again swung the tiller and now the turtle was directly in front of the boat, heading away from it. It was near the surface so that now even I could see it, the hump of the shell motoring through the water like a submarine. Batja accelerated, then turned as the turtle tacked again and dived. Djambawa somehow remained standing as the boat heeled on a wave. The turtle veered closer to the boat and Djambawa leapt overboard, driving the harpoon into the water beyond as he did so. He hit the water with a splash as the harpoon rebounded, banging against the side of the boat. Batja immediately dropped to an idle. The coiled rope began whipping off the deck. Dhangayal had been focussed on the chase and had not noticed an empty jerry can slide into the rope, tangling it. He pulled the can out just in time, tossing the float overboard. The rope catching on the boat could easily pull the nail out, making the whole chase pointless. The float moved away quickly as Djambawa stiffly dog paddled around to the back of the boat, a sense of urgency in his movements and discomfort in his eyes. They are saltwater people, but Yolngu do not like spending time in open water. Given the number of deadly animals in their world it was understandable attitude. We had launched the boat at the home of the Ancestral Crocodile, and we were now hunting in the domain of the Shark. He struggled back in, assisted by a hand from Batja at the tiller, who was smiling quietly at the effort the big man needed to get back on board.

“That was good fun eh?” Djambawa was breathing hard and had the broadest of grins on his face, as saltwater droplets fell from his hair onto his nose. “That turtle almost tricked us!” I smiled back and he grabbed his discarded shirt to wipe his face. I knew he liked the more difficult chases; the speed, the adrenaline, the balance and skill they required of him. The challenge brought him alive. The only times I had seen him as happy on land was a few moments of singing at ceremonies, when the music had carried him away. When he was far from home for meetings in Darwin and beyond, he carried a little tape recorder with tapes of his people singing and he played them often in his hotel room, to remind him of home. The first and only thing he ever wanted to do when he returned to Yilpara was get in the boat and go and catch a turtle. Sometimes, too often for his liking, other responsibilities, or damaged or blown boat motors prevented him.

“I feel good now, jumping in that gapu.” Djambawa laughed and tossed his crumpled shirt to the front of the boat, not bothering to wipe his chest and arms. The droplets on his skin caught the sun. This was not the first time I had seen him jump in the water after a turtle at the end of a long and stressful week. On at least one occasion he admitted it was totally unnecessary, he just did it for fun. He laughed again, provoking more smiles from the other three of us.
“Harpoon-dja wanaka wey?” Djambawa refocussed on the chase, looking around for the harpoon. Dhangayal was retrieving it from the water. The float was some distance from the boat now, but moving away more slowly as the turtle recovered from the shock of the strike. Batja cruised towards the float as Djambawa fitted the second nail to the harpoon. Dhangayal leant out and snared the float with one hand as the boat passed.

“Ganga” said Djambawa. He had hit the turtle, but not deep, as it had been almost out of range. Dhangayal gently took up the slack in the rope, but did not pull hard. The turtle began to swim away, and he allowed the rope to run a little. We would wait for the turtle to come up to breathe, rather than pulling it up. Djambawa waited near the prow, harpoon poised. Batja gently eased the boat closer. I readied my camera. It was nice to be the fourth man, rather than the third, in the boat. There were days when I was far busier, trying somewhat inadequately to fulfil Dhangayal’s role as the rope man, turtle spotter, and general labourer whilst retaining the role of researcher.

We waited. Turtles could hold their breath for a long time, and this one had had the added shock of the harpoon strike. Dhangayal took up a little slack in the rope, then a little more. Then he let some out. At a signal from Djambawa, Batja cut the engine. Slowly, the length of rope in the water shortened and the length at Dhangayal’s feet increased. He began pulling it in more quickly. The turtle was coming up. It was just under the surface when Djambawa drove hard at the shell. Again the turtle pulled away, but it would soon be on board. The second nail had gone in hard and deep.

This turtle was smaller than the first, but still a mature green. It was certainly enough, and the men looked pleased, for this had been a short hunt. Sometimes a day’s searching might yield nothing. It seemed that today there would be time to relax back on the mainland.

The boat cruised back along the shoreline, slower now. Each turtle weighed at least as much as an average man. I smiled wryly at the thought of the boat’s riding height once the oyster gatherers were back on board. Older Yolngu still carried memories of travelling in canoes, their sides lower in the water than any properly laden modern dinghy, so no one would worry much. We would just take it easy in the fine weather. I took out a tape measure and measured the shells. Both turtles were female. For some reason the ones we caught almost always were. One was a big 110cm, the other smaller at 100cm. The difference in girth that went with the extra 10cm made the difference in size seem much larger. The turtles we caught were almost always greens, although the occasional flatback or hawksbill turned up sometimes.

Djambawa sat near the front, face into the breeze. Dhangayal stood beside him, his hand on the pole of the canvas boat shade. There was always an air of quiet satisfaction about a successful hunting boat on the return journey. Starting out there was often an air of expectancy, excitement, pleasure at the chance to get out on the water mixed with the desire to test one’s luck and skill against the prey. This was particularly so when the men were out on their own. The return was calmer, prouder when successful, disappointed and tired when not. Unsuccessful hunts were longer, more draining, particularly with near misses or, worst of all, a turtle that escapes when the first nail comes out. Hunters returned frustrated, tired, and hungry, searching for explanations for their failure.

The saltwater on Djambawa’s chest and back had dried to tiny white crystals, tracing the outline of the sea. White scale in streaks and flowers, the mark of the ocean.
Saltwater Yolngu sang about this mark. It had a name, and deeper, symbolic meanings about semen and the forces of procreation.

We cruised in to where the oyster gatherers were collecting. Bent backs, with the thuds and taps of metal on rock and shell. I had been out with oyster gatherers before, on the smaller oyster clumps at Yathikpa, just north of where we had launched the boat. The women enjoyed themselves on these trips, chatting laughing, and eating as they worked. The kids ran around, ate, played, and very occasionally collected. To get the oyster out you had to strike it just hard enough in one particular place and at exactly the right angle to knock the front shell off, allowing the undamaged meat inside to be easily scooped out. My attempts to gather them more often led to smashed fragments of shell in the meat as I hit too hard, or in the wrong place, or both. Raw oysters with shell grit were not particularly appealing I had discovered. The oysters were small, a greyish smudge of dense, overpoweringly rich flesh, juicy and salty straight from the rocks.

Cathy and Rosita were bent over the rocks some distance away. Neither of them looked up as the boat cruised into the shallows. They had seen the boat coming long ago, and were focussed on gathering as much as they could. The children were more curious, and alternately straggled and ran towards the boat. They had oyster juice around their mouths, and one carried a dead lizard captured from the dunes. Djambawa’s youngest son Ningiyama was the first to wade out. He peered over the side onto the wooden floor.

“Miiyyaapunuuu! Maaaarrrrramma baaaathalllaaa!” he cried in an excited voice, announcing to all that the hunters had been successful. The women would have already known this from our early return. Some of the other kids came over to the boat shouting and peered in at the two turtles lying still on the deck. Guypungura climbed back on board with a container of oysters.

“Mekawu go!” said Djambawa from the prow, and his daughter offered him the container and the little pointed stick she had been using to fish the oysters out with. He fished out several and contemplated the women, who were still bent over the rocks. Cathy looked up from where she was collecting and he signalled to her. She replied by handsigns, and he replied again by hand. I still had not figured out the hand signing, but it was obvious what was going on, particularly from her last sign. Cathy was quite happy collecting oysters, and intended to continue for the time being. The hunters had come back earlier than expected. Djambawa was keen to get back and start butchering the turtles, but was not going to get his way just yet. Occasionally being the community leader did not help much, particularly with the youngest of his three wives. I had seen this kind of passive resistance before, and it always brought a smile to my face.

Djambawa sat back on the seat and stuck his hand out for more oysters. Batja jumped into the shallows armed with a rusty file and began chipping oysters off the rocks in a casual way. I noted the time. The kids straggled away, chasing crabs on the rocks or returning to their oyster gathering, but stayed closer to the boat than before. After reaching in to touch the shell of the nearest turtle and claim a biscuit from me, Ningiyama turned back and waded in, heading for the beach. Guypungura got her oysters back, claimed a biscuit as well, and jumped into the shallows.

Clouds were forming out to sea, but they would not trouble us today. The sun was bright and the afternoon breeze was gentle. On some days the wind would pick up and we had to take the long way home from this island, using the shelter of the coastal
peninsulas and Gunyuru, the small island to the north. Today, even loaded down as we were, we could cross over open water, heading straight towards the campfire smoke that signalled where Mayawuluk was fishing.

I looked across at the smoke. It was very faint, almost invisible in the afternoon breeze. If I had not known where it was already my eyes would never have seen it, even though to Yolngu eyes it would still be clear. Underwater was not the only place that Yolngu vision seemed to see clearer than mine, although there was nothing wrong with my eyes. A lifetime of familiarity with the shapes and colours of the land, sea and sky made small changes stand out. I could think of many that I had missed in the past: the faintest outline of a clear and deadly jellyfish floating in the shallows, the tyre pattern of a vehicle from another homeland, the tiny hole in a tree trunk twenty feet above the ground that marks the entrance to a bee hive, and the turtle tracks marking a nest of eggs on a distant beach. These were signs that I could not see, but they were clear.

Djambawa coughed noisily and lit another cigarette.
“Marrtjina wuy!!”

He called out with a little more insistence in his voice, and loudly enough so that all including Cathy could hear. He wanted to go. Oysters were not as important as turtles, although they were more reliable, even now with dinghies and engines. This time he had more impact. Slowly, the oyster gatherers began to straggle towards the boat. The wait had not been long, more symbolic than anything else. Cathy was the daughter of a strong woman, and the women did not often get the opportunity to gather oysters on Woodah. More often I had come over with the men alone, and with Djambawa in particular, looking for turtles.

The kids followed the general move. I stayed with Batja at the back of the boat, watching it sink lower in the water. We would be fine to get back in this weather, but it would not be a quick journey. Eventually everyone piled in. Ningiyama ended up perched on a turtle shell. The boat dragged on the bottom and Dhangayal and I jumped over the side, wading out, pulling the boat into deeper water. Batja restarted the spluttering motor and we chugged out over the rocky reef. I noted the time we were leaving, and quickly estimated the volume of oysters that had been collected. Oysters were always hard to judge, but it looked like about half a litre, which was quite a lot of the small, dense, rich flesh.

The boat cut into the waves, sending spray back onto Batja and me as it rode low into the breeze coming off the water. Cathy sat facing backwards, avoiding the spray. She was, like Rosita sitting on the seat in front of her, one of those people who was called more often by her English name than one of her Yolngu ones. Yolngu names came from the Ancestors, from the events, places, and signs that made up the Ancestral world. They were important and powerful, and were often avoided in polite conversation in favour of kinship terms. Yet the Yilpara people were close, and closely related, and so they recognised the power of their names but still used them. Djambawa was often Djambawa, Mayawuluk was Mayawuluk, Dhangayal was Dhangayal or Ngambullili, or Balpa. But other names remained hidden. Djambawa, the person I was closest to, had at least seven names, but I only knew five, including his English name, Terry. He never seemed like a Terry to me, and it always brought me up short when he was called that. Yet Cathy was somehow Cathy, in a way that fitted and in a way that everyone used.
The boat splashed through a wave, breaking my reverie with warm seawater. One of the turtles, feeling the splash, began to move, trying to escape. Dhangayal reached down and put a thumb and forefinger over the turtle’s eyes, forcing them shut. He left his hand there, and unable to see, the turtle lay quiet again.

“Gurtha! Bushfire!” Djambawa pointed away to the west, then down to the south. I looked over to the west. There was a growing haze in that direction.

“Mak Bandipandi” said Batja, noting the direction in which I was looking. The westerly smoke was spreading from roughly the direction of Bälma, where Bandipandi lived. Someone had lit the bush out that way, burning the grass that had grown in the wet season and was now dried out. The smoke of a small fire like that was a sign of life, of presence on the country. The haze away to the south was much bigger, multiple fires, or a blaze that had been burning for a day or so. Sometimes, at the height of the fire season, the blazes were so big and widespread that the sun set early, disappearing into the haze well above the horizon.

“Groote people” I commented to Batja as I looked at the smoke to the south. He nodded in assent. Djambawa’s two older wives came from Groote Island, and so did Dhangayal’s new wife. The connections between the Groote Islanders and the people of northern Blue Mud Bay were numerous, and boats from Groote were a not infrequent sight on the beach at Yilpara. Groote was a big island, with a big indigenous population, a big manganese mine, and big social problems. In some ways, Yilpara was a haven for Groote people, free from drugs, alcohol, and the related violence. In other ways it was a backwater, boasting none of the noise, bustle, and excitement of a big mining town.

We trundled on. I was sitting at the back on the windward side, the wettest place on the boat. I had salt spray in my eyes and could taste the sea on my lips. My shirt was wet through, but I was not cold. It had been a new experience for me, a southerner, to be wet through but still warm on a dinghy on the ocean. Batja was on the sheltered side, but as the wind picked up in the middle of the strait, he still had to wipe his face with one hand occasionally. The salt design on Djambawa’s arms had faded, the moisture and spray in the air dissolving it away. I shifted uncomfortably in the seat. The trip had not been rough, but a few hours on a bare aluminium bench was enough to test my fortitude, particularly with my legs arranged between turtles, jerry cans and small children.

Djambawa’s big white truck was now clearly visible on the beach, a white speck in the distance. There was another smaller yellow speck nearby. Nuwandjali’s 4WD probably. He had a theory about cars. To be good they had to be cheap and either red or yellow. This latest one fitted the bill, yellow and under $4000.

The water flowing by was back to the olive green, opaque sea of the Yathikpa and Yarrinya coast. After a few more minutes we were in the lee of the peninsula, sheltered from the afternoon breeze, and the water became calm. I could make out people, one on the rocks, one on the beach, and several up near the campfire. The one on the beach would be Mayawuluk. The ‘old lady’ could no longer stand for hours to fish, and found it equally hard sitting on the rocky reef, where the best fishing spots were. She made do with the beach to get her fishing fix.

As we got closer I saw that the person fishing on the rocks was Julia, Mayawuluk’s much younger half sister. They were both married to Djambawa’s elderly, invalid father Wakuthi, along with another classificatory sister Mulkun, Batja’s mother. Julia must
have managed to find someone else to look after the old man for a few hours and driven out with Nuwandjali. She was the most skilled fisherwoman in the community, and one of the hardest working people I had ever met. She cared for an invalid man, usually looked after several children who were not her own, and still managed to be the most active woman hunter in the community. She was not shy, but was taciturn, a master of the shrug of the shoulders or the one word response to an anthropologist’s question, despite her good English. She showed her knowledge by what she did and how she did it, not by talking, reflecting, explaining. Yet she had knowledge born of a lifetime spent with Wakuthi and Mayawuluk. I had seen her supply the name of an obscure cut of turtle meat when everyone else, including the senior men, was stumped. I had seen her, along with Mayawuluk, instruct Nuwandjali in the correct procedure for butchering a water goanna after he had forgotten. I had seen her spin a handline across a billabong further than anyone else could, every time landing it perfectly just in front of the logs and tree roots on the far side, where the freshwater saratoga liked to hide. I had seen her time and again catch more fish than anyone else. She was a constant presence in my notes and thoughts about Yilpara and its people, yet I did not think I had a single sentence directly quoted. She told her tales with her skill, efficiency and hard work, with her knowledge of where to go and what to do there.

We drew closer still, and I saw Nuwandjali walking to his car from the tree shade. He, on the other hand, was a storyteller. His travels through Victoria and New South Wales as a young man gave him the perspective and the English skills to stand back, reflect, explain, provide answers and make jokes to an outsider with ease. Very occasionally, I suspected, the quality of the story took slight precedence over the accuracy of the explanation, but the journey was always instructive and enjoyable, wherever his stories took me. A highly valued singer at ceremonies, he used his songs as a storehouse of knowledge to reflect on my questions and provide answers to them. He was also an artist, but one whose focus was on using art to help him live; he painted a bark to pay for the car registration, he made clapsticks to get some shopping money. He was also an inveterate traveller, and knew people living down roads well outside Yolngu country.

The boat slowed in the shallows, stopping just short of the beach. The kids leapt out, immediately starting an investigation of their new environment. I decided to get out too, although I figured we would not be here that long, for this was not one of the usual places to cut a turtle. The favoured place was Yathikpa, where we had launched the boat. We would perhaps lighten the load here a bit, transferring people to the cars to drive back up there. I walked over to where Mayawuluk was sitting on the beach. She had one hand out, and a fishing line was draped over her forefinger and ran out into the shallows. Behind her was a hand reel, with several lengths of line wound off it, and beside her was a jumbled mess of broken sand crabs. Mayawuluk liked fishing with sand crabs. Not only were they the best bait, but she could sit on the sand and dig for them, following the tortuous tunnel from the surface hole and capturing them in their burrow. The blue rock crabs were beyond her as they scuttled away on the reefs, and climbing through the mangrove roots to search for the big edible mudcrabs was equally difficult.

“Nhamirri ngāndi?” I asked as I sat down beside her, facing the water.

“Manymak waku!” She nodded and smiled, but kept her one good eye on the line going into the water.

“We got two dhalwatpu in that boat. Did you catch any fish?”
“Marrama. Two. Wangany Yambirrku ngarra luka. Lunchtime. Nuwandjali got the other one. Now, bayngu guya. Nothing. Low tide.” Low tide was not a great time for fishing, particularly for Yambirrku, the prized parrotfish, but it had not stopped her trying. I smiled to myself. More than once I had silently and irreverently likened Mayawuluk fishing to a retiree getting her regular poker machine fix. I glanced across at the boat. Batja had not got out. We would not be here long. I took the chance to ask one question.

“Ngāndi, what’s the name of that place just before Ningari? You know when you travelling down from the oyster place? This side.”

“This side… nawiya, waku…bulna bulna…” she paused, her mind ticking over. I knew what she was doing. I had seen her do it before. In her mind she was running through the songs relating to Wangurrarrikpa, Woodah Island, for the songs not only told the stories of the Ancestral creatures in the area, they also contained the place names in sequence. Only the men sang the songs, but after a lifetime of ceremonies, she knew them as well or better than most them did. She was also matching names with her memory of the coastline, the features of the coast clear in her head from a lifetime spent in the area. I was pretty sure that she had not been there in a long time. She did not go on the boat anymore, it hurt her arthritic bones too much. There was no point asking her when she was last there. One thing Mayawuluk was not so clear about was time.

“nawi…Wangurtji”. It matched what Djambawa had slung over his shoulder on the boat, taking into account my mishearing due to the engine. I was not surprised. The only hunter at Yilpara whose memory for names I trusted as much as Mayawuluk’s was Djambawa’s. Both of them had learned from Wakuthi, now too old to hunt or to answer the questions of young anthropologists, but his mind was a vast library, and it showed in his wives and his descendants.

“Thankyou ngāndi, I thought you would know. What is this place here?”

“Warralwuy” she answered without hesitation. It was a name I had heard before from one of the younger people, but not for here. Mayawuluk was usually right, and others at Yilpara would concede the point. “The old lady knows”, said Nuwandjali simply, when talking about it one day.

With a roar Batja started the boat engine. I did not want to get stuck and go back on the truck, so stood up to go.

“See you later ngāndi. You coming soon?”

“Yo. Dhuditi”. She would follow in the truck soon. A turtle butchery was more attractive than fishing at low tide, and she did not often get the chance to be present these days.

I went back to the boat. It now contained Djambawa, Dhangayal, Batja, the two turtles, and Guypungura, who was staying on board for the trip up the coast to the turtle butchery site. Nuwandjali was already heading up to his car, ready to follow us around the beach to the butchery site, close to the crabbers camp.
Rosita and Guypungura with oysters on Woodah Island

Nuwandjali with a Yambirrku (parrotfish) at Yarrinya

The crabbers’ camp at Dhojuwuy

Fig 3B: Back On Shore
We motored along in the calm water close to the coast, the boat much faster now. Soon the white speck of my troop carrier was visible, with the crabbers camp just beyond. Batja drove the boat in closer and slid the prow into the sand at the waters edge.

Sitting under the casuarina tree was Bakulangay Marawili and two of his sons, Mulawalnga and Wurrandan. Now in his sixties, Bakulangay was fighting lung cancer, and had been since before I had known him. According to the doctors he should have died long ago. Yet he was still a great artist, one of the best in the region, so I was told by those who know, and when he painted the rainbow serpent, the snake swirled and coiled across the bark, alive under his thin but firm hand. Bakulangay was an ex-cattleman with a fiery temper, but he could speak with the grace and ease of a gentleman, and I remembered the first time he had spoken to me, before I was introduced to him. I had been sitting behind him as he butchered a turtle, talking intensely in Yolngu about local politics with Djambawa and others as he cut. It was a discussion I could not follow except for the English words, and I drifted away from things a little. Without breaking stride in the Yolngu conversation, he turned to me and said in the best of English missionary accents “Could you pass me that tin, please?” Somewhat dumbfounded, I had complied. He could have reached the tin himself, but had achieved the impact he desired. Bakulangay was a man of style, passion, and temper, whose intense addiction to tobacco was killing him, but whose resolute determination to remain out of hospital and on his country was keeping him alive longer than anyone predicted. Like Djambawa he was the patriarch of a large family, but his children were older, spread between Yilpara and Groote Island.

I knew the drill now. Whilst the other men headed up to the shade, I got into my truck, reversing it around and down to the boat. It was not to drag the boat up, but to drag the turtles. Wurrandan came loping down to help, moving with the long-limbed, predatory grace of the natural athlete, and Mulawalnga came more slowly. They were two of the younger men I knew best at Yilpara, Wurrandan from playing football together, and Mulawalnga from the early role he had taken as his father’s deputy teacher. Together we heaved the first animal over the side onto the sand. It immediately began to try to make for the water. Wurrandan put his foot on the shell, halting its progress, before we all got on one side and flipped it over onto its back. It was helpless, the dome of the shell keeping the flippers waving loosely in the air. Mulawalnga ran a rope around both front flippers and tied it to the towbar, and then I dragged the turtle up the beach to the shade of the casuarina tree, its shell leaving a curved groove in the sand. We then did the same with the second turtle.

“Getkit! Gurtha!” Like Julia, Wurrandan was a man of few words. He and Mulawalnga hopped into the truck and we went to get firewood.

When we returned with a load of wood on the roof rack, another vehicle had turned up, the Hilux ute belonging to Ron, the white storekeeper who had recently begun living at Yilpara. Ron was not there, but Gumbaniya, the man whose house Ron was living in, was sitting under the tree with Djambawa, sharpening a knife on a stone. Gumbaniya used the car when it was not needed for store business. A half brother of Bakulangay’s, Gumbaniya was old and grey now, perhaps seventy, but still strong despite years of heavy smoking. He had lived a tough life in the bush, on missions and on cattle stations, and his body was stringy sinew where Djambawa’s was bulk and power. One of the favourite stories people told about him was how when he was young he had been trampled and mauled by a buffalo until he was unconscious, but had survived. He had
been a good hunter in his younger days, and was still an artist, singer, and patriarch of a large and growing family. He was no politician or powerbroker, but his age and his success as a family man and artist meant that he was treated with respect. He spoke little English, understood more, and so he and I communicated in a doggerel of English and Yolngu that served our purposes most of the time.

Both Bakulangay and Gumbaniya were sons of the great Madarrpa leader, Mundukul. Mundukul had died when they were young, and, after his death, Djambawa’s father Wakuthi had adopted Bakulangay and Gumbaniya as sons. He had brought them with him to Yilpara, and had taught them about art, ceremony, their country, and about managing the community. Yet the two lineages, Wakuthi’s and Mundukul’s remained distinct, and were important in the social dynamics of the community. Even so, all acknowledged Wakuthi’s authority, and, as was demonstrated by the sight of the three senior men sitting under the tree chatting amiably, they were friends, brothers, and neighbours, with a shared history and a shared future.

The firewood and firepit were ready. Gumbaniya had finished sharpening his knife. A turtle butchery was about to begin.
Chapter 4

Resource Flows: Sharing, Mobility, and the Taste of the Sea

“We share him out when he’s cooked. Everybody will get a taste.”

Bakulangay Marawili

The sharing of food can express many things. Amongst Blue Mud Bay people it speaks of close residence and distant kinship, of resolved disagreements and shared opinions, of friendship and duty, of blood relationships and adopted ones, of clan and lineage loyalties, of new horizons, and of the interwoven histories of many lives. When sharing falters, it can reflect personal animosities, political conflicts, rudeness, selfishness, bad planning, or just plain bad luck. Underneath the superficially simple word ‘sharing’, complex judgements are made, for resources are shared, but not indiscriminately. Everybody gets a taste, but not all the time. Individuals create, signify, and renew relationships through sharing, but sharing hunting foods is also about developing pragmatic ways to distribute valuable, perishable, and unpredictably available resources within an extended community whose size and composition can change daily. Sharing is simultaneously pragmatic and symbolic, and the degree to which it is either or both is never firmly fixed. The judgements people make, the movement of resources that arise out of them, and what that illuminates about some aspects of social life, form the core of this chapter.

Tracing resource flows also traces people flows, for resources shared at a distance do not move by themselves. They are carried by those on the move; walking, driving boats or cars, and flying on journeys across considerable distances. High personal mobility is a characteristic of remote Aboriginal communities and although Yilpara people are considerably more sedentary than most, following the resource flows gives some sense of wider human movement in the region. It thereby provides some background context to the emphasis on hunting movement found in both the last chapter and the next. A further element of the resource flows are the transitions from sea to bush, as these flows bring the taste of the sea to places far inland, connecting relatives living there to the people, places, tastes and sensations of the saltwater, reasserting their identities as saltwater peoples. By moving between them, resource flows integrate land and sea, reaffirming coastal connectedness and echoing some paths of water and people already described.

The importance of hunted foods to the everyday diet at Yilpara lends itself to an analysis of sharing with a more functionalist cast than might be expected in a community that is at least partially integrated into the bureaucratic systems of a first

42 Yilpara is the largest of the homelands in the region, and this is one reason why its population does not fluctuate as much as smaller homelands in the area such as Dhurupiti and Djarrakpi. The presence of the shop and, prior to their deaths, the invalid status of Wakuthi Marawili and Bakulangay Marawili also contributed to this stability. However mobility can nevertheless be very high at times, and on a busy day Yilpara might receive ten or more visits from light aircraft ferrying people to and from the homeland. One aspect of wider movement is ceremonial, and list 4 in Appendix 1 (pgs 49-50) contains records of movement for ceremonial reasons.
world state. Sharing has elements of symbolism, but also of strategy and pragmatism, as people decide how to distribute valuable resources in a way that takes some account of the potential for conflict in such a process. No one starves, for although the shop operates sporadically and stocks no fresh meat, it can supply the staples of flour, sugar, powdered milk and tinned meat, and relatives at Yirrkala can send food down by plane when the store is closed, albeit at great expense. Yet simply comparing these limited options with freshly caught barramundi, turtle, dugong, mudcrabs, oysters, and magpie geese to name just a few, demonstrates that hunting, and the subsequent sharing of the proceeds still matters a great deal.

However sharing food from the hunt is also a subset of a much wider set of sharing and exchange relations, which can incorporate money, store food, technology, and other material items. People need and use much more than turtle meat or fish to negotiate the needs of daily life and to express their social relationships. Outlining this wider system of exchange is beyond the scope of this chapter, and indeed the relationship between hunting and gathering and the cash economy has been well analysed elsewhere in Arnhem Land (Altman 1987). However although there are differences, a number of the principles underlying the processes of sharing from the hunt are relevant to this wider set of exchange relations. Miyapunu43 butcheries are contexts in which the major characteristics of sharing are more explicit than in many other smaller and more diffuse interactions in everyday life. It is a male-dominated process, but similar distributive decisions are made on a smaller scale by all successful hunters; men, women, and even children, who may not be able to withhold food from adults but still must decide how to share food amongst siblings, cousins and friends. Equally, a big shopping trip to town can present some of the same dilemmas, albeit with cereal, tobacco and corned beef rather than fish or turtle. As a result, decisions about resource allocation, made collectively and individually, are at times the responsibility of everyone. This account is about cutting up miyapunu and sharing stingrays, but it is also about Yilpara sociality, and how that sociality relates to people in the wider region.

The literature about sharing in small scale or hunting and gathering societies is substantial, for it has long been an object of anthropological study (Marshall 1976; Sahlins 1972). A fresh pulse of writing has emerged in recent decades, emphasising the continuing relevance of the topic (Altman 1987; Altman and Peterson 1988; Bliege Bird and Bird 1997; Gould 1982; Kaplan and Hill 1985; Kent 1993; Kishigami and Savelle 2005; Peterson 1993; Testart 1987; Wenzel 2000b; Woodburn 1998). However it was still possible for a recent reviewer to note that there are very few detailed accounts of the phenomenon of meat sharing amongst contemporary foragers, and of the consequent need for more ethnographic study (Hunt 2000: 22). His comment may be overstating the case a little, but it nevertheless indicates that there is still value in exploring the relationship between meat sharing and wider social life, as is amply demonstrated by the papers in the volume that Hunt was introducing (Bodenhorn 2000; Hovelsrud-Broda 2000; Kishigami 2000; Kitanishi 2000; Wenzel et al. 2000a). Meat sharing continues to be an integral aspect of the lives of people who are nevertheless part of the complex polities and economies of First World states (Altman and Peterson 1988; Hovelsrud-Broda 2000; Woodburn 1998).

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43 Miyapunu is a Yolngu noun that refers to both turtle and dugong, for both are hunted in the same way in the same habitats. There are differences in the way the animals are butchered, but the underlying processes are similar. Turtle is far more important in contemporary hunting and so appears in most of the examples here, but miyapunu will be used where it is appropriate.
Two published papers are particularly relevant to this account of sharing marine animals in northern Australia. The first, by Altman and Peterson (1988), uses ethnographic material from a smaller Aboriginal outstation in western Arnhem Land to discuss rights in game and rights in cash, and the basis for sharing these items. It provides an account of the wider systems of exchange within which meat sharing occurs, providing similarities to and contrasts with some of the principles of sharing at Yilpara outlined below. Altman and Peterson make a distinction between sharing game and sharing cash or market goods, and within the category of game, they make a further distinction, also made by Momega people themselves, between sharing large and small game animals. As will be clear from the description below, this latter distinction does arise at Yilpara, but the differences in sharing that flow from it are more matters of degree than of underlying process, and the Dholupuyngu do not overtly make the distinction between large and small game animals that Altman and Peterson report. The distinction between cash and game is present amongst the Dholupuyngu, but Altman and Peterson (1988:81) note that there are clear parallels in how the two are treated in sharing terms at Momega and the same is also true at Yilpara. The sharing of crab royalty payments has many similarities with sharing large game,\(^{44}\) whilst smaller amounts of cash and purchased goods are shared in a similar way to small game animals, with the bulk of sharing occurring within rather than across families.\(^{45}\) However the fundamental point made here is that many of the underlying principles that govern sharing in different contexts are similar, in particular the roles of kinship, residence, and labour, and exploring these principles, and their consequences, forms the major part of what follows.

The second relevant paper is a detailed ethnographic account of the butchery and distribution of turtle and dugong amongst the Yanyuwa people of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria (Bradley 1991). Bradley’s account includes sketches and an extended account of butchery processes, and whilst the dugong butchery process he outlines is similar to that of the Dholupuyngu, the turtle butchery processes in Blue Mud Bay are considerably more complicated (see Appendix 1, pgs 26-29). The second noticeable aspect of Bradley’s account is the extensive set of Yanyuwa protocols that exists for the allocation of butchered pieces to particular individuals and kin categories. This contrasts with the situation at Yilpara, where a limited protocol accounts for some early distribution to the hunters, but the remainder of the animal is shared through a far more flexible and negotiated process.\(^{46}\) This process involves shared underlying principles being used to negotiate appropriate outcomes, rather than protocols or rules which are fixed in advance. Bradley also emphasises the role of turtle and dugong hunting in people maintaining their sense of identity as Yanyuwa ‘saltwater people’, and the importance of hunting and of sharing the ‘tastes of the sea’ is another element of what follows here.

\(^{44}\) Altman and Peterson note the importance of gambling in redistributing large sums of cash at Momega outstation, and this was also a critical facet of Woodburn’s account of the Hadza (Woodburn 1998). Gambling is prevalent at the larger Yolngu townships of Gapuwiyak and Yirrkala, but I did not witness people gambling once in 18 months at Yilpara. It is not used as a means of redistributing income there.

\(^{45}\) Income from art sales is a slight anomaly here, for the major artists can receive a few thousand dollars for a major piece, a large amount of cash in a Yilpara context, but that cash is not normally shared beyond those in the immediate family. This may be partly due to the fact that a few families had artists of this calibre.

\(^{46}\) Altman and Peterson note that less than 50% of meat from a kangaroo is allocated using the relevant sharing protocol (Altman 1988). The figure for a turtle or dugong at Yilpara was not calculated exactly, but would be also less than 50%.
Sharing Miyapunu

Miyapunu distributions are the most obvious manifestation of food sharing amongst Yolngu people in Blue Mud Bay, for a small number of men secure a large amount of meat, far more than they can possibly eat themselves, in a place where refrigeration is unreliable at best. As the men return to shore in the boat, the specific circumstances of that day present themselves. What if lots of people are waiting on the beach, some close relatives and some not? What share might relatives back at the homeland centre receive compared to those close by? What if the hunters themselves are visitors to the area, or the boat they used was not their own? The answers, both to these questions and many others, all affect how meat is shared and the significance that people give to that distribution. Not everyone in the community has the talent, or the technological resources, to hunt such large animals successfully, and significant status is accorded to those who can do so. Yet they must also negotiate the consequences of that success, and judging who gets what is an important responsibility, with significant social ramifications.

Wakuthi Marawili

“We are still under Wakuthi.”
Ngulpurr Marawili

“We think of that old man first, and the meat goes out from him.”
Djambawa Marawili

Djambawa’s father Wakuthi died in the early months of 2005, and for many years prior to his death he was a blind, mostly deaf, invalid who rarely left his house. Until his death he was a generation older than anyone else in the community and everyone acknowledged him as the ultimate authority and leader of the Madarra. A number of the active senior Madarra men are his sons, and when the community was established over 30 years ago he made adoptive sons of other important Madarra men such as Gumbaniya and Bakulangay. Wakuthi was present at a turtle butchery only once in the 18 months I lived there, and even then he sat in the shade of a tree well away from the activity, attended by his youngest wife Julia. For every other butchery he was in his house many kilometres away, but when asked about distribution, Djambawa and others described the miyapunu coming in on the boat with the hunters, going to Wakuthi, then going out from him to the different families at Yilpara and beyond. His role as the ultimate source of sharing was invisible, even to a participant observer of many butchery events. It was only in direct conversation about butcheries after observing many that people expressed his importance to what was occurring, and this deference appears in other aspects of Yilpara life in the same, understated way. It is a marker of his seniority and of a history of miyapunu butcheries, referring to a time when Wakuthi was strong and active, able to judge how the sharing process should proceed. Now the senior men distribute the catch to Madarra families grown and changed from then, but still recognizable. Wakuthi’s role is simultaneously a personality, a history, an ideology, and an element of continuity that goes some way to explaining the apparent smoothness in a process so potentially fraught with conflict. It is a smoothness that may not last

47 Yilpara finally received a regular mains power supply in 2004, and refrigerators and freezers were much more common after this point. This change is also likely to have made transporting fresh meat from Nhulunbuy more attractive, although in 2005 the Yilpara store still did not stock fresh food and vegetables.
forever, or even necessarily for much longer given his recent death, but for now it remains, both in the sharing of miyapunu meat and to a lesser degree in other aspects of social life at Yilpara.

**The Yilpara Families**

"This is ngarraku (my) part, enough for families."

Djambawa Marawili, gesturing to his share whilst cutting a turtle.

The most important foci for sharing in practice are the extended, multi-generational families grouped around a senior Madarrpa man. These families might fill two or more houses as a number of senior men in the community have had more than one wife, and Djambawa currently has three wives and eight children spread across two houses, often leading him to refer to his ‘families’ in English. These families are foci towards which resources flow, and from where they can emerge to flow elsewhere. Wakuthi’s role as the symbolic point from which sharing begins contrasts with the concrete role these families play in the way resources flow, and even prior to that in the way that hunting activity is organized.

The existence of these families highlights the fact that kinship relationships are not even. The extended classificatory kinship system means that everyone at Yilpara is ‘kin’ in a formal sense, but within that field of kin, relatedness is enacted in a way that makes some kin closer than others, and whilst a significant part of this closeness can reflect biological relationships, it need not necessarily do so. To describe the Yilpara ‘families’ as nuclear in a biological sense is inaccurate, yet houses are arranged in ways that correlate with families grouped around senior Madarrpa men and/or their wives, and children. Other links can crosscut or augment these; shared grandparents, growing up together, remarriage, adoption, friendship, and so on, but the families of Yilpara remain an important element of social life. Detailed discussions of Yolngu kinship are beyond the scope of this work and indeed have been the subject of extensive study elsewhere. What is important to note here is that when the word ‘kinship’ is used, it not only refers to the categories of a kinship model, but more importantly to the relationships in everyday life that make some people in that category more important than others. In many situations that means close genetic or marriage ties, but not in all.

Wakuthi’s role as the symbolic source of resource flows, the Yilpara ‘families’ as foci within the process, and the lived and dynamic nature of kinship all form starting points for understanding what happens to miyapunu meat or indeed many other resources, including royalty money. Yet these general characteristics do not provide the basis for acting in specific circumstances; they do not tell the hunters how they can answer the questions that present themselves as the boat motors back to shore.

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48 There were some variations to the picture of a family grouped around a senior man. Firstly, until his death Wakuthi stood above these men as the ultimate authority, and secondly, in two other cases the senior Madarrpa man died recently, but their immediate kin continue to occupy two houses each, preserving the structural role of those families. In another case the senior man was not a Madarrpa but the son of a Madarrpa woman, and his role in community life will be discussed in Chapter 8.

49 The kinship system of the Yolngu/Murngin has generated a huge literature since Warner’s initial formulation in 1937 (Warner 1958). Recent work by Morphy and Keen clarified and to a significant degree resolved the outstanding issues (Keen 1995; Morphy 1978, Morphy 1988).

50 There are no mines or other businesses paying substantial royalties to people living in Blue Mud Bay. Royalties are received from some professional crab fishermen, and these will be discussed further in Chapter 10.
Shaping the Flows: Factors in Sharing

The reasons for a particular distribution occurring in a particular way are often heavily interlinked and are rarely stated explicitly, so pinpointing the exact rationale in any one case is difficult. However, after being present at many miyapunu butcheries, some important factors influencing the decision makers begin to emerge, including kinship, labour, technology, proximity, seniority, and the ownership of country. Such factors might have a greater or lesser degree of importance depending on the particular circumstances at hand, although some, such as kinship ties, are involved in some way in almost every distributive decision. Indeed, the interaction and overlap between the factors in the list above make different interpretations of the same outcome possible. For example, the supplier of the hunting boat, an owner of the country, and the turtle harpooner could all be one and the same person. Yet public disagreements about distributions were extremely rare at Yilpara, indicating both a significant collective understanding of what was appropriate in the prevailing circumstances, and that close variants of those circumstances may well have occurred before in the past. Kin relations drive the resource flows from the sea, but those relations are in turn shaped and mediated by other factors, and the first stage of this mediation occurs with labour.

Labour

The key labourers in a miyapunu hunt are the harpooner (djambatj), the boat captain (goli’mirri), and the man responsible for lines and ropes (napugangu). A further role is that of butcher, whose work begins once the animal has been brought on shore, and he carefully follows a butchery method that produces certain cuts of meat. The captain of the boat is responsible for the sharing decisions, and there is a protocol for sharing out some of the initial cuts amongst the hunters in order to repay them for their labour. In the past, the captain had usually made the crucial decision about where the hunters should travel to hunt, and had also done the bulk of the physical work paddling the canoe. In contemporary life the captain is often a younger man, and so senior relatives may advise him about how to proceed or take over the decision making, but he is still considered to be responsible, albeit sometimes in name only. The initial protocol directing meat to the hunters does not exhaust the cuts of meat from the miyapunu, but it does provide a basis for starting the sharing process, and it has a pragmatic component, in that it quickly feeds the men who may have been labouring on the hunt for several hours. Many of the cuts of meat the hunters receive are created in the early stages of butchery and can be cooked quickly over an open fire rather than being slow roasted in the oven created from the turtle shell. Therefore the hunters and butchers can quickly ease their own hunger whilst undertaking the time and labour-intensive process of butchery and cooking, and without having to make difficult decisions about where the rest of the meat should go.

“Everybody shares that, even the dogs.”

Nuwandjali Marawili, pointing to the lower section of the turtle intestine (burriyalyal).

51 The harpooner receives the head (mayarr), the ventral shell meat (gumurr) the liver (ngalthiri), and sometimes the back flipper section (ganybi) and the stomach (gulun). The captain receives the front flipper section (galu’ngu) and the intestines (lirra). The third man in the boat will receive some meat lying above the back flippers (bana) and sometimes the lungs (burrwuj).
However such decisions cannot be put off forever, as the rest of the meat has to be shared out and the initial protocol does not help directly with this. What that protocol does point to is labour being an important consideration, and this remains true for the remainder of the sharing process, even if the flows are guided by more than simply a return for labour. The hunters get more meat than they can eat themselves from the initial protocol, and by being present at the butchery they can easily secure an even greater proportion to share with their close kin and with visitors to their household. Thus what shapes the flow of resources are the interactions between labour, kinship ties, and the current population of particular households. Moreover, the relationship between these factors can change depending on the circumstances, giving the process the flexibility necessary to adapt to a wide array of conditions.

The interactions that shape the flows of resources can occur before the men have even left the shore, as the example of one hunt shows. On that day, Djambawa decided to go on a hunt in the community boat, a craft that he exercised the most control over. His large family meant that he would need a significant share of meat, and his skill with the harpoon meant that he chose that role.\textsuperscript{52} His childless son Ngambulili wanted to come and act as boat captain, but Djambawa’s younger brother Batja also wanted to go and has four young children in his family. Ngambulili withdrew as boat driver when he heard that Batja wanted to go, knowing that Batja needed a greater share of the catch and that Djambawa would secure enough meat for Ngambulili to share. Gumbaniya was too old to play an active role on the boat, but could secure a significant portion of meat by acting as the main butcher when the men returned successful. One of Gumbaniya’s adult sons wanted to go on the boat and be responsible for the ropes and pulling in the miyapunu. However Bakulangay, another senior man, also needed a significant share of meat to distribute to his large family, yet his frailty meant his options were limited. Bakulangay’s unmarried son Mulawalnga displaced Gumbaniya’s son as the third man on the boat. Mulawalnga would need only a small share for himself and his labour, combined with Bakulangay’s assistance with the butchery, would allow a significant share to be allocated to Bakulangay’s large family.

From this example it is clear that the tasks associated with a miyapunu hunt can be negotiated prior to setting out, in such a way that sharing based on labour will also begin to satisfy some of the major requirements of sharing based on close kinship and on need. The allocation of tasks in this way may be implicit rather than explicit; from the outside it might simply appear as if three men chose to get in the boat whilst others stayed behind, but the wider context that makes the choice sensible would be apparent to those involved. Politics, power, and family relations can play a part, for negotiations about resources do not take place in a vacuum, or on a level playing field. Yet allocating labour in particular ways makes the subsequent flow of resources fairer and more predictable, for in part, it has already been negotiated in advance.

“Ngarra hard job, beh!”
Mulawalnga Marawili, vehemently declining to help with the butchery after participating in a successful but arduous dugong hunt. Other members of his family who had not gone on the hunt were present on the beach to help with the butchery. Ngarra means ‘I’, and ‘beh’ is an exclamation of emphasis, so he is saying that he has done a ‘hard job’ and will not do more.

\textsuperscript{52} Djambawa did not actually go on a hunt without being the major harpooner.
The example above shows how it is possible to vary the way resources are shared without disrupting the integrity of the principle of return for labour, simply by regulating that labour. A harpooner might have a large family or a large number of kin visiting him, and so he could choose to act as the butcher as well to secure more meat. Or he might register that several men on the shore will require substantial amounts of meat, and so hunt for two turtles, allowing the others to share the job of cutting them up. Conversely, a man who requires little meat because his family is away might sit back and allow others to undertake tasks he might often perform in different circumstances. Labour is part of the apparent justification for a particular distribution, but labour is being negotiated in the light of the wider context of household and kinship demands. The flows of resources can therefore reflect both criteria.

The supply of technology occupies a similar mediating role to labour. In contemporary hunting some of the technology required is different (cars, boats, fuel, oil, etc) and some simply modified or unchanged (spears, harpoons, fishing lines, hooks, etc). Obviously having access to these items is essential to hunting success, and so the person supplying them has a strong claim to some share of that success. However the influence of the supply of technology on kinship-based sharing does not flow all one way. Clearly the most likely way for a hunter who does not own a car to obtain one is to borrow it, and the person most likely to lend him or her a car is someone the hunter has a strong kinship connection to. The supply of technology mediates and influences the flow of resources, but is itself underpinned by kinship relations.

Negotiating a particular boat crew and/or varying the butchery regime are ways of spreading the initial flow of resources more widely in a way that is justified by both labour and by some important requirements to family and dependent kin. Yet resources are dispersed much more widely than this, and as was clear above, the direct allocation of meat to the labourers does not account for all the butchered pieces, nor does it provide a basis for the labourers sharing meat with those who were not involved in the hunt in some way. Kinship, mediated by other factors, has broader and more specific roles to play, and one of the most prominent of these mediating factors is the ownership of country.

**Kinship and Country, Proximity and Practicality**

The relationship between people and the country where the resources were caught can be a particularly important means of mediating and shaping their distribution. For example, if a miyapunu is harpooned on the seagrass at Yathikpa, an important Madarrpa site, then senior Madarrpa men can and do claim a certain quantity of meat regardless of whether they have helped catch or butcher it. This claim of being an owner of the place where resources have been collected is a strong one, particularly when the person doing the collecting is not from the owning clan. On one occasion I was visiting the homeland of Djarrakpi, across the bay from Yilpara, and was driving along the beach with Baluka Maymuru, a senior owner and resident of Djarrakpi. Baluka saw some vehicle tracks with a concave channel running between them, and he recognized this as the sign of an upturned turtle being dragged behind a car, the turtle having been taken from the beach when it came up to lay its eggs. He instantly asked me to follow the tracks, for he knew they belonged to Wali Wunungmurra, a regular visitor to the homeland of Bararaitjpi, located about 10km from Djarra. We located Wali on the beach on the opposite side of the Djarrakpi peninsula, preparing to begin the butchery of
the turtle. Baluka remained present throughout the butchery, assisting at some stages of the process, and secured a significant proportion of the meat, far more than he would have received had he not been present.\textsuperscript{53}

Behind the hunters having to share with the owners of the country is the issue of permission for them to hunt on that country in the first place, and such permission depends on the strength of the kinship ties and social relations between the hunters and the owners. Furthermore, the hunters access to hunting habitats in remote country like Blue Mud Bay relies on them being able to stay at one of the nearby homelands, which in turn means that kinship ties to the homeland owners are equally, if not more important. The resource flows are influenced by the ownership of country, but the initial permission to hunt on country, and to even reside at a nearby homeland, are both prerequisites for those flows. Each level of ownership depends on the strength and depth of the relationships between people.

As the example of Baluka demonstrates, people often make the effort to attend a miyapunu butchery, or at the very least will remain at the homeland rather than going out to hunt elsewhere when they know a butchery is occurring nearby. This is because it is not only the fact that recognized owners exist that is important, but also that they are physically present to claim a share of the resources. In the oblique manner of polite Yolngu social relations, an owner does not make the claim verbally, it is understood to have been made by them being present or turning up. He or she might well have received some meat anyway if they were nearby, but they would receive substantially more by being present at the butchery, preventing others with lesser but still legitimate claims to claim meat ahead of them.

This issue of physical presence is really an aspect of a wider, pragmatic component of resource flows. In a world where both refrigeration and transport are only sporadically available and where close kin are numerous, the feasibility of sending meat to particular people is an important factor mediating sharing based on kinship and ownership. A relative at the butchery site is more likely to receive meat than equivalent kin at the homeland, and kin at the homeland are more likely to receive meat than kin who are in Nhulunbuy or away visiting another homeland. Whether these more distant people have their latent rights to meat activated will depend on whether delivering meat to them is practical in terms of transport, and whether the meat supply is exhausted by those kin making legitimate claims closer to the butchery event. The pragmatics of distribution mediates the flow of meat, affecting which kin of the overall group of potential candidates will receive meat on any one occasion.

**Seniority and Gender**

“My father, everybody brought that ngatha (food) to him. They knew he could share it, proper way. They trusted him.”

Bakulangay Marawili

\textsuperscript{53} In a further example of owners asserting their rights, when Wanyipi Marika of the Rirratjingu clan hunted and butchered turtles at Yathikpa, most of the people present at the butchery were Mađarrpa. As well as being harpooner, Wanyipi performed the bulk of the butchery, yet gave away most of the meat. He is married to a Mađarrpa woman and other than his own nuclear family had no other Rirratjingu relatives in the area likely to make claims on him. Therefore, his apparent generosity arose simultaneously from the owners of the country being present, his obligations to his wife’s family, and the relatively few demands that would come from his own close family.
Seniority and authority affects sharing in different ways, for it allows people, particularly men, to have a greater influence over the flow of resources. Indeed they can carry responsibility for sharing food that they had no role in collecting, as Bakulangay refers to above, when he describes his father Mundukul, a powerful Madarrpa leader with many wives and descendants. Mundukul’s ability to judge the circumstances fairly was part of how he maintained his power and prestige, and Wakuthi’s role as the symbolic arbiter of resource flows at Yilpara continues this convention in the present day. Of course seniority not only gives men responsibility for overseeing miyapunu distributions, it also gives them the chance to obtain more from them. Older men with substantial ceremonial knowledge and political power have a greater claim to resources than younger ones of an equivalent kin status, and this is partly a recognition that most have large extended families whom they will have to share with. Yet greater seniority and authority can command a greater share of resources, regardless of the number of dependants a person has.

The strong gender emphasis in miyapunu distributions should already be clearly evident. It is not just senior people, but senior men who are the leading actors, and whilst women can assist when there are no men to do so, this situation rarely occurs at a large homeland like Yilpara. Women are not often in the foreground, yet this lack of prominence does not necessarily entail a lack of knowledge about what is happening, for children of both sexes can move in close to the butchers when they want to, and the knowledge gained through doing this can be augmented by repeated experiences of the same event later in life. On one occasion, my query about the name of a minor piece of the turtle intestine was greeted with consternation by the assembled senior men. The answer was supplied by Julia, who was only present at a handful of the butcheries I witnessed, but clearly possessed considerable knowledge gained from more than thirty years of living in the area with Wakuthi.

Gender can also be mediated by seniority, as the two differentially affect the contingencies of everyday sharing. One day I was sitting with Mayawuluk at her house, when some men came and told me that they wanted me to drive them over to Dholuwuy where a dugong would be cut up. I agreed, and almost without thinking, I invited Mayawuluk along. She instantly accepted, but when the other men found out she was coming they resisted, saying she should stay behind. Mayawuluk insisted on coming regardless, and when she arrived at the butchery site, she sat down just behind and a couple of metres to one side of the butchers. She had a bucket with her, and throughout the process she asked for small pieces here and there, and by the time it was complete she had secured considerably more meat than she would normally have received had she waited at home. Her seniority enabled her to resist the pressure from the men about coming along, and to secure more meat once she got there. Her gender remained a factor, but she nevertheless was able to take strategic advantage of an opportunity provided by her relationship to me and her proximity to the situation. Kinship, seniority, proximity, and gender interacted to produce what was on the surface a simple outcome, that Mayawuluk received more meat than usual.
From left to right: Gumbaniya, Batja, Djambawa, and Bambarrar Marwili. Rear: Gawaratj Mununggurr.

Gumbaniya removing the head of the turtle.

Mayawuluk at the dugong buchery, with Dhuka Wirrpanda (left) and Djambawa (right).

Fig. 4A: Miyapunu Butchery
“They should have saved some for me eh?”
A senior Yilpara man, who received very little of a dugong butchered whilst he was elsewhere for the day.

So Yilpara residents have an understanding of both who has the authority to make decisions at the butchery site, and of the set of guiding parameters they use to shape the flow of resources according to the prevailing circumstances. Does this imply there is no disagreement? Such a state of affairs would be extremely unlikely in any place, let alone a poor and remote Aboriginal community, and yet no serious disagreements were witnessed at the butchery site. The dissatisfaction that was expressed generally came from those who were not close by and therefore missed out, or who got a smaller share than they expected because other non-specified claims closer to the event were not resisted strongly enough on their behalf. Such grumbles and dissatisfaction do not undermine the principles outlined here, for what is being queried is whether they were applied correctly. The process of sharing a miyapunu cannot be random and disorganized, which would lead to frequent conflict, nor rigid and inflexible, which might lead to resources being wasted. Negotiating a balance between these two poles cannot ever produce perfect results, and instead generates the complex dynamics underlying what Bakulangay said at the start of the chapter, that he would share out the miyapunu meat so that ‘everyone would get a taste’.

Sharing from other Hunts

“See, that’s the Yolngu way. Share the cigarette, share the fish, share everything.”
Nuwandjali Marawili

This chapter began by pointing out how the sharing of hunting resources was part of a wider set of resource flows. Miyapunu butcheries provide a way of exploring sharing in a defined space and along a trajectory that connects to wider themes of sea hunting and coastal life, but the limitation of analyzing butcheries is that they are a context in which senior men dominate 54 and in which there is at least one formal protocol for sharing. This is not true of all, or even most, of the situations in which sharing occurs; most store shopping is done by women, and other types of hunting resources are usually obtained in smaller amounts by a much wider group of people than occurs with miyapunu hunting. Every able-bodied member of the community goes linefishing regularly, including children as young as six, and boys as young as eight can spearfish successfully, returning with crabs, stingrays, and fish. This in turn leads to sharing that is more diffuse, less complex, and less likely to extend beyond the immediate group on the hunt. However, the emphasis on negotiated, flexible solutions to the given set of circumstances remains an important theme. Certain aspects are emphasized, others diminished, but the fundamental nature of sharing processes remains the same.

"Everyone takes something back, that's the law"
Nuwandjali Marawili talking about maranydjalk (shark and stingray)

54 There are usually fewer than ten men living at Yilpara with the skill and knowledge to act as either a turtle harpooner or butcher. A further fifteen or so men and boys have the driving skill, eyesight, and hunting knowledge to act as boat captain. Boat availability is another limitation, as there is rarely more than one boat present and working at any one time. The importance of boats will be explored further in the next chapter.
One significant difference between miyapunu hunting and other types of hunting (or shopping at the store, for that matter), is that the individuals do not all equally fail or succeed, and this slightly shifts the emphasis of sharing. The hunters search independently rather than performing tasks related to catching one animal, and this changes how labour functions as a justification for a particular distribution. One day, Mulawalnga Marawili went out maranydjalk spearing with four other young men and was the only one who was successful, spearing four stingrays. The other hunters directly contributed some labour to the hunt by preparing the stingrays after they were caught, yet Mulawalnga’s catch was shared equally between all five, recognising their labour on the hunt regardless of their success or failure. Sharing the proceeds regardless of success is one characteristic of maranydjalk hunting, as Nuwandjali’s statement above indicates, but the equal share reflected more than this, it reflected their equal labour. Furthermore, the men were from three different families, so Mulwalnga’s relatively small success when compared to a miyapunu hunt was nevertheless shared widely in kin terms.

“You taste some fish today!”
Craig Moore, speaking to me after I had helped to chop down a sapling to be used to stake out a mullet net. Craig Moore was an Aboriginal man from Bulman who stayed with relatives at Yilpara for approximately 18 months until November 2000, when he returned to Bulman.

Different types of resources are often collected simultaneously on a hunting or fishing trip, and this complementary activity articulates with sharing and labour in a similar way to the maranydjalk example above. The resource flows are shaped by labour, but here it is labour split across a number of hunting activities rather than the same hunting activity. Diversifying labour not only justifies sharing more widely amongst the hunters, it spreads the risk of overall hunting failure, for if maranydjalk spearing is unsuccessful, then perhaps the linefishers will have more luck. Some common combinations of activities undertaken by a hunting party include yam digging with parrotfish fishing, oysters with catfish fishing, and linefishing with spearing. There is a gender aspect to these combinations; women usually collect yams and oysters, men and older boys hunt with spears, whilst linefishing is done by everyone. Diversifying labour spreads further than hunting activities, for preparing the catch, collecting bait or firewood, and minding children are just some of the additional tasks which, along with undertaking complementary hunting activities, justify sharing based on labour rather than on individual hunting success.

However, like miyapunu distribution, labour is only one factor in sharing. Spreading labour across a hunting party can justify the pooling and subsequent distribution of resources that party collects, yet it does not explain how those people came to be hunting together in the first place. Like miyapunu hunting, kinship and proximity are important in shaping the resource flows, but the exact roles they play are slightly different. Fishing parties are generally only composed of the members of one or two families, for there is less pressure to widen them to include representatives from other families. This is in part because, unlike miyapunu hunting, which demands specialized knowledge, skills, and technology, linefishing and related activities are accessible to a very broad cross-section of the community. A linefishing party knows that others at the homeland could be, and usually will be, out fishing elsewhere to supply their own families, even if it is just from the reefs within walking distance of Yilpara. Furthermore, a fishing party is highly unlikely to catch an amount of fish equivalent to the weight of a miyapunu, so there is far less need to plan for the wide distribution such an amount would require. Therefore fishing groups are frequently composed of the
members of one or two families of more closely connected kin and their direct in-laws. Sharing based on labour within the group is also going to be a distribution recognizing close kinship ties.

Hunting parties which engage in just one type of hunting are more likely to spread their success across a number of families, and this is a result of the slightly different makeup that such parties frequently have. They can be one-gender groups, as the men go spearing for maranydjalk and mullet, or the women go linefishing or to look for oysters, and Mulawalnga’s stingray hunt was one example of this kind of trip. These groups are limited and defined along different trajectory, and so they more often contain representatives from a number of families. This is partly a social phenomenon, as people spend time with friends and relatives at the same stage of life, but it can also be the pragmatic result of choosing a particular hunting location. In either case, the outcome is that more families are represented in the party, and this means that any resources over and above the party’s own requirements are more likely to be spread across different families, even when the excess they collect is relatively small. Labour and kinship are still important in distribution, but friendship, choosing favoured activities and/or favoured locations can also shape the resource flows, both within the Yilpara community and beyond. It is the ‘beyond’ component of such sharing, and what it contributes to an understanding of social life, that forms the final part of this chapter.

Resource Flows, Regional Mobility and the Taste of the Sea

Yilpara is not only an endpoint for resource flows, it is also a place from which they are redirected elsewhere. Other smaller homelands and major population centers like Yirrkala and Gapuwiyak can be destinations for food hunted around Yilpara, particularly food from the coast and seas. The flows of such resources demonstrate wider regional networks of sociality, connecting people with other people and people with places. They also reflect human mobility, for resources do not move by themselves, but are carried in cars, planes, and boats by people who are also on the move. Not all or even most regional trips involve hunting resources being carried from place to place, but focussing on these trips maintains an emphasis on hunting whilst also highlighting the wider mobility so characteristic of remote Aboriginal communities. Yilpara people are more sedentary than most, but movement to and from other places is still an important part of everyday life. Major ceremonies bring people together from across the region, whilst other requirements of contemporary life can have a similar

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55 Highly successful fishing trips can result in the wide sharing of resources in a similar way to miyapunu. However, these times of great excess were uncommon, and more often the hunters would return with several extra fish and crabs which would be shared with kin who did not go hunting. A fish or two might be sent to Wakuthi Marawili or to other senior men such as Bakulangay for whom fishing is difficult, in recognition of their status and kin relationships.

56 One element not considered thus far is the sharing which occurs within the families themselves. This was the aspect of sharing that was the most difficult to observe regularly, but the same factors are likely to be important on a smaller scale; the kin relations amongst family members, the seniority of particular people, whether they were involved in collecting the meat or in contributing other important household labour, and so on. Again much of the decision making is likely to be implicit rather than explicit, for the senior man is not necessarily in the situation of saying no to direct requests from kin, rather the members of his household would usually recognize what they are entitled to based on the meat available, and act accordingly. Thus the wife and children of the Madarrpa man holding the meat might take a significant share, but a Rirratjingu man who has married one of the couple’s daughters and is present in the house would sit back and allow others to claim first, as he was not involved in the hunt and is already in a position of debt to the Madarrpa. The microsocial level within extended families reflects many of the characteristics of sharing on a wider scale.
effect -mining negotiations, Native Title meetings, health issues, school and training programs, and so on. In their roles as regional spokespeople, men such as Djambawa and Bandipandi Wunungmurra can move much further afield, often travelling to Darwin and, in Djambawa’s case, cities in southern Australia. Yet within this picture of the mobility of people and resources, there is also consistency to life and residence at Yilpara. People like Wakuthi and Julia, and Bakulangay and his daughter Muypirri, are some of those whose presence there is very stable.

As well as human mobility, resource flows also demonstrate the connections between people at Yilpara and those elsewhere, and exploring patterns in those connections shows how the community and the people within it are socially oriented. Such social orientation is partly related to geography, but only partly. The resource flows reflect important links to other homeland communities in the northern part of the bay, and the major population centers of Yirrkala and Groote Island, even though some of these places are further away than other closer places of lesser importance.

Tracing the resource flows from hunting also shows one way in which Yilpara and other homeland communities are productive, creating goods that are valued elsewhere. The dominant flow in the wider system of exchange comes from big centres like Yirrkala, which supply the money, store bought goods, and technology critical to contemporary life. Yet these flows cannot supply some important things that the hunters of Yilpara provide, and food from the hunt is one resource that flows in the opposite direction to the dominant resources from Yirrkala. Sharing food from the hunt is more often about kinship, connectedness, taste and recognition than about driving needs or economic functions, particularly when it is flowing towards large centres such as Yirrkala, where fresh store food is freely available. However turtle, crabs, and fish are still greatly valued, both as high quality food, and for what they represent.

The Taste of the Sea

“When I get to wanga (home), I will eat guya (fish)”
Wannuła Marawili, speaking after midnight on a long, tiring, night drive back after a football game at Yirrkala.

Resource flows moving from the sea to the land integrate these two, and connect people who may be living many kilometres from the coast to the sea places that are important to them. For saltwater people like the Dholupuyngu, the taste of miyapunu or stingray or crab is the taste of home, connecting them to the bays and beaches when they might be far away. People staying inland or recently returned from it talk wistfully about seafood, hoping to have miyapunu or stingray again soon, whilst those living at the homeland make some effort to send seafood inland, sometimes planning a hunting trip that will coincide with transport opportunities, sometimes cutting short a trip to take advantage of opportunities that arise. Flows from the coast are greater than from inland communities to those on the sea, and turtle is particularly common, both because it provides a large amount of meat and because it can be transported alive if necessary. Sometimes the journey such resources make is complex, involving sea, road and air transport before the food reaches its intended recipients. The flows are one means of people affirming their identity as saltwater people and their connections to the places from which those resources come.

57 Another which flows in the opposite direction is art, usually sold through the Yirrkala arts centre.
Flows between the Homelands

The people who live at the homelands of northern Blue Mud Bay have families that are intermarried and interwoven in complex ways spanning many generations. Some homelands such as Yilpara and Djarrakpi are on the coast, whilst others such as Gangan and Rurrangalla, are many kilometres inland. Resources flow between these homelands in different ways, but the importance of sea resources is clearly evident, and the kinds of factors that were important in shaping the flows at a miyapunu butchery also shape these wider flows. Gawirrin Gumana is the elderly leader of the inland community of Gangan, and one day he telephoned Djambawa and asked him to hunt some turtles for the Gangan community, who have no access to a boat. The men arranged that Djambawa would bring the turtles over to the western side of Grindall Bay and Gawirrin would drive the 40km track down to the beach from Gangan to meet him. Gawirrin arrived early enough to see Djambawa harpoon the turtles on sea country belonging to Gawirrin’s Dhalwangu clan, and so he claimed both turtles for Gangan rather than just some meat, and Djambawa then had to hunt more turtles to take back to Yilpara. Gawirrin’s claim was based on being the owner of the country, on being Djambawa’s classificatory father, and on the fact that Yilpara hunters regularly caught turtles on sea country belonging to the Dhalwangu, and these turtles were usually taken back to Yilpara. Gawirrin’s claim was recognized as justified by Djambawa, who nevertheless later expressed some mild exasperation at being caught in those circumstances. Ownership, seniority, kin relations, technology, and the pragmatic practicalities of sharing are all evident in the flow of resources between homelands, and from the sea to inland areas.

Because resource flows are as much about social relations as practical or economic considerations, sea resources can flow between homelands that are each on the coast and have a working boat. Baluka Maymuru was at his homeland at Djarrakpi whilst there was a ceremony on at Yilpara, and in lieu of attending in person, he caught a turtle and offered it to Bakulangay Marawili, who was one of the organizers of the ceremony. A boat owned by visitors from Bickerton Island picked up the turtle and also took petrol back to Djarrakpi for Baluka to use to hunt another turtle. Baluka needed the fuel in economic terms, but his gift to Yilpara people was a gift rather than necessity, as the Yilpara people were quite capable of getting their own turtles.

In a further example of this wider significance of resource flows, Nuwandjali got some crabs from the professional crabbers camp at Dholuwuy, and then later in the day received some dugong from a successful dugong hunt. He sent the crabs to Gangan on a plane that happened to be leaving, even though, unlike dugong, Gangan people are theoretically able to get crabs for themselves from the mangrove stands along the western side of Grindall Bay. The significance of these crabs was that they came from the crabbers operating under a permit and royalty agreement overseen by the Northern

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58 Gawirrin and Djambawa’s father Wakuthi are half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
59 On another similar occasion, people from Gangan supplied the boat fuel and Yilpara people supplied the boat. The turtles that were caught were shared between both groups.
60 On another occasion, Bandipandi Wunungmurra from Bälma used his own boat to travel up to Grindall Bay and camp at Dholuwuy. When he left to go home again, he took with him some turtle that had been caught by Yilpara hunters using the Yilpara boat, despite being a skilled hunter, owning a boat, and travelling home through productive turtle hunting grounds.
Land Council, and the crabbers often operate in sea areas belonging to the Dhal’wangu clan members at Gangan. Therefore the crabs have a status over and above their food value, for they recognize the ownership and the formal permission that has been given by people from Gangan.61

The closest community by road to Yilpara is the inland homeland of Rurrangalla, 35km away from Yilpara and on the same road. It is inhabited by members of the Munyuku clan, but for a number of reasons the links between the people at Rurrangalla and those at Yilpara are not as strong as the geographic proximity would suggest.62 On one occasion Gambali Ngurruwuthun shot an emu at Rurrangalla and offered some to Wakuthi Marawili, providing not only the unusual situation of resources flowing from inland to the coast, but also the only noted instance63 of resources flowing between the Munyuku and the Madarrpa. The other recorded examples of resources being carried from Yilpara to Rurrangalla were occasions when people closely connected to Yilpara were staying at Rurrangalla, and the fish were sent to those visitors, rather than Rurrangalla residents.

The resource flows reflect the differing strengths of the connections between Yilpara and the surrounding homelands. Such connections are only partly related to geographical proximity, as the comparison between the flows to Gangan and Rurrangalla demonstrates. Whilst the inland homelands welcome resources from the sea, the value of the crabs that went to Gangan was greater than their food value. The sea resources that flow between peoples who each have access to the coast makes explicit the social and symbolic value such resources have over their economic or subsistence role.

**Flows from Groote and Bickerton Islands**

The connections between Groote Island and Yilpara are significant and longstanding, involving residential, marriage, and Ancestral links. Ownership of Woodah Island is shared between Islanders and mainland dwellers, with a full set of names in both languages for the places on the island.64 The elder sons of both Bakulangay and

61 Crabs are a convenient thing to send by air, as they are professionally tied up, can be transported alive and fresh across long distances, and, despite their lower status, are a welcome addition to the diet in inland homelands. Crabs from the crabbers were sent to Yirrkala for the same reason.

62 The degree of distance should not be overstated, for two senior Munyuku brothers, Dulja and Gambali Ngurruwuthun, acted as djirikay or ceremonial leaders throughout the region, including many ceremonies at Yilpara, until they died in quick succession in late 2001 and early 2002. They passed the mantle of djirikay on to Djambawa when it was clear that both would not live long, and the relative lack of movement and exchange between Yilpara and Rurrangalla during the fieldwork may have been partly due to these men being away from their homeland quite frequently. However there are old disputes and clan rivalries that also contribute to a degree of distance, and Djambawa noted that the Munyuku had in recent times tended to marry people from clans further inland rather than from other clans with whom they share territory around the coast of Blue Mud Bay. Yarrinya, the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula, is Munyuku coastal country. Dulja and Gambali were important contributors to the work of Howard Morphy (Morphy 1991:xv), and may well have contributed substantially to this research had circumstances been different.

63 The transport of resources by boat was much more noticeable than that by car or plane, and this may be one reason for the fewer number of observations for places like Rurrangalla relative to boat transport from Djarrajki. The same is true of resources both flowing out of and coming into Yilpara- boat arrivals are more obvious.

64 Longstanding contact between the inhabitants of the coastal mainland and islands has also been reported from elsewhere in the Gulf (Trigger 1987)
Gumbaniya Marawili live there often, and a significant number of Maźarrpa men, including Djambawa Marawili, have married women who grew up there. Boats from Groote and Bickerton Island are by far the most regular visitors by sea and the reasons for these visits can vary - transporting relatives, attending ceremonies, and hunting on the rich hunting grounds of the northern part of the Bay. On one occasion Djambawa rang them up and asked them to bring a boat over so that the Yilpara people could hunt turtles, because the boat engine at Yilpara was damaged. Travellers from Groote or Bickerton Island will often stop off at Woodah Island along the way to hunt for a turtle as an arrival gift, and these turtles were almost always given to Bakulangay Marawili, whose eldest son had lived on Groote for a long time, whose house was close to the beach where the boat landed, and whose frailty meant that, unlike Djambawa, he was unable to hunt for turtles himself. On Christmas Day 2000, two boats arrived at Yilpara from Groote Island bringing relatives of Yilpara people for Christmas celebrations. They brought a small turtle from Woodah Island and gave it to Bakulangay, but there was already a turtle at Yilpara, so Bakulangay sent the turtle on to the chairman of Laynhapuy Association at Yirrkala, the organization responsible for supporting the homelands. He was not a close kinsman of Bakulangay, but was a powerful man, and so this Christmas gesture had strategic value both for Bakulangay personally and for the Yilpara community as a whole. Nuwandjali said later that the chairman regularly received presents such as this, a reflection of the importance of seniority, but also of the political power that has come from new governance structures. However most striking in this example is the scale of the resource movement. The turtle was brought 25km from Woodah Island by boat and was then sent on by plane 150km north to Yirrkala, to a man the original hunters may know only by reputation. A turtle moves from sea to a coastal community, onto a vehicle to the airstrip, then into the air, then down again for another 10km by road from the Nhulunbuy airport to its recipients at Yirrkala. The tastes of the sea express the sociality and strategy of everyday relationships, the mobility of people in contemporary life, and the historical, personal, and kinship links that orient people towards other people and other places within the region.

Flows to Yirrkala

Yirrkala is an important place in the lives of Yilpara people; it is where the homeland support association, the homeland school, and the homeland health service is based, and it is also where Yilpara people stay when they need to visit the town of Nhulunbuy for shopping, banking, and so on. Some Blue Mud Bay people live at Yirrkala permanently, and resources hunted at Yilpara and sent to Yirrkala are usually directed to these people. Nuwandjali’s wife Bangawuy lived at Yirrkala most of the time between 2000-2002, for she worked for the Aboriginal health service, and during 2002 Nuwandjali’s mother

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65 Yilpara boats did not normally travel the reciprocal journey to Groote Island during 2000-2002, partly because there was only one boat large enough to make the trip. When people wished to travel that far, they chartered a plane. However on a brief visit in 2005, people were using Yilpara-based boats to travel to Groote Island.

66 On one fishing trip Yilpara hunters saw that people from Groote had been on the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula. The islanders had found two turtle nests filled with eggs but only dug one, leaving the other one for Yilpara hunters to find as a courtesy, and in recognition that the Islanders were visitors there.

67 This was another occasion of proximity being important. Djambawa used the boat from Groote Island to harpoon two turtles on the western side of Grindall Bay, but his classificatory father-in-law Manman Wirrpanda arrived on the western side of the beach soon afterwards having travelled from his inland home at Dhurarupijpi. Djambawa had to give one of his turtles to Manman.

68 In 2003 he moved back to Yilpara, following the death of his father Bakulangay.
Mayawuluk began to live at Yirrkala as her health deteriorated and proximity to health services became a priority. Nuwandjali’s younger brother Malumin and his family also divided their time between Yirrkala and Yilpara, with an emphasis on Yirrkala. This extended family all lived at the same house when they were in either location, and the resource flows between the two houses were consistent, even as the people changed in different locations; Nuwandjali sent mullet, trevally, and turtle to Bangawuy, and trevally to Mayawuluk, Malumin sent mullet to Bangawuy, Mayawuluk sent crabs to Malumin, and Bangawuy sent bush fruit to Malumin. The family patterns reflect wider patterns across other families who were also splitting their time between Yilpara and Yirrkala for all sorts of reasons, although perhaps not to quite the same degree as Nuwandjali’s. Flows of store bought food and other important resources move in the other direction, supporting kin living on the homelands and reciprocating the lower volumes of bush and sea food coming in from them. Again, the flows reflect the importance of the sea, of kin connections, and reflect the wider mobility of people characteristic of life in remote Aboriginal communities.

**Conclusion**

“Sometimes we get sad for one another and go and visit each other”
Bakulangay Marawili

The resource flows express relationships between people, the mobility of people, and the importance of the saltwater to those living far away. The flows from the sea to those living inland reflect the integration of bush and sea country, and emphasise that resources from the sea are an expression of social life on land. The flows between coastal communities who are able to access the same resources, also emphasise that sharing food is more than pragmatic and economic, although the practical importance of a diet rich in fresh fish and meat at coastal homelands should not be underestimated.

The social and regional orientation of Yilpara is evident in the resource flows, for there has been no mention of the communities at the Walker River or Yilila, homelands on or close to the southern coastline within the Bay. Yilpara people are oriented towards the other homelands in the north, particularly Dhurupitipi, Gangan, and Djarrakpi, and to the larger communities of Yirrkala and Groote Island. Yilpara is also an exporter of hunting resources, for other than one instance of emu being sent to Wakuthi, turtle was the only resource that flowed in from hunting activity based elsewhere, whilst people from Yilpara sent resources to a number of places in the region. The movement from sea to land is a significant element in the resource flows from contemporary hunting, and more broadly, the flows reflect the wider mobility of people. This wider mobility provides some context for the next chapter, which focuses systematically on that aspect of movement related to hunting.
Chapter 5

People Flows II: Patterns in the Maps

The delicate hands of the fisherwoman at the moment the fish bites, or the flashing strike of the spearman’s arm express in a single moment a deep familiarity with place, environment, and activity. It is embodied knowledge, emerging out of observation, practice, experience, and the direct tuition of others. To accurately cast a line or throw a spear is to physically recall in an instant many similar moments of life in similar places in the past. They are acts of familiarity and acts of belonging.

In what follows, such familiarity and belonging is explored and represented in ways that the Dhoḻpuyngu themselves would be unlikely to adopt: quantitative, detailed, systematic, and precisely delineated in space and time. GPS points gathered from 12 months of hunting trips were fed into a GIS mapping program creating maps depicting patterns of human presence and movement on country. Such patterns demonstrate where people were and how often they were there, but they can also show much more, revealing important aspects of social life right down to the personality of one individual. The ‘people flows’ of a previous chapter gave some sense of those whose activities generated these patterns, of their engagements with the country and with each other, and of the moments and continuities that make up a single day. Here, in contrast, particular moments are distilled from the context of the journey and the day, and are stripped of their descriptive richness down to a numerical point in space. Such points say nothing about whether they represent a day spent with a fishing line in the water, or a temporary halt on a journey to collect bush fruit, or even a few seconds on a boat in motion. But in relating these points to others on other journeys, patterns emerge, patterns that can tell stories. The moments of the previous hunting narrative were situated between the moments before and after them on a single day, but the moments here are situated between other moments on other days. Each moment represented a time where recording a point was both possible and useful; a movement in space, an event, an encounter, an arrival or departure, a place to hunt, and so on. Therefore the patterns within the maps provide both a counterpoint and a sequel to the previous account of ‘people flows’, for the points are represented as moments in place rather than moments in time. Such a systematic approach to hunting movements and general presence on country might not be useful everywhere, or even in most remote Aboriginal communities, but in a place such as Yilpara, where subsistence hunting still plays a critical role people's lives and diets, the patterns can be and are meaningful.

Investigating presence, movement, and relationships to country in this way has more resonance for people beyond Blue Mud Bay than with those who live there. For Yolngu people, part of belonging to a place is knowing how to exist in it, and so the skill of a

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69 Similar to research conducted elsewhere in the NT (Altman 1987; Povinelli 1992), contemporary hunting at Yilpara focuses on meat, as store bought carbohydrates such as flour, rice, and breakfast cereals are cheap, easily transportable, and require far less labour to prepare than most bush sources. In contrast, store bought meat is not available from the Yilpara shop, and the nearest source is Nhulunbuy, 200km away by road, where it is expensive and of far lower quality than bush sources. To provide one simple example, during the main survey period, I did not see anyone eating lamb chops often a staple of larger remote Aboriginal communities. Yet mud crabs, which can sell for $35 or more per kilo in the fish markets of Southern Australia, were often used as bait for fishing.
fisherwoman may be, at least in one sense, an expression of ownership. But the broader non-indigenous public usually speaks of ownership in different terms and in a different language; a moment of physical skill is simply that, rather than an expression of all of the previous engagements underlying it. Yet this depth of interaction can be represented in other ways, ways that meaningfully contribute to legal, political and broader social debates about the use and ownership of country. One popular criticism of indigenous ownership is that areas controlled by indigenous people are not often ‘used’ sufficiently, where ‘use’ is defined as economic exploitation. In some ways it is a curious objection to arise from a system which allows someone to own land without ever setting foot on it, but ‘using the country’ still has a degree of power in popular discourses about indigenous rights. One public domain in which the material in this chapter has appeared was the Federal Court of Australia, and Appendix 1 (pgs 8-9) describes, in terms appropriate to that forum, the methodology behind this study of use.

However to say that the value of such an approach is exhausted by strategic considerations is to greatly diminish what it has to contribute. The patterns in the maps can reveal very human characteristics about movement and presence, hunting and sociality, groups and individuals, and about how the hunting choices people make affect their engagements with the country. Gender, lineage, and personality differences emerge as social life is revealed through dots on the map. The patterns here also demonstrate the importance of water, and particularly of saltwater, for so many of the points and routes are on the coast, either on the beach or on the water close to shore. The homeland of Yilpara is the origin of almost all of these journeys and is itself on the beach, further underlining the importance of the coast for sustenance, recreation, travel, and everyday life. The patterns in the maps are patterns of social life, but they are also patterns of relationships between people and the waters of Blue Mud Bay.

The opening chapter was a critique of Western mapping and its limitations in representing a Yolngu vision of country and ownership. Yet ironically, I noted above that systematically representing use on maps can potentially augment such a claim to ownership. The vision that maps suggest was not undermined with a view to dispensing with them entirely, but rather that the particularity and idiosyncrasy of the perspective they provide be made explicit. Western maps are a powerful way of representing the world and knowledge about the world, yet powerful does not mean omniscient, and identifying their deficiencies was and is critical to the reformulation of coastal country being attempted here. Understanding maps as schematic rather than holistic is easier in this context where they are depicting patterns of human movement and their static quality is brought into sharper relief. In a computer age it is possible to represent journeys and movement in less static ways, but the representation would still be schematic, as the contrast between these maps and the turtle hunt narrative clearly conveys. Journeys can be charted through lines on maps, but some of the maps below contain a hundred or more journeys, and many of the routes are roads traversed again and again, with people stopping at different points. To turn each of these journeys into individual routes would not only be a laborious task, it would render the map illegible in ways that would be detrimental to the purposes of much of what follows, legibility is important. So for most of the maps below, the patterns are created by points, which become markers of stillness as well as movement- sometimes representing a boat in motion, sometimes fishers standing still for an entire day. Two maps provide a contrast to the pattern of the points, one at the beginning marks out the roads that people use on land, the other, final map, traces Yilpara hunting routes across land and sea, highlighting flows of people and the journeys across Dholupuynyu country.
The nature and the forms of hunting in contemporary life have changed significantly from pre-colonial times, but the concrete contribution bush hunting makes to subsistence remains important at Yilpara. Quantitative assessments of hunting and resource use are still popular in certain branches of anthropology (Bird and Bliege Bird 1997) and indeed it has been one important strand of previous research amongst Aboriginal people along the Northern Territory coastline (Altman 1987; McCarthy and MacArthur 1960; Meehan 1982; Povinelli 1992). McCarthy and MacArthur made the earliest studies in 1948, focussing on the time spent undertaking particular hunting activities. Of particular interest here is recent work by Povinelli, which built upon Altman’s approaches in an important paper which contained quantitative analyses of bush and store bought foods, but also explored the broader meanings of contemporary hunting. As should already be clear, this account does not prioritise the quantitative study of the amounts of resources obtained, nor the way those amounts articulate with the overall diet and economy. Instead the systematic orientation is a spatial one, examining how different people are present upon and engage with the country in everyday life, and how patterns in that data can reveal important characteristics of Yilpara social life.

What to Hunt- Food from the Country

Many different food resources are available from the country around Yilpara, but people do not seek them all. Like contemporary hunters elsewhere (Povinelli 1992: 174), people focus on meat, fish and shellfish that are tasty and/or easy to catch, with the bulk of carbohydrates coming from flour, rice, and noodles bought from the Yilpara store. Food from the sea is particularly important, not least because Yilpara itself is on the coast. Two exceptions to this emphasis on meat and on the sea are yams and bush fruits. Women, particularly middle aged and older women, gather yams in the dense thickets of vines and bushes growing behind the coastal dunes, whilst both children and adults eagerly gather bush fruits and berries when they are in season. A more detailed description of food resources and techniques for obtaining them appears in Appendix 1 (pgs 19-37), but Map 5A provides a summary, showing the locations of some resources commonly targeted by hunters based at Yilpara, including some non-food resources such as spear shafts and art materials such as barks, and hollow logs. It does not include all of the foods available at those locations, only the most popular ones, and it is Yilpara-centric, for it does not include resources gathered by people traveling to those same areas from other communities. Some coastal places on the map, such as the western side of Grindall Bay, are largely used for turtle hunting by people traveling from Yilpara, but are used in other ways by people from other homelands like Djarrakpi, Bararaitjpi, Dhurupitjpi and Gangan, who may hunt stingrays, catch fish, and gather oysters from that same area.

How to Get There- Roads, Cars and Boats

Cars, boats, and walking are all important in the rhythms and routines of everyday hunting. A critical sign in the contemporary landscape of the presence and passage of people are the roads and bush tracks made by these vehicles, but on the commercially

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70 Povinelli writes “foraging is a way of attending to, re-enacting, and ensuring the physical, and mythical reproduction of the environment, the human body, and the social group” (Povinelli 1992:172).
Map 5A: General Locations at which Resources are obtained by Yilpara Residents
available map of the area, only the main arterial roads to the community and to the telecommunications tower at the tip of the peninsula are marked (Map 5B). These bigger dirt roads are cut by graders and bulldozers and are important arterial routes for connecting communities, but in terms of hunting they are complemented by many bush tracks, which are often just two lines of packed earth marking where the tyres of 4WD vehicles have repeatedly passed. These hunting tracks wind through the trees and around other obstacles, their apparent meandering disguising the direct path they strike towards their destination. They are tracks made by people who, although they may be in the midst of the forest, always knew exactly what direction they were traveling in.

The bush tracks also have a dynamic quality, for they are made and remade, becoming overgrown if vehicles do not pass regularly, shifting to bypass new obstacles like fallen trees and washaways, and splitting and reforming as people choose a new sideroute or a new short cut. In the wet season some tracks can become impassable, allowing the grass to grow four feet high and rendering them almost invisible. At such times it is good to know where the track used to be, for its traces will be faint, just the memory of a road in some places. Similarly, new tracks can be made rapidly with just a vehicle and sometimes an axe, creating new access to areas previously only traversed on foot. These new roads are not made by everyone, but by people who are confident of their place, who have the knowledge and the authority to make this kind of change to the landscape, a change that might lead to more people visiting and more food being gathered. People take pride in making tracks, and they remember who made them and why. Who made the path can become part of the memories about both the place and the person.

A third type of road is the beach itself, and it is as important as the other two for Yilpara hunters, if not more so. Vehicles from Yilpara can drive on the beach in both directions over a distance of approximately 40km, covering almost the whole coastline of the peninsula, and giving them access to uncountable fishing sites. Often there are two roads on the beach, a temporary one on the hard sand near the sea at low tide, and a permanent road amongst the grass and dunes above the high tide line. One is covered by every tide, the other is much more stable, but can still vanish under storm surge or be blown away by cyclonic winds. The beach is a major highway for hunting journeys in northern Blue Mud Bay.

Mapping bush tracks using a GPS and car odometer creates a picture of the recent history of where and how people traveled. Map 5C shows these bush tracks, and comparing it with Map 5B shows how few of the paths relevant to everyday life appear on current maps of the region. Comparing Map 5C with the resource map 5A also demonstrates how these tracks lead directly to the site of key resources.

In order to travel on these roads it is necessary to have a vehicle, and so vehicles are a critical part of remote homeland life. They are the major material possession that people desire, but the roads are too rough and the conditions too bad for a normal car, so people must buy more expensive 4WDs. As most people receive the majority of their income from social security payments, the 4WDs they buy are often old and worn out, rapidly developing mechanical problems in the harsh conditions, and the lifespan of some of these cars can be less than a year. Fixing them is difficult, even with the mechanical support provided by the homeland association, and they are often off the road for extended periods. When functioning, they are in almost constant use, running errands around the community, going on hunting trips, and driving to and from other homelands or Nhulunbuy. The vehicles present at Yilpara during the initial 12 months of the resource survey are listed as part of Appendix 1 (pg 10).
Map 5B: Yilpara Roads as Printed on Commercial Maps
Map 5C: Hunting Tracks at Yilpara
The same kinds of factors apply to boats and boat engines, and, as should already be apparent, these are critical to turtle hunting and to the general presence of the Dholupuyngu on the sea. The most important hunting boat at Yilpara during 2000-2002 was a large 5 metre long dinghy, wide enough to allow three people to sit side by side, and with a floor area sufficient to carry two or more turtles. It was the only boat based at Yilpara that was used to travel to Woodah Island, although two or three smaller aluminium dinghies capable of carrying three or four people were sometimes used for fishing, turtle hunting, and occasional travel across the internal bays to other homelands. Whilst the boats were usually present, the availability of the outboards to power them varied far more, for a lack of money, tools, local mechanical knowledge, and of the proper use of engines greatly affected their lifespan.


I participated in 180 hunting trips over a 12-month seasonal cycle from Oct 2000-Nov 2001. This was by no means all or even most of the hunting trips that emerged from Yilpara during that period, and the nature of this sample, and how it related to the total amount of hunting activity, is discussed in Appendix 1 (pgs 7-15). What the data represents is a sample of the types of places people chose to go and how often they chose to go there. The first of the hunting maps (Map 5D) shows all of the points collected from the trips, providing a base pattern against which the subsequent maps can be interpreted, and it also highlights the scale of contemporary hunting, for day trips involved cars, boats, and walking, and ranged across an area up to 35km wide and 40km long. Map 5D also gives some sense of how activity was concentrated in particular places, and the most striking comparison is that of the coast and seas compared to inland areas, emphasizing the importance of the beach and sea to contemporary subsistence. However within that overall coastal emphasis there are some important foci of activity. On the coast these included turtle hunting in Grindall Bay and down the eastern side of Woodah Island, fishing for Yambirrku (parrotfish) on the peninsula south of Yilpara, hunting for stingrays on the beaches and reefs close by Yilpara, and boat fishing off the reefs to the northeast of the community. Inland, hunters shot birds on the wetlands and fished for freshwater fish in the billabong at Mangatjipa close to the northernmost point of the map. The orientation to water sources, both fresh and salt, is clearly evident in these concentrations of activity.

Seasonality

The Blue Mud Bay seasonal cycle is a detailed one containing 7 distinct seasons (see Figure 5A). Within the overall rhythm of wet and dry characteristic of the tropical north, these seasons are locally specific, coded for by changes in the wind and weather, but also by the appearance of plants and animals. Temporal comparisons will not be explored in great detail here, partly because if they are made using the short Yolngu seasons, the patterns are confounded by other factors such as the availability of transport and lengthy funerals. However one temporal comparison can be made in a robust way,

71 In the maps which follow, the points that appear may represent two or more visits to the same location. This is particularly true of the dense points around the coastline of the Yilpara peninsula itself, but has little effect on the overall patterns of points. Points on the adjacent peninsulas and on the islands to the south mostly represent a single instance. Only in one location, at the billabong of Mangatjipa at the northernmost point of the map, have points been spread out around the location to indicate the number of visits.
Fig 5A Blue Mud Bay Seasonal Calendar*

Outermost ring represents the Yolngu name of the season, the next ring the name of the predominant wind of that season, and the inner rings are important resources available during that period. Yolngu words in bold are translated in the ring immediately below them.

*Created by Patrick Faulkner from information gathered by Marcus Barber, and based on a similar diagram by S. Davis (1984) for a different area of Arnhem Land
Map 5D: Total GPS points from Yilpara Hunts, Oct 2000-Nov 2001

1 Points may overlap, and can therefore represent multiple visits to the one site. Points on the Yilpara peninsula often represent multiple visits. Points on the coastlines of the bays opposite and the islands generally represent one visit.
Map 5E: GPS Points from Wet Season
Nov 2000-May 2001

Map 5F: GPS Points from Dry Season
June-Nov 2001
and this is the overall comparison between the wet and dry seasons, shown in the two maps 5E and 5F. Comparing the two shows there is little difference in presence upon the country between the two halves of the year, and this is despite the changes in the wet season, when roads are cut, there are storms at sea, and different resources become available. Some reasons for this are that hunters can exploit different resources from the same place at different times of year, that there are wet season routes that avoid serious water obstacles, and that it rains in pulses rather than continuously, so people can wait a few days for the waters to subside before using the more difficult routes on land. When it comes to storms at sea, experienced hunters can see which direction the clouds are moving, how the winds will blow the storms around, and where the best shelter is from the prevailing winds. Boat travel requires more knowledge and more caution, but is not greatly limited by the onset of the wet season storms.

However there is still one important difference between the wet and the dry seasons. The freshwater billabong at Mangatjipa is cut off during the wet season as the road is blocked by an impassable stream. The greater focus on coastal resources this implies correlates with some past practices of hunting and movement, something that will be addressed further in the next chapter. But it is worth noting how, on different timescales, the movement of people reacts and relates to the movement of water. People concentrate even more on the coast during the big flows of the wet season, and move back inland when the water recedes to the billabongs in the dry and the fish go with it, making them much easier to catch. On a daily timescale, people travel out from their houses in cars, boats and on foot to hunt for a day around salt or freshwater, then return with their catch in the afternoon. Saltwater and sea resources remain dominant, but people still move with the water in a number of ways.

Men In Boats: Gender Patterns

There are patterns in the maps which show some far more striking differences than the seasonal comparison, and one of these is the demarcation between genders. At Yilpara during 2000-2001, this was expressed largely, although not exclusively, through access to boats, as the maps of three different groups of hunters show. The first map (Map 5G) shows points where men were hunting together and, with the exception of the freshwater billabong at Mangatjipa to the north, the range of these hunts was similar to the range covered by the overall hunting points (5D). The contrast between the patterns of this map and those of map 5H, where women travelled in groups, is striking.\(^\text{72}\) Boat access is critical, for women did not normally travel in boats alone, and the only observed instance of them obtaining food independently away from the mainland coastline was when they collected oysters on Woodah Island. There are also some differences on land, as the northernmost points on the men’s’ map reflects trips to cut

\(^{72}\) The points identified as trips where women went alone were also trips on which I was present, and so my status as a man must be taken into account here. However more important than my status as a man was my possession of a vehicle. A number of women in the community can drive and some own cars, but the protocol of men doing the bulk of the driving is maintained as often as possible. I believe that the women would not have been able to undertake the number of trips that they did without the presence of my vehicle. However I did not influence the choice of destinations, which were selected by the women whom I hunted with, and so what map 5H shows are the places women chose to go when they had the means to do so. Like my gender, the gender of children was ignored in the above comparison between men and women, as children did not normally influence the choice of destination or the route to get there. I will return to the issue of children later in the chapter, but it is important to note here that they are still a part of the scene.
Map 5G: Men Hunting Separately

Map 5H: Women Hunting Separately
hollow logs\textsuperscript{73} and to shoot waterbirds on the floodplains, but the women did not travel to the floodplains alone. The points on the women’s map that are close to the same area lie on the main road and represent stops to cook fish that they had caught at the freshwater billabong at Mangatjipa, a place women did travel to alone.\textsuperscript{74}

Points on the gender maps that are in close proximity can reflect quite different activities, as groups of men and women interact with the same places in different ways and at different times; the men might be spearing on one day, and on the next a group of women might be digging for sand crabs and linefishing.

However many hunting trips contain men and women, and Map 5I shows the pattern of points for these mixed groups. It is strikingly similar to the map of the presence of women, showing that the men hunt turtle alone, covering long distances. When women were present in the boat, the group travelled to one location, Woodah Island, where the women got out and the men moved on. This type of movement and presence on the country, where women and men share certain experiences but also have different ones, has some historical correlates, as a coming chapter will show.

Such patterns at a wider social level can also be represented and reflected at the level of the individual. Maps 5J and 5K compare the presence on country of the most active male and female hunters at Yilpara, Djambawa Marawili and Julia Wirrpanda. The differences in their movements show how they both generate and reflect the wider gender distinctions evident above. Both are highly knowledgeable and skilled hunters, but the places they go and the activities they undertake are quite different. As the main turtle hunter, Djambawa travelled often to the outer islands, but also fished in a boat off the reefs to the east of Yilpara, and on land, shot birds on the floodplain. Djambawa’s relatively infrequent visits to the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula contrast sharply with Julia’s, for whom that area is a major hunting ground. She gathered bait, went linefishing, dug for yams, and collected turtle eggs from that region, often in the company of other women and children. She also collected mudcrabs from the mangroves east of Yilpara, and went fishing at the Mangatjipa freshwater billabong to the north. As would be expected, the patterns of these two active hunters show strong gender divisions in the use of country being equally replicated amongst individuals as well as on a group level.

**Hunting in 2002**

The maps shown above represent points recorded during a 12-month seasonal cycle in 2000-2001, but they do not contain the points from a further 6-month fieldwork period during the dry season of 2002. The research objectives of the second period were different and several funerals reduced the amount of hunting activity people undertook, but I still participated in a further 54 hunting trips in 2002. The geographical range of the points and the patterns within them were similar, so they will not be reproduced

\textsuperscript{73} Elaborately painted hollow logs were used as coffins in the past. The same kinds of logs are now sold to the Yirrkala arts centre. Thin hollow logs are also used to make yidakis (didgeridus), both for sale and ceremonial use.

\textsuperscript{74} Povinelli focuses on gender differences in hunting at Belyuen, but the major gender differences she notes are that women go hunting much more frequently, and conversely that hunting by men is more productive in caloric terms (although not necessarily in social terms). Had she described hunting in terms of spatial patterns it seems likely that they would be similar to the ones here, for she notes that men go ‘sea hunting’, but that they have similar problems with the supply of petrol and outboard motors (Povinelli 1992:180).

1 cm = 2.8 km
Map 5J: Djambawa Marawili

Fig. 5B: Djambawa Marawili with the results of a hunting trip
Map 5K: Julia Wirrpanda

Fig. 5C: Julia with sand crab bait at Yarrinya
here, but one map is worth noting. It represents the points where mixed groups containing adult men and women chose to go during 2002 (Map L). The difference between this map, and the map of the mixed group of 2000-2001 (Map 5I) is striking. However a further pattern in the data needs to be drawn out before the reasons for this variation can be fully explained.

**Hunting and Lineage**

The Madarrpa at Yilpara can be separated into two patrilineages, one of which stems from Wakuthi Marawili and incorporates, amongst many others, his wives Julia and Mayawuluk and his sons Djambawa and Nuwandjali. The other lineage stems from Mundukul Marawili, an important Madarrpa leader who died in the 1950s and whose descendants include Bakulangay and Gumbaniya. The two lineages live in houses on separate streets of the community, and the distinction between them is important in local social dynamics. I lived next to Nuwandjali’s house on the side of the homeland occupied by Wakuthi’s lineage and, and this meant that I received more invitations to go out hunting with its members. However I went out regularly with people from across the whole community, and the maps below show the pattern that occurs when the total data set is reconfigured in terms of these two lineages. Map 5M shows the points made when the group was mixed, which is defined as when at least one adult member of each lineage was present. It shows a similar range to the pattern of overall points. Map 5N shows the presence of members of Wakuthi’s lineage hunting on their own, and Map 5O shows the points relating to trips with only people of Mundukul’s lineage. The differences between these two lineage maps are clearly evident, for members of Wakuthi’s lineage dominate presence on the water, with the relatively few boat trips made by people from Mundukul’s lineage made closer to shore and in smaller boats. Comparing map 5O with the mixed groups of Map 5M shows that members of Mundukul’s lineage did travel further offshore, but only with members of Wakuthi’s lineage.

This phenomenon can be traced to the tight control Djambawa Marawili exercised over access to the larger boat, the ‘community boat’. Other boats of equivalent size did visit occasionally, but this boat was the dominant one for long distance turtle hunting at Yilpara. The senior men of Mundukul’s lineage, Bakulangay and Gumbaniya, were too old to hunt, and whilst a few of their elder sons were old enough and skilled enough to hunt turtle, Djambawa was still reluctant to allow them to use the boat without him being present. On one occasion he allowed a group of younger men to take the boat out, but they did not use sufficient oil and badly damaged the motor, a common problem in a community where poor numeracy makes accurate calculation of appropriate oil proportions difficult. The motor required expensive repairs and the money could not be found for many weeks. When it was finally repaired, Djambawa exercised even tighter control over the boat from this point on.

The lineage pattern within this data was even more pronounced 2002, when the illness and death of Bakulangay Marawili, of his brother Garindjirra, and of Gumbaniya Marawili’s wife dominated the lives of Mundukul’s lineage, and to a lesser extent the lives of the community generally. Members of the families of these men went hunting

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75 The ‘community boat’ came from a government source rather than the people themselves. Djambawa negotiated the supply of a boat and motor from customs, immigration, and/or fisheries officials when he and the community were asked report on the presence of unusual boats in the bay.
Map 5L: Mixed Gender Groups
June-December 2002

Fig. 5D: Cathy Wirrpanda driving the boat off Woodah Island
Map 5M: Mixed Lineage Groups

Fig. 5E: On the Boat (from left to right): Wurrandan, Mulawalnga, and Bambarrar from Mundukul’s Lineage. Rear: Dhangayal, from Wakuthi’s lineage.
Map 5N: Wakuthi’s Lineage Hunting Groups

Fig. 5F: Members of Wakuthi’s Lineage with the results of a boat fishing trip to Ngandharrkpuy
Map 5O: Mundukul's Lineage Hunting Groups

Fig. 5G: Parrotfish at Yarrinya

Fig. 5H: Stingrays and catfish at Yathikpa
far less in 2002, and indeed I only went hunting on one occasion with members of Mundukul’s lineage alone in that 6-month period. Although hunting is a critical part of everyday life at Yilpara, it can cease to be so when other events like funerals impinge, and such ceremonies can last for more than two weeks. During ceremonies, hunting is often restricted to certain areas and to certain people, and one characteristic of Yolngu funeral rites is that people closely related to the deceased person will avoid hunting activities for a period after the death and, if that person is known to be dying, the period before death. However even for people who are unrestricted, the time taken to complete the necessary rituals limits the amount of time available for other activities. Funerals taking place elsewhere can also have an impact, and there were periods of a few days when the homeland was almost empty because an important funeral was nearing completion. It is not just ceremonies that can have this effect, for individuals, families, and groups of families can be away from the homeland for significant periods of time for other reasons; a sick family member, a job in town, visiting relatives elsewhere, the distractions of shopping and alcohol in Nhulunbuy, and so on. However Yilpara is a large and active hunting community, and so over the course of a whole year these smaller scale impacts do not show up strongly, unlike the important deaths that occurred within the families of Mundukul’s lineage.

The lineage pattern is one missing element behind the variation in gender patterns identified earlier. The presence of women on the outer islands changed between 2001 and 2002 because what became important was the lineage distinction rather than the gender distinction. More specifically, Djambawa began to use the boat more for his immediate family, and the presence of women on the outer islands is the presence of his youngest wife Cathy. This was partly a reflection of his tightening control over the use of the boat, partly of his desire to spend some time with his family away from the pressures of the homeland, and partly a reflection of the cooler relations between the two lineages, largely due to the stresses associated with the deaths and funerals occurring in Mundukul’s lineage. In 2001 the boat was known as ‘the community boat’, but in 2002, Djambawa told me that he had named the boat Dakanjali, the same name he gave to his car. The patterns in the data reflect not only lineage and gender dynamics, but indirectly reflect changes in community relations and access to important technology. However patterns of boat access can change substantially with time. During a brief return visit to Yilpara in 2005, three boats with working engines were present in the community, none of which were owned by Djambawa, and the most heavily used belonged to a member of Mundukul’s lineage. The geographic range of hunting and travel that would emerge from this period is likely to be similar, but the patterns of lineage and gender within that range are likely to be quite different.

**Child Hunters: Agency and Personality**

Earlier, I noted how children were not normally involved in deciding where to hunt. However they can still exercise agency about their own involvement in a hunting trip, and one final pattern in the points returns the analysis to the individual level, but to individuals who are much closer to the beginning of their lives than senior hunters like Djambawa and Julia. The bush, beaches and reefs are the children’s favourite playgrounds, and they can be enthusiastic and sometimes skilful hunters. By journeying and hunting with their relatives, they get the chance to practise their skills and can acquire all kinds of knowledge about the wider country that is their home. Djambawa

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This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
and Cathy’s two youngest children are his daughter Guypungura and his son Ningiyama, and they are relatively close in age. Their father’s pre-eminence as a hunter and leader gives them opportunities that other children their age do not have, and it also means that comparing the hunting activities of the two is a robust comparison, because both are choosing from a similar set of opportunities. Gender was an important determinant of hunting patterns amongst adults, both on a group and on an individual level, but are these patterns always replicated amongst the children? Map 5P shows the points where Djambawa’s son Ningiyama went hunting with me during 2000-2002- on shooting trips to the wetlands, on stingray hunts along the coast north and south of Yilpara, and on journeys to Woodah island for oysters. From the gender patterns amongst the adults, it would be expected that Ningiyama’s sister Guypungura would have had a more restricted hunting range in the same period, particularly on the water. Map 5Q shows where she was present on hunting trips, and the pattern is exactly the opposite. Guypungura was present on the wider country far more often, travelling all over the peninsula, across to the opposite side of Grindall Bay, and far to the south amongst the outer islands. She saw more of the country than any other Yilpara child, actively taking as much advantage as possible of the opportunities presented to her.

At times she created opportunities through her own actions. On one particular occasion, Djambawa planned to take some of the young men, older boys, and myself to a very important Ancestral site called Garrangali, in order to show it to us and explain its significance. The site is inaccessible except during the late dry season, and Djambawa himself had only been to it once before, as part of a school education trip a decade ago. Guypungura was not invited on the trip, but on learning that a trip was planned, immediately began nagging her father to go, then climbed into the vehicle and refused to get out. Djambawa relented after some mild protests, and so Guypungura was both the youngest person and the only female to make the trip. The map of her movements, when seen in the light of the previous patterns, expresses not just a record of her presence on the country, but also a fundamental aspect of her personality, a marker of who she is and the choices she made. Guypungura is an outgoing person who, because of her status as the child of a powerful man, was able to, at least partially, subvert strong gender patterns evident in the movements of her older relatives. Not only was she out more than her brother during the period of fieldwork, she saw more of the wider northern Blue Mud Bay region than anyone else of her age group, male or female. She was accompanying a man who was actively hunting in diverse ways and who is the most knowledgeable person of his generation, and although they will not be drawn out in detail here, the implications for the transfer of particular kinds of knowledge are clear. Not surprisingly, at the end of 2002, Guypungura was the most knowledgeable person of her age group about the wider region. This pattern of travel has faded as she has aged, but its legacy remains in her wider awareness of the processes of hunting and travelling, and of the names and places that make up northern Blue Mud Bay.

Hunting Routes

The points and patterns above record moments when I had the time, the space, and the opportunity to note the ‘where’ of what was taking place. The precision of modern technology means that the point is always accurate in space, but it represents different things; sometimes the place where the fishers stood all day with their lines in the water, and sometimes a minute required to drop off the yam diggers. The points represent

77 This site is a crocodile breeding area, and will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Fig. 5I: Ningiyama and Djambawa with brolgas shot on the wetlands
Map 5Q: Guypungura Marawili

Fig. 5J: Guypungura on the boat at Woodah Island
Map 5R: Routes of Yilpara Hunters on Dholupuynngu Country
2000-2002
people in places, but they do not discriminate between those moving through the
country and those who are stationary upon it.

Were route maps of all of the journeys to be constructed, they would replicate the social
patterns in the points shown above, and as such only one route map will be depicted
here. The extensive use of the coast, beach, and subtidal reefs is evident from the
previous maps, and this pattern is created by people moving along the beach and tracks
on land, using them over and over again. The route map of a year or more of hunting
journeys on land is, therefore, the same as a map of the tracks themselves, for every
single track was traversed at one time or another, and most were traversed many times.
The sea provides greater freedom to choose one own path, yet some places and routes
are more important than others. The final map in this chapter (Map 5R) shows the
routes Yilpara people\textsuperscript{78} used in their journeys across Dho\l\upuyngu country, journeys on
foot and driving in cars and boats. It is a pattern of coastal movement, of people flows.

Two places from which these journeys originate are worth noting here, because their
significance will recur in later chapters. Most journeys originated from Yilpara itself,
although people sometimes camped overnight on the beaches along Grindall Bay during
the dry season, and the importance of the homeland is already clear. The other important
place are the adjacent areas of Yathikpa/Dho\l\uwuy, the site of the crabbers’ camp and
the place from which so many turtle hunts, including the hunt in the previous narrative,
were launched. Representing each of the hunts that originated or returned to that place
would turn the area into a mass of lines, and the reefs and seagrass beds offshore of
Yathikpa were usually the first place to search on any turtle hunt. Like Yilpara itself, the
places and country of Yathikpa will emerge as important in other spheres of life in the
chapters to come.

The routes of the final map are journeys to and through places, connecting them to
people and creating a wider, regional sense of country. The patterns in the maps show
the range of hunting movement in northern Blue Mud Bay, and it is a range that makes
pragmatic sense, for all are places that can be reached comfortably in time to return
within a day. However it is also a marker of other aspects of social life, for the country
that is being traversed also forms the major part of the country of the Dho\l\upuyngu, the
intermarrying set of clans in northern Blue Mud Bay. Hunters are making pragmatic
decisions about how far they can go, but that movement is also framed within social
boundaries, albeit boundaries that are fuzzy and porous.

The resource flows of the previous chapter pointed to the wider movements of people,
movements which provided a complement and a frame within which contemporary
hunting movements could be set. The coming chapter provides some further context to
contemporary movement and contemporary hunting, in which older Dho\l\upuyngu recall
memories of coastal journeys in the past, during a time when distinctions between
hunting movement and travel were somewhat harder to make. The maps above
contained broader patterns in social life, but also the particularities of individual
experiences and personalities. The same emphases will be retained in the patterns of
memory that are the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{78} There are others out on the same country, albeit less frequently, and these hunters are also members of
the Dho\l\upuyngu, but come from Djarra\r\ki, Barara\i\pi, Gangan, Dhurupi\ti\pi, Rurrangalla, Wandawuy
and Bälma. They make their own routes across the country, routes that would overlap in different ways
with those of Yilpara hunters.
Chapter 6

Time Flows: Memories and Journeys, Water and Places

Dholupuyngu roots to place run deep. The public ideology is of ownership and residence since time immemorial, the impacts of invasion arrived later than almost anywhere else in Australia, and the memories of kin and marriage go back many, many years before first contact with English colonisers. In what follows, the question asked of these roots is how does everyday life in the past relate to the conceptions of coastal country and human movement already described? This question is explored in conversations about where and how people lived and travelled, conversations about memories and journeys, water and places. Five older Blue Mud Bay people gave their time and their thoughts, recalling and revisiting times in their early lives when they camped, hunted and journeyed on coastal country. As we talked about the past they revealed, often only in passing, patterns of movement, of water, and of relationships to country. Such memories contrast with and complement the contemporary flows of people, water, and resources of previous chapters, and at the same time the memories themselves flow within the structure of this chapter, as the initial focus on sea journeys and life on the islands moves to an endpoint at freshwater places inland. Taken together, the conversations provide further insights into why water is integral to the constitution of Dholupuyngu country, why that country is so important to people, and how specific, individual experiences relate to broader patterns in everyday life.

Between the late 1930s and the early 1970s, the missions at Yirrkala, Groote Island, and Numbulwar had an increasing impact on the lives and the residence patterns of people from Blue Mud Bay. This impact only began to diminish again in the 1970s with the establishment of the homelands, and as the Dholupuyngu were spread between these three missions, there were times in the 1950s and 1960s when the bay was relatively uninhabited. This spread is exemplified in the people whose words appear here, for Gawirrin Gumana spent much time at Yirrkala, Gumbaniya Marawili lived some of his childhood at the mission on Groote Island, Mayawuluk Wirrpanda raised her children at the mission at Numbulwar, Dhukal and Manman Wirrpanda also went to school there. However their conversations below show how Blue Mud Bay remained important in people’s lives, both as a waystation on journeys between the missions, but also as a place where people did live for extended periods during the mission era. A way of life oriented towards the coast and sea was common to a significant number of people and, although it was altered by colonial contact, it continued through it in modified forms. In the last 30 years, the Dholupuyngu have lived permanently at homelands within the bay, giving people the ability to create, recreate and reinforce their connections with their country on a daily basis. The seasonal movements and longer boat journeys of the following conversations have diminished in importance in contemporary life, but their legacy, a particular understanding of country and place, remains strong.

In the past, the distinction between saltwater and freshwater, but also the totality of their interconnectedness, was an important element of everyday life and movement on different, mutually related timescales. Canoes were a major means of regional travel although the journeys were largely inshore coastal ones rather than long oceanic voyages. People travelled to and from Yirrkala along the coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria, stopping along the way at freshwater sources close to the beach, and in
some cases travelling in parallel with walkers moving on land. People also travelled between the Bay and Groote Island, breaking up the journey by going across the short distances from island to island and camping where there was freshwater on Woodah Island and Gunyuru. Woodah Island was an important focus for coastal life and travel, for people would live on it for extended periods, looking back across the water to the mainland and encountering others on journeys of their own. As well as being important in coastal journeys, water shaped movement and residence on an annual cycle, for seasonal shifts and changes in the country affected where people chose to live and hunt. Finally, water has shaped patterns in contemporary life, because freshwater supplies and access to the coast were a major consideration in the location of some homeland communities. These homeland locations have in turn affected transport, logistics, local population, the strength of connections between groups in different homelands, and the kinds of knowledge and experience gained by the young people who grow up in those communities. More broadly, the homeland locations have altered place within the bay by creating new foci for movement and residence, increasing the importance of some places to everyday life and decreasing the importance of others.

Along with the themes of the chapter title, there is another element that emerges from the conversations below. I previously noted the implications of Guypungura’s childhood travel for her wider knowledge of the country, and this theme continues here, as people for whom childhood passed 60 or more years ago recall stories of that time, of being around others, of watching, learning, and trying for themselves. These memories of knowledge and skills learned many years ago point to a more fundamental relationship between skill and memory, a relationship that links this chapter with previous ones. I previously noted implications of physical skills for a sense of belonging, that skills reflect interactions with places over time. Here the link can be made more explicitly, for, in one way, to exercise a skill is to physically express a memory, it is to recall in a single moment a complex history of interactions with places, with people who shared their knowledge, with tools, and with other forms of life. In simple terms, this is a chapter about ‘human movement in the past’, where previous ones were about ‘human movement in the present’. Yet the hunting skills that were fundamental to previous chapters were physical expressions of memory, and equally, the memories of this chapter point to the foundations of hunting skills. The excerpts here were chosen predominantly because they reveal relationships between people, movement, and water, but as they do so, they also comment on the connections between the memories of the past and the skills of the present.

Mayawuluk, Gawirrin, Gumbaniya, Dhukal and Manman developed their own paths and orientations in their conversations about life in Blue Mud Bay and beyond. Each of these transcripts could be the subject of a chapter in itself, for they run to many thousands of words and cover far more aspects of life than can possibly be examined here. Some of their individual orientations emerge in the passages below, suggesting the variations that are so important to retain within the broader patterns of a textual account. The five people come from three different clans and three different homelands, and all

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79 For a number of reasons, the relationship between memory and history will not be examined here. This is an area for which there are very few historical records of any kind, particularly not at the level of specific individuals. Also the memories recalled here were not of events that were locally controversial, and so are taken as representations of the past that are sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this chapter, i.e. to enable patterns and commonalities about movement, water and residence in the past to be drawn out. Although his predominant interest is the 1930s, Egan does corroborate the general point made here, that there was a significant level of canoe travel and Yolngu presence upon the islands and coastline of Blue Mud Bay (Egan 1996).
Fig. 6A: Mayawuluk Wirrpanda fishing at her country at Mangatjipa

Fig. 6B: Gawirrin Gumana

Fig. 6C: Gumbaniya Marawili
Map 6A: Locations Referred to in Chapter 6
bar two have already been introduced in some way, and the two who have not are Manman and Dhukal Wirrpanda. They are brothers and joint leaders of the Dhudji Djapu clan homeland at Dhurupitjpi and are closely connected to Yilpara people. These two men are in their fifties, younger than the other three, but they spent their early childhood on Woodah Island and are old enough to have lived a considerable part of their lives before the establishment of the homeland movement in the early 1970s. Of the others, Mayawuluk was the senior female representative of the Dhudji Djapu clan until her death in 2003, when she was aged in her late sixties. Gawirrin, the Dhalwangu leader at Gangar, is now in his seventies, and he is a few years older than Gumbaniya, the only Madarrpa clan representative here. Although the full transcripts also covered their recent lives, the focus is on their memories of the period up to and including the establishment of the homelands, and in Gawirrin’s case this period begins as far back as the late 1930s.

“Sometimes by Canoe”: Journeys on Land and Sea

In this first conversation, Gawirrin relates a story of a boyhood canoe journey with his half-brother Wakuthi and his father Birrikiti. The scale of the movement (200 kilometres down the Arnhem Land coast from Yirrkala to Gayawaratja in Blue Mud Bay) is striking; the mode of transport (a suspect, undersized, softwood dugout canoe made by a couple of teenagers eager to prove themselves) is even more so. As the boys paddle, others walk alongshore, meeting up with them at named places along the route.

Marcus: So coming back from Yirrkala to Blue Mud Bay, was that by canoe or walking?
Gawirrin: We always coming by...sometimes by canoe myself and Wakuthi, and sometimes walk, all the women and the young people.

Marcus: So that trip you told me about, when you were a kid and you killed your first kangaroo, how did you get to Caledon Bay, were you paddling or walking?
Gawirrin: Walking. We walking (first) and ah, we make a canoe at Birany Birany. Me and Wakuthi, we make it ourselves. A dugout one. From a tree like that one there lying down, a softwood one. So we can walk eh? I mean, hunting around. After that, our father was feel sorry for us, because the little canoe, you know, too much time, so many time we hunting for our turtle or fish or stingray and all those and sometime he’s (hand gesture).
Marcus: Fall over? Because it was too small?
Gawirrin: Yo, small one!
Marcus: You used to fall in the water all the time?
Gawirrin: Yo! (Laughing). Sometimes we sailing up, you know, (and) it was a bit hard for me and Wakuthi!
Marcus: So the wind would blow and the boat would fall over?
Gawirrin: (Laughing) Yo! Sometimes! And sometimes we paddling near the shore, so we can, you know (hand gesture).
Marcus: So if you fall over it’s still alright?
Gawirrin: Yo, so we can swimming (in to shore). And then my father was feel sorry for us. Our father.86
Marcus: because you kept falling in the water?
Gawirrin: Yo. And even himself too he was… (Laughing).
Marcus: In that canoe as well?
Gawirrin: Yo! (Laughing). And he said, he’s thinking, “Oh, I’ve got to make a canoe for you two!” A real one, big one. And he was at, um what you call, what’s that place…It’s Dhurupitjpi but…
Marcus: Oh yeah, I know, I went there with Dhukal the other day. I forget the name now…
Gawirrin: Yo. What’s that place…Dhurupitjpi ga…that was second time I saw him cutting canoe eh?
Marcus: It’s in my notebook we had it the other day…Gayawaratja.
Gawirrin: Yo! Gayawaratja, you right. That was when I was a teenager.
Marcus: I see, so you cut your little one with Wakuthi at Birany Birany, but that was too small so you kept walking, you didn’t paddle back in that one.
Gawirrin: No, we been paddling. From Birany Birany to Gayawaratja.
Marcus: (Surprised). You came back with the canoe [across the open coast], your little one?
Gawirrin: Yo!
Marcus: You, Wakuthi, and anyone else?
Gawirrin: Ah…Our father and mother and all the family. But not with the canoe, they’ve been walking. Me and Wakuthi was paddling. And we are naming, ‘we are going to meet up, up there, at such a place’, something like that.
Marcus: So, then you got to the second canoe place (Gayawaratja) and that’s where Birrikiti said he would make a really good one?
Gawirrin: Yo, really good one!

Gawirrin’s story shows how people felt at ease about traversing coastal seas, for although saltwater must be treated with respect, it is not unfamiliar or hostile territory. The boys were paddling across the exposed coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria and also across coastal bays where sharks, crocodiles, and deadly jellyfish are all found. Whilst they mostly stayed close to shore, reaching Gayawaratja required traversing many kilometres of open water within the Bay itself, again in this small, deficient canoe.

Dholupuyngu living in the Bay today are relaxed about boat travel, for to move between the islands and peninsulas is not to undertake a great journey; it is to step into the boat and keep walking. Nevertheless, Ancestral stories exist of canoes capsizing and of those on board drowning, so there are risks and dangers for the ignorant or unwary, something

85 ‘Yo’ is the Yolngu word for yes. It appears very regularly in the transcripts that follow, and will be left untranslated.
86 Wakuthi’s father died when he was a baby. His mother remarried Gawirrin’s father Birrikiti, and they then had Gawirrin. This is why Gawirrin sometimes refers to ‘my father’ and ‘our father’ when speaking of them both.
that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. Knowing how to travel is an important skill, a marker of manhood, something that the teenaged Gawirrin and Wakuthi were aware of. Yet even in their imperfect first attempt at testing out new skills, there is a sense of confidence, security, and belonging. The teenagers capsizing their way down the Arnhem Land coastline with the full knowledge and consent of their parents gives some indication of this confidence.

A second important element in Gawirrin’s anecdote is the different modes of travel, for the boys paddled as their families walked along the shoreline or cut across peninsulas. The travellers agreed to meet up at places along the route, reminding those who had travelled this way before where to stop, and teaching those who had not about the good places to camp. The walkers are predominantly women, those on the boat are men, and this gendered aspect to coastal movement resonates strongly with patterns of contemporary hunting activity. It is a pattern evident elsewhere as well, as Mayawuluk recalls a journey with her then baby son Nuwandjali in the 1950s:

*Marcus: So you took Nuwandjali to the Garrapara mission?*87
Mayawuluk: Yo. I take him right in, carrying him. And all the dogs barking (laughs) and (I’m) carrying that bag. Not that bag but different one we carrying (hand gesture indicating Yolngu wrap for carrying a baby in)
*Marcus: Paperbark?*
*Marcus: Did you paddle the canoe (to get there)?*
Mayawuluk: Yo, they (the men) paddling and we can walk up.
*Marcus: So you walked to Garrapara?*
Mayawuluk: Yo, Garrapara, Baraltja. That crossing. Crossing to Djultjawuy, and then Djultjawuy to Garrapara.
*Marcus: Oh so you walked to Baraltja and then they met you, then you paddled across with them, then you walked again to Garrapara?*
Mayawuluk: Yo, yo.
*Marcus: But they kept paddling around (the peninsula)?*
Mayawuluk: Yo, waku [son]! Hard job! Some dog been run away half way (laughing)! Get lost. Little puppy you know? Yo! I having three puppies, and one been lost, and then (I) having two (laughing).

The patterns of gendered movement are similar in both stories. The women are predominantly moving on land, the men on the water, and the beach is a meeting point for the next phase of the journey. This movement is profoundly coastal, resonating with the environmental descriptions found earlier in this work as human travellers move down the coast in arcs, coming together on the beach and joining up for short canoe trips to help the walkers to cross water obstacles such as coastal bays and river mouths. It is not just that people cross land and sea on a journey, but that the journey is simultaneously made on both. The canoe paddlers may arrive on the beach sooner than the walkers and hunt and fish for the evening meal, or the walkers might cut across a peninsula in time to gather food for hungry paddlers who had to paddle around. The interrelationship of men, women, land and sea are a fundamental part of these coastal journeys.

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87 Wakuthi Marawili and others tried to establish a mission at Garrapara (Mt Grindall) on the western side of Grindall Bay in the 1950s. It did not succeed, for reasons that included local clan politics and related tensions about whether a Blue Mud Bay mission should receive support from the Anglican Church mission on Groote Island or the Methodist Church mission at Yirrkala.
Traversing the open water between the islands of Blue Mud Bay or going further south to Groote Island made this kind of combined coastal movement impossible. Everyone had to be taken across the water, and so the journey became a series of canoe journeys, bringing people across from island to island, before beginning the next stage of ‘island hopping’.

Sometimes people, particularly women and children, were deliberately left behind, and after cutting another canoe at Gayawaratja as an adult, Gawirrin recalled that the men left the women on Woodah Island before heading across to the mission at Groote. Women’s more restricted access to boats is still evident today, yet in the past they were not necessarily passive passengers on canoe journeys nor wholly inexperienced in the saltwater domain. Context, opportunity, and individual personalities played a role, and Mayawuluk remembers both her inexperience and her saltwater skills in one of her many memories of life on Woodah Island:

Marcus: So when you were, before the Yilpara time, in the bush time, did you paddle the canoe by yourself sometimes?
Mayawuluk: Only one day (laughing).
Marcus: What happened?
Mayawuluk: I saw that nawi [um]…something been come out (of the water). Yo, waku [son]! (laughing) I don't know what…(whispers) big and black. It just come out and (made a) big splash.
Marcus: What did it look like?
Mayawuluk: It look like stingray…submarine, submarine you know that? Yo, that one! I call out to my husband Wakuthi to see (laughing). We having holiday there (at Woodah Island). And rough sea (came).
Marcus: And you saw this big black thing?
Mayawuluk: Yo, black thing! And I go back again (laughing)!
Marcus: You turned around?
Mayawuluk: I turn around and stop there. I got my little boy, marrama [two].
Marcus: In the boat?
Mayawuluk: Yo! That's why I'm frightened, you know?
Marcus: So when you travelling with Wakuthi, just family, did you paddle?
Mayawuluk: Yo. We helping. Yo, helping my husband. I know to paddle.
Marcus: What about if he was hunting, turtle hunting, did you paddle?
Mayawuluk: Bayngu, bayngu [No, no].
Marcus: Just travelling?
Mayawuluk: Just travelling around, that's all. We change that sail and sailing back, we turn him around like that (hand gesture of changing sail). Yo, move like that, to that side. He's teaching me, my husband. Me and Julia. Yo. For that boat she know everything, that Julia.
Marcus: She doesn't get time much to go in the boat now does she?
Mayawuluk: Yo she's stop, because no boat been there.
Marcus: And she's looking after Wakuthi?
Mayawuluk: Yo, she's looking after her husband. The old man. Because he can't leave, you know? That old man. He all the time staying home. That's where she stops too, looking after him.

Bakulangay Marawili recalled the complex logistics required when a significant part of his father Mundukul’s huge family was assembled together and on the move through Blue Mud Bay. People were camped in different places, hunting where they were and waiting for the canoes to arrive or return to take them to the next stage.
Marcus: So you learned to paddle for travelling, but not for hunting, and you learned to sail a little bit?
Mayawuluk: Yo.
Marcus: Did you ever travel on the boat with just the women?
Marcus: But not you?
Mayawuluk: Not me.

Mayawuluk and Julia’s boating experience and knowledge of saltwater country comes from their life with Wakuthi, where they travelled often as just an immediate family, without many other men to assist with the canoe. Mayawuluk not only talks of their skills, but also of a significant shift in the opportunities available to them. Julia ‘knows everything’ about being in the canoe, yet despite being the pre-eminent hunter at Yilpara in the present day, she only went on the boat twice in the 18 months, both times paddling a hundred metres or so from shore close to Yilpara for reef fishing. The change in activity from her early life is striking, and can be attributed to a number of changes in wider Yolngu life. Boat trips are now more about turtle hunting than travel, and mechanization means sailing skills are no longer needed. Living in larger communities also means there are more men around to adopt the active boating roles usually assigned to them, although, as was demonstrated by Cathy’s presence on the water in the previous chapter, there are occasionally still exceptions.

“Big Water There”: Knowing Island Country

As Julia’s boat knowledge shows, the legacy of travel early in a woman’s life remains long after roles change. In terms of knowing the country itself, that legacy is both a wider, regional sense of the Bay, and also a greater sense of specificity. Despite the contemporary patterns of women on the water, for Mayawuluk Woodah Island is not just a place visible across the water. Rather it is a whole series of places, their details clear and ingrained with her memories. She has not been there in a long time, but retains a detailed knowledge of its specificities. Her recollections of it here show this, as well as adding a further element to the relationship between movement and water.

Marcus: So when you travelling, going to Groote Island, in the canoe, where did you camp?
Mayawuluk: Gunyuru. Wänga [place]. Camping place. That billabong. And its (the water is) staying there, (at) Gunyuru, on top (of the hill). Clean water there waku [son]!
Marcus: So you camped on that one?
Mayawuluk: Yo camping! (Then) from Gunyuru, (to) Laytjirra camping, that side crossing.
Marcus: Crossing to Woodah Island. And next night?
Marcus: So following, travelling Ningari ga nha [then what]?

\(^{89}\) Ngalapalmi literally means ‘the old ones’, referring to long deceased people and/or Ancestral human figures. Mayawuluk may have remembered the Ancestral story of the Djan’kawu sisters, who paddled their canoe through the region (Berndt 1952), hence her correction. The initial denial was emphatic, the ‘maybe’ following the pause equally so. In some versions the Djan’kawu travelled with a brother, in others, the sisters were alone.

*Marcus: Ga next one, keep going when you traveling...*

Mayawuluk: Keep going (down) that side nothing no water, no water, only at Mangalamulumatji. You know that one (in) Darwin, my father, (who) killed that policeman? Yo there.

*Marcus: So where Dhäkiyarr killed that policeman?*

Mayawuluk: Yo. And that side, to corner (on the little bay), another one.

Wananingura. His (its) name Wananingura. Yo, water place there, to corner. Yo, soft sand. Water there, big water.

*Marcus: And when you finished from Woodah, when you going towards Groote...*

Mayawuluk: Riding, we cross from there right to that place Bickerton Island. Yo.

*Marcus: So one day travel, from Wangurrarrikpa to Bickerton?*

Mayawuluk: Mmm. Bickerton just one night. We don't know (the location of) that water. Only we see that wänga (place, camp) for everybody. They know, old people, that water. Yo, we camping there.

*Marcus: So when you go to Bickerton you stay with the Bickerton mob?*

Mayawuluk: Yo. Bickerton. Only (during the) bush time you know? We passing from there, and we camping to nawi...Alyangula. That town. Yo there. That's finished now.

Mayawuluk’s knowledge of the route through Blue Mud Bay is detailed, and the centrality of water in guiding the pattern of movement is clearly evident. This is travel on saltwater to freshwater, as the canoes and walkers move down the coast, the availability of freshwater influencing the camping spot. Later, when asked about another island in the bay, Gamarraliya, Mayawuluk said that there was no water there, and that no one camped there, although they might visit it to hunt turtles or collect turtle eggs. Naturally, an orientation to move to and camp near water is hardly unique to Yolngu travel, for water is critical in human life, but it has particular resonance in an island setting, and in the light of the wider consideration of water in coastal life being explored here. The notion of fresh and saltwater as orienting features of coastal journeys must be built in to the gendered land/sea movement described by Gawirrin earlier. The arcs down the coast do not just meet on the beach, they meet where there is freshwater, where salt and fresh are close together.

“A Big Wind Came”: Travel and Weather

Further, water not only shaped the stages on a journey, but understood more broadly as part of a system of clouds, rain, wind, and weather, it shaped the timing and sometimes the route of those journeys. In the following extract, Gumbaniya Marawili remembers a coastal journey of his youth, when he went to find Wakuthi so that they could undertake the last burial rites for his father Mundukul. Noticeable is the way that wind

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90 This is a reference to a colonial encounter in the 1930s that became famous on both sides. It was documented by Egan (Egan 1996).
91 Bickerton Island was quite often uninhabited after the establishment of the Groote Island mission in the 1920s.
92 Gumbaniya speaks relatively little English, so his words are translated here.
93 Yolngu burial rites involve a number of stages. In the first stage, the body is placed on a platform away from the dogs and the flesh is allowed to rot. In the second stage, which is what this passage refers to, the bones are cleaned of remaining flesh and later placed in a painted hollow log.
and weather influenced the route he took, how far he could travel, and where he stopped:

Marcus: *What did you say to Wakuthi when you saw him?*
Gumbaniya: "Lets go! Come on! Let's go to that place." I said that to him. “Old man Birrikitji is staying and camping at Gayawaratja. We want to prepare a dhanparr.” Do you know what a dhanparr is? Hollow log.
Nuwandjali: Log. Log coffin for Mundukul.
Gumbaniya: Yo. A hollow log for Mundukul. A big one. I told them "I've got one for him. Lets go there." So we went, paddled from Numbulwar to Randjukum, Windangi, ...that Murrungun (clan) place...
Nuwandjali: Windangi?
Gumbaniya: Yo, Windangi. A big wind came up, so we stopped and slept there. I harpooned a green turtle.
Mäkala (his daughter): How many?
Gumbaniya: One. We ate it, and slept there another night. The next day, we paddled to Bakarrangura. It’s a place on (the western side of ) Woodah Island. A bay.
Nuwandjali: Bakarrangura. They went to bury...
Gumbaniya: Yo. We slept there, slept there, and then the next day came another wind (motions wind blowing from the northeast). So we paddled to Gunyuru. From Gunyuru we went, over there (points towards Grindall Bay).
Nuwandjali: Dhupunbuy?
Gumbaniya: Dhupunbuy (place on the western side of Grindall Bay). Yo. We sat there and then went to that place with the lily roots....Bumatjpi. Do you know that place Bumatjpi?
Marcus: *Bumatjpi yo.*

Gumbaniya’s journey was a characteristic one. He travelled to find Wakuthi and inform him about a funeral rite, and ceremonies were a major reason for travel in the past as they are still today. His journey involved coast and island hopping through Blue Mud Bay, the staging points determined by wind, weather, and where freshwater could be found. Strong winds halted the journey or altered its course, but are not to be greatly feared, as he waits for them to subside or paddles in the lee of islands such as Gunyuru. Gumbaniya’s knowledge of the best route to take given the conditions are a part of the story, and when he stops he tests his skills as a young hunter and remembers that he was successful. Freshwater, saltwater and wind, are the orienting elements of a journey made to contact Wakuthi and bring him back for an important reason.

“*We Can Always Cry For Something*”: Journeys with Kids

The conversations so far show that these canoe journeys were a regular part of life, and the frequency with which people were on the sea looking back at the land is important to how they constitute coastal country. Dhukal and Manman spent the early part of their lives on Woodah Island at some of the campsites Mayawuluk listed above, and their memories reflect both the level of activity out on the water, and some of the reasons for those journeys. They also show how the brothers were in a position to watch and learn, how they began to develop their understanding of their country and of how their lives connected to it.

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94 Gumbaniya remembered his hunting prowess with pride at a number of points in our conversations.
Marcus: So when you were on Woodah Island, like when you were little kids. Can you remember any of the hunting, like whether you were catching fish or anything?

Dhukal: I remember, I remember we was in the canoe…

Manman: Canoe.

Dhukal: Yo. Paddling.

Manman: paddling.

Dhukal: and our brother speared a big stingray, and we made a song out of it! "Billi ngaraku mamuji [That’s my fat!]". That's what the song was for us when we were children (laughing)!

Marcus: Mamuji is the word for the stingray or…?

Dhukal: Stingray nawi95...djukurr [liver, fat].

Manman: Djukurr.

Dhukal: Djukurr for that stingray, yo.

Marcus: So you can remember going in the canoe...

Manman: We can remember, me and this man, and my brother Peter, Gurrul, we used to go with ah, Gumbaniya, and his brother eh?

Marcus: So Gumbaniya stopped there too sometimes?

Dhukal: Yo. Not sometimes! All the time!

Manman: All the time. We grew up on his nawi…(hand gesture).

Dhukal: Shoulders.

Manman: We can always cry for something and the dugout canoe would go away. And he (Dhukal) always cries for nawi...

Dhukal: Pandanus nawi… (hand gesture). That end part (soft edible part of pandanus tree). I could cry to those two old men, Gumbaniya and his brother…

Manman: Yo. “Can you turn around that nawi…(canoe)?”

Dhukal: Really cry bilinya [like that] (hand gesture).

Marcus: A real screaming cry?

Dhukal: Yo. They had to turn that boat, nawi dugout canoe, and go ashore and go running up to the pandanus!

Marcus: So when they were going along the coast you would see one and go "Waah! I want that one!"

Dhukal: (laughing) Yo, yo! And we used to follow them for fishing, and everytime they threw that line for the fish, and we start eating that nawi...

Marcus: the pandanus? Yaka [no], the fish?

Dhukal: The nawi...sand crabs.

Marcus: Oh! You started eating the (bait)...

Dhukal and Manman: (Laughing) Gatjini [sand crabs] yo! Manman: Gatjini Yo. Even the...Dhukal, he always cry for gatjini. The bait of that nawi...

Marcus: I never heard of anyone eating those before!

Manman: But I’ve seen him!

Dhukal: (Laughing) we used to eat that and those two men used to growl at us you know?

Marcus: Yeah I’ll bet, because they ran out of bait all the time...

Dhukal: Yo, all the time!

….

95 ‘Nawi’ is the equivalent of ‘um’ in English. Dhukal and Manman use it often, so the translation will not be written every time.
The two men have just finished listing some of the people they lived with as children on Woodah Island.

*Marcus:* There were a lot of people! Were they all staying there or passing through and going back?

*Manman:* All staying there.

*Dhukal:* Staying there moving to nawi...(hand gesture).

*Marcus:* Back and forth?

*Manman:* Yo. Back and forth.

*Dhukal:* Yo back and forth. They had different, nawi, separate canoe.

*Marcus:* Separate canoes. So it was like a big camp and people who were travelling would come...

*Dhukal:* Yo, stop there and sit there. Yo, One day I saw them making craft. Wawa [brother)] at Gurka'wuy. Passed away (now). Making handcraft. Selling to Mister Gray.96

*Manman:* Fred Gray was our first nawi, teacher, kindergarten teacher. And he has this boat down there called 'Wanderer'.

*Marcus:* Wanderer. And he used to stop on Woodah Island, and see you there?

*Dhukal:* Yo and we grew up...

*Manman:* He used to nawi...trade with us. On his boat.

*Dhukal:* Yo, we used to jump on that boat, travel with that boat.

*Manman:* Yo! Every river, we went into there!

*Dhukal:* We went with that boat.

....

*Dhukal:* And when the old people run out for narrali [tobacco]...

*Manman:* Narrali run out, that's when they went across [to Groote Island].

*Dhukal:* And sell that nawi...(hand gesture)

*Marcus:* Turtle shell?

*Dhukal* and *Manman:* Yo.

Dhukal and Manman’s childhood recollections are of hunting, journeying, trading, and throwing tantrums out on the water. They watched the men fishing, and, in a later unprinted transcript, described being on board for night miyapunu hunting.97 Although they spent their later childhood at the mission at Numbulwar, this early period is still important to them, as their earliest memories connect them to places where they still hunt and gave them their first lessons in skills that they now pass on to others. Such memories also show how coastal life on canoes and islands was not limited to a few people, but in the past could involve extended families and large groups on the move. The importance of missions as destination and departure points has been one facet of the recollections thus far, and the busy nature of life on Woodah during this period (and indeed of the size of the Yolngu population on Woodah), was partly due to the proximity of the Groote Island mission and of related non-indigenous infrastructure such as the boat belonging to Fred Gray. Yet the predominant activity is of Yolngu travel in Yolngu craft, of the bay as a generally busy place, with people living for

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96 Fred Gray was a non-indigenous fisherman and trader who lived and worked in the area for many years, setting up the mission at Umbakumba and developing very good relations with local people. Manman may have been referring to a brief period of kindergarten at the mission on Groote Island, or may have been referring to informal lessons given by Fred Gray when he visited them on Woodah Island.

97 This is a distinctive form of hunting in which the hunters locate the miyapunu using the sound of them coming up for air, and then pursue it using phosphorescence in the water caused by the wake of the fleeing animal as a guide.
Use of the sea is often envisaged in terms of people living on land and venturing to the coast or out in boats to hunt and fish. Blue Mud Bay geography, combined with memories such as those above, shows how it is equally important to envisage people living out on the islands and in canoes, to imagine them oriented from a position out amongst the saltwater, reefs, and river plumes. From there they are surrounded by both water and by land, and they can look across saltwater to the coastline or out to the deep sea where the clouds stand. There are places on the shore in Blue Mud Bay where land is visible across short expanses of saltwater in almost every direction, as the islands line up on the horizon and the coastal bays arc around on either side. Standing at such places, the interrelatedness and integration of land and sea seems logical, and the canoe journeys to cross the spaces short and straightforward. They can still be dangerous, as Gumbaniya’s avoidance of the ‘big winds’ demonstrated, but for those who know how to travel they are not journeys to be greatly feared. Making sense of country and place in this context requires sensitivity to a particular history of coastal residence and travel.

“In the Wet Season, We went to the Beach”: Seasonal Movements

However, coastal journeying on saltwater was not the only way in which water shaped everyday life and the wider country. Water and movement on broader timescales also played a part, as Gumbaniya’s comments below demonstrate:

Marcus: Who taught you spearfishing?
Gumbaniya: Dhukal's father was teaching me.

Marcus: Did you stay for a long time at Wangurrarrikpa (Woodah Island)? Was he teaching you on Wangurrarrikpa?
Gumbaniya: Wangurrarrikpa, Garapara, Yilpara, Djarrakpi, Caledon Bay, and a few more places. He was teaching me about animals.

Marcus: When you were staying at Wangurrarrikpa, where was (your father) Mundukul?
Gumbaniya: He had left, so Dhukal's father was teaching me.

Marcus: He's your what?
Gumbaniya: Ngapipi [MB or classificatory father-in-law]…(Gumbaniya pauses, thinking back)…. Baykutji (an inland river). We stayed there, and then came back (to the coast). In the wet season, we went to the beach. In the dry season, we went inland; Gangan, Baykutji, Dhurupitji, those places.”

Marcus: Lake Evella?98
Gumbaniya: No.

Marcus: Gurrumuru?
Gumbaniya: No.

Marcus: Wayawu?
Gumbaniya: Wayawu. We went there.

Marcus: No further?
Gumbaniya: We didn’t go further. After Mundukul had died, (my brother) Watjin and I went further, to Raymangirr and Gapuwiyak, Lake Evella. They had a small airstrip there.

Marcus: You went by plane?

98 Lake Evella, also known as Gapuwiyak, was a mission village that was established in the late 1960s
Gumbaniya: No! On foot! From Gangan and then further

Marcus: *That's a long way.*

Gumbaniya: A long way! Before, we had no tobacco, no tea, and no sugar. We walked and ate bush food. Nowadays we are always thinking of tobacco!

Gumbaniya was taught spearfishing by Dhukal’s father, rather than his own. Years later, his ngapi’s (MB) sons would, in their own words, grow up on Gumbaniya’s shoulders, sitting in canoes that he paddled and throwing tantrums about pandanus trees on the shore. Life experience, skills, and knowledge, are shared across time and across generations in complex ways. In reflecting on where and from whom he learned spearfishing, Gumbaniya also mentions in passing the fundamental seasonal relationship between people and water in Blue Mud Bay; when the rains fall, people move with the water flows to the beach, drinking from temporary springs and hunting the stingrays, fish, and turtles that grow fat at that time. When it is dry, they move inland, getting water from and fishing from the deeper pools. Canoe travel reflected humans moving on and with water on a timescale of days, but such movements fell within a much broader seasonal cycle, and traces of this movement still exist, as the dry season use of the freshwater fishing hole at Mangatjipa showed. Numerous places referred to as ‘inland’ by coastal clans were close enough to the coast to enable hunters to hunt there during the day and return to a common camp in the evening. Mayawuluk recalled such a moment in her early childhood, simply saying “my father (was) sleeping under a big tree, afternoon time. Everybody (had) gone hunting to freshwater and saltwater.” Perhaps most noticeable about this comment is not that people were hunting simultaneously in both kinds of places, but that the distinction between them was expressed through water. There are words for bush and beach which people do use to distinguish the two, but describing them in terms of states of water is equally common. As well as arcing down the coast on land and sea on canoe journeys lasting a week, there was coastal movement on a seasonal cycle, as Yolngu moved between saltwater and fresh, following the water flows. Inland freshwater, and its importance to life, is the major emphasis of the remainder of this chapter.

“More Water There”: Locating the Homelands

In contemporary life, water has had a structuring role in residence and movement patterns in a different way from those described above. Along with the Ancestral importance of the location, the siting of contemporary homeland communities was also connected to the predictability and quality of freshwater supplies, something that is evident in people’s recollections of that time. The location of homeland communities has had daily ramifications for life in those places and in the area as a whole. Gawirrin

99 Thomson described seasonal movement amongst inland groups in other parts of Arnhem Land (Thomson 1949:16)
100 Coastal Yolngu moved inland in the dry season, but usually only a certain distance. Gumbaniya’s comments make clear that the limit of his ‘inland’ movements on country as a teenager was the freshwater billabong system of Wayawu, some 30km inland from Grindall Bay. He did not travel further until he was in his twenties, after his father Mundukul had died and the Lake Evella (Gapuwiyak) mission had been established to provide a significant destination. Baykutji, where he first began reflecting on the seasonal movements he made with Dhukal’s father, is freshwater Madarrpa river country only 15km inland. The limited extent of his inland travels contrasts with Gumbaniya’s sea journeys to Groote (75km from Yilpara) and Numbulwar (120km from Yilpara).
Gumana tells the story of how the Dhalwangu homeland of Blue Mud Bay came to be inland at Gan gan river:

Gawirrin: And my father was saying…I was thinking for Garrapara, because I want(ed) to feel, staying near the sea. But my father was saying no, we got to go back to Gangan and stay at Gangan. More water there. Freshwater. But he didn't think, (that) old man, what windmill going to do or bore going to be at Garrapara.

Marcus: He was thinking more about rivers?

Gawirrin: Rivers and more lots of fish. I mean there's fish up there in the Garrapara area, saltwater fish, and turtles and all the others, but anyway...

Marcus: So you came back here (to Gangan)?

Gawirrin: We sleeping one night (at Garrapara) and go back (to Gangan). We caught lots and lots of fish, maybe 20 fish, baypinnga [saratoga].

Marcus: Down on the river?

Gawirrin: Down on the river. This river here. Billabong.

Marcus: And that made you think. Were you happy about that?

Gawirrin: Yeah, I was happy, and that time I was follow my father words and what my father was saying. He want to be a more saltwater, I mean freshwater, staying near the river.

Marcus: What did the missionaries (travelling with you) think? Did they say anything?

Gawirrin: It was good. He saw lots of fish and lots of water, running water.

Marcus: Right, and the airstrip place was near. They thought it was a good place?

Gawirrin: Yo, it was a good place. That what those two missionaries were saying to me and my father.

Gawirrin and his father Birrikritji were choosing between Garrapara and Gangan, places that they had Ancestral rights to, and this was the primary determinant of their choice of locations. But within that, the importance of a reliable water source was critical to where the homeland was built. Wakuthi made a similar trip on his own to look for water on Madarrpa clan territory, as Mayawuluk recalls:

Mayawuluk: Old man Wakuthi go to Yilpara and he see that (place), marking all the wänga[camp, place].

Marcus: So he's looking?

Mayawuluk: Yo, he's looking for that water. Yo, for water. And I stay back (on Woodah Island). “When I find him, you know when he's boiling, that water, before long time.”101 But it's closed (over), that water. Lovely water!

Marcus: So he was looking for water at Yilpara and he travelled there and could not find it?

Mayawuluk: Yo.

Wakuthi’s experience in establishing the Numbulwar mission had given him some experience of community infrastructure, and so despite his difficulties in locating water, he still chose to put the Madarrpa clan homeland at Yilpara.102 Getting freshwater was

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101 Mayawuluk’s English and storytelling mode is highly idiosyncratic, even when edited and punctuated. Without explicitly indicating it, she has slipped into Wakuthi’s voice, where he is saying “I am going to find that water that was bubbling up from the ground when we were here a long time ago”

102 Homelands were sited in places that were of Ancestral importance to the clan, but that importance was also cause for concern. Bakulangay Marawili commented that people had decided not to site the
an early struggle for Yilparra residents, and, along with the story about the building of the airstrip, is an important part of the narrative people relate about the establishment of the homeland. Water was a notable theme of the first film made about Yilpara, Ian Dunlop’s “Bäniyala” and one part of the film shows an extended discussion with non-indigenous bore diggers trying to locate underground freshwater (Dunlop 1974). A second part shows women collecting water from the billabong at Guyapi, which was the main source of freshwater in the early days of the community. Gangan is next to a substantial river, and so water supply is never a difficulty, but access to coastal saltwater, and to the resources it can provide, is considerably more difficult.

The homeland communities have been the focus of contemporary Yolngu life in Blue Mud Bay for more than thirty years, and will continue to be so well into the future. The siting of those communities has had daily ramifications for life there in terms of the ease of accessing support and services from Yirrkala, the knowledge, skills, and experience that young people gain, the wider relations between groups and individuals at different communities, and even the overall viability of particular communities. On a deeper level, the homelands themselves have also altered formations of places within the Bay. The Ancestral important areas have retained their significance as foci of group and individual identity and of ceremony, but patterns of residence and travel in everyday life have shifted significantly. The homeland is no longer just one of many camping and hunting sites along the peninsula, it is the place where people live, a reference point, a destination, a home, and a source of pride. The significance of homelands to individuals, families, and clan groups as a whole continues to grow the longer people live there. Water, particularly the presence of freshwater but also the proximity of the right kind of saltwater, was one important factor shaping the complex choices about where such places were built.

“I’m Alive from Gapu”: Water, Life, and Death

A dramatic, traumatic event in Mayawuluk’s childhood draws together some of the themes of this chapter, as well as relating a critical time in the recent history of Blue Mud Bay people. Water, seasonal movement, memory and place are threads in her recollections of the time that an epidemic ravaged people from Blue Mud Bay as they stayed at an inland freshwater area near Gangan:

Mayawuluk: We was camping this side, Garrimala. After from there they tried to swim (wash). And something happened to wangany darramu [one man], my brother, and my mother Galkama number 1. It happened.

Marcus: What happened?

Mayawuluk: I don't know! They was drinking the water and that gapu [water] is coming from yurta [new, young]. Raining. Bayngu [not] clean. Little bit rusty one, that gapu [water]. That's why they getting rirritun [sick]. (Inaudible name) passed away there, then märi [mothers mothers brother], old man.

….

Mdarra homeland at the alternative site at Yathikpa because it was too important and powerful a place, and the women and children might be put at risk by living there. The Ancestral importance of places are discussed further in Chapters 8 and 9. On a practical level, Ngulpurr Marawili also said that the clear water and the flat, gently sloping sandy beach at Yilpara made it easy to see approaching animals such as sharks and crocodiles, an important consideration with children playing in or near the water. The water at Yathikpa is silty and opaque, the seabed drops more steeply, and it is close to a crocodile breeding area.
Mayawuluk: Old Wakuthi (went to) see that naku [canoe] there (down at the beach), lipalipa yituwala [little canoe]. He go and look around and came back. Everyone starting getting sick. I go with Wakuthi in that canoe, crossing that river(mouth). He was wetting the canoe, and sewing that sail. I was sitting, other side. Eating laluk, gunga [pandan nuts].

Marcus: Sitting on the beach?
Mayawuluk: Yo. And that dog, that brown one, stealing that water, that gapu [water] that last one. Wakuthi go back and (found) that water, the dog spilled it all. So we slept there, and came back to Gangan. Early in the morning, one (person) been pass away. When we got back, two die from sickness at Gangan.

Marcus: Were there other people feeling sick?
Mayawuluk: Yo!

Marcus: Lot of people?
Mayawuluk: Yo! Lot of people been pass away! There were all lying down. No ngatha, no water.

Marcus: All very tired?
Mayawuluk: Yo! Tired, crying. Everybody sleeping to house. Yo, (I was) sorry!

Marcus: Did you get sick yourself?
Mayawuluk: Yo. I'm weak too. You know that morna, ngatha, ga gamay, ga rinydjama [Different kinds of bush foods]. We having that. Raw one. All the time.

Marcus: When you got sick, you still had some food left?
Mayawuluk: Yo. Made me feel better. I swim (wash) too. We got dry one, gapu [water], cleaning and boiling, cooking. Bush ngatha [food]. We living alive from that ngatha.

Marcus: Where was this?
Mayawuluk: At Rrandjuka, old Wakuthi start getting weak. He cutting sugarbag [bush honey] and fall down in the water. I’m busy, getting yams. The water was a little bit, you know, running around (swirling, whirlpool). He swimming around in there, having prayer inside his mind, inside his heart. (inaudible sentence, too softly spoken). (Whispered) Yalala [later] he told me he nearly died in that water. He fell down in the water…

Marcus: Was he in the water?
Mayawuluk: Yaka [no]. He crawl out. I tried to wake him up:
"Are you awake? Are you leitjo [good]?
“I'm not awake, I'm not leitjo. I'm feel weak, and I nearly died in the water. I'm alive from gapu.”

Wakuthi lost all of his three wives and seven children in the tragic, traumatic influenza epidemic. He did not have another child until Mayawuluk had grown up, married him, and given birth to Djambawa. The importance of water in Mayawuluk’s narrative, as both the likely cause of the illness and the basis of Wakuthi’s salvation, is clearly evident in her understanding of what happened. The gapu was ‘a little bit rusty’ in her words, discoloured because it came from ‘yurta’, from the first rains after the dry season. Mayawuluk and others boil water to drink, ‘dry one’ meaning clean in her
idiosyncratic bush English. Finally Wakuthi attributes his survival directly to the water, “I’m alive from gapu”.

Seasonal change and people movement is one thread of this story. Wakuthi had left his canoe on the beach and gone inland during the dry season and, with the first rains, was returning to check on it and fix anything that had deteriorated (wetting it and sewing the sail). He and Mayawuluk took drinking water with them to the beach because the rains had just started and had not yet filled the waterholes near the coast. When the dog spilled their water, they had no choice but to return to the inland camp, where they found the epidemic raging. Later, the change in seasonal water flows would have sparked a movement of people to the beach had the epidemic not occurred, and it was this movement, back to the saltwater and the islands as the rain came, that Wakuthi was preparing for. Gawirrin gave his own explanation of the epidemic in terms of seasonal movement, and again water is critical.

Gawirrin: They all died in here, but they going that way, wrong place. If they go down to beach camp then they might be alive or something you know?

Marcus: So you think they made a mistake going into the freshwater?

Gawirrin: Yo. But I was lucky myself.

Marcus: that you went somewhere else, true.

Gawirrin: I went that way (gesturing towards Yirrkala) and the sickness came through this way eh!

One reading of Wakuthi’s statement that he is ‘alive from gapu’ is a similarly practical one, that the river water he fell into kept his body temperature down, his fever in check, and kept him hydrated. However as Mayawuluk’s story of Wakuthi’s illness suggests, there are other ways of understanding the phrase, “I’m alive from gapu”. Mayawuluk’s description of what happened when he was in the water suggests much more than just keeping his body cool. Wakuthi was, in her Christian-influenced English vocabulary, ‘having a prayer’ inside his mind and inside his heart as he was submerged. He became ill near Baykutji, a freshwater Mađarrpa area where Baru the crocodile is of great Ancestral significance. On another occasion, Djambawa told his fathers’ story and said Wakuthi had survived because he transformed into a Baru whilst in the water. There is a metaphysical as well as a physical understanding of what happened, a continuity between body, mind, country and Ancestry that is fundamental to the way Wakuthi and his family interpret this event. Thus far the emphasis has been on physical, experiential relationships to country and place. In coming chapters this wider, metaphysical aspect to life will be more explicitly addressed.

Conclusion

Memory, movement, and water have been dominant themes here, as the chapter has progressed from the saltwater to the fresh. These themes are all implicated in the creation and recreation of Dholupuyngu country, although that creation is far from exhausted by them. People journeyed on sea and land, moved with the cycle of the seasons, and lived as much out on islands and canoes in the middle of the bay as they did around the coastline or inland. Such rhythms and ways of life are behind the integration of coastal country that is so fundamental to the thinking of the Dholupuyngu. This chapter will finish as it began, with people, travel, childhood knowledge, and memory. Dhukal and Manman spent their early lives on Woodah
Island, then went by canoe to Groote Island and on to the Numbulwar mission to start school:

Manman: We start meeting lots and lots of different different nawi [um]...Yolngu. Making friends. When we got at Numbulwar, first-dja, we wasn’t talking our language we was talking in Anindilyakwa [Groote Island language]. Because when we grew up-dja, when I was born and I grew up-dja, I could hear them and I could pick their language instead of mine.

Marcus: So when you got to Numbulwar who taught you your language?

Dhukal: Some people, Djapu (clan) people came, nawi, Balamumu\textsuperscript{103} from Yirrkala.

Manman: Punishment.

Dhukal: Punishment.

Manman: They came with one canoe all the way from Yirrkala to my, that's the time they came to my...nawi...initiation ceremony.

Dhukal: Circumcise

Marcus: When you say punishment they were in trouble?

Manman: Yeah! At Yirrkala.

Marcus: And they got sent away?

Dhukal: sent away to Numbulwar. Same time they went for his nawi...Manman: Initiation.

The intersections between language, movement, kinship and place are the subject of the next chapter, on Yolngu personal names.

\textsuperscript{103} Balamumu is a collective term for Dhuwa moiety saltwater. Here it is used to refer to a number of Dhuwa saltwater clans simultaneously. The way in which water is used in this way will be discussed further in Chapter 9.
Djambawa Marawili:

“Others have called it ‘just the land’. But every individual in this area has a name, small, special names, sacred names, canoe names. Yolngu have used these names through the ceremonial singing of our ancestors or in the naming of our grandchildren. They are all names in the individual lands; also in the sea. Every small bit of sea has a name. That is how we chose our names. From naming our grandsons or our nephews or family. Names after names. Before, it was the old people’s names. And in each generation there are people named in this way. From their grandmothers, great-grandmothers, aunties, and grandfathers. From the Yolngu that have died, old people, they would name their children. Some of the names represent saltwater and some freshwater. Water that comes down, from the rain, from the inland, it comes down as storm water and it comes down to the sea. The saltwater...here it rests in the saltwater country, but it all has names. Just like Garrnggirr, just like Ngadayun, just like Mumuthun, every individual’s name is a special name representing country. Country where the floodwaters rush by and become one, and wherever they may rest and become one. It is that, now we are telling you. Also the rocks. Rocks that the country holds. Where the water moves...where it rests. There are places there, names there, names that are special, that Yolngu receive in their heads. And sing and give names to children. Also it explains the country, how they became one, not only the sea but the land too. They became one.”

Djambawa Marawili (Saltwater 1999:14).

In tracing how Yolngu names are intertwined with coastal country, it is tempting to simply quote the above passage and end there, for it contains the major elements of what follows, concentrated in just a few moving and powerful paragraphs. Yet to do so would fail to acknowledge the way in which, without reference to or remembrance of the statement reproduced above, senior Dhölupuyngu agreed to systematically record the name meanings they knew from genealogical lists compiled by Frances Morphy. Personal names are treated with respect in Yolngu society and are not always readily revealed, for they are direct connections to and manifestations of Ancestral power. So

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104 Much of this chapter relates to material collected from Dhölupuyngu people, but the names recorded stretch well beyond the Blue Mud Bay area, and well beyond the ‘mud people’. For this reason, the term Yolngu will be used here.

105 In normal life it is generally more polite to use the kinship term or ‘skin name’ of the person one is talking to. However personal names tend to be used more often amongst close kin (Tamisari 2002:91), and because Yilpara is a community based on one particular clan, people’s names were a regular feature of everyday conversations. Usually one name was favoured in these circumstances, but not always, and sometimes people might emphasise their closeness to another person by using one of their less common
the meanings that underpin the naming discussion below should be seen in this light; as a patient, systematic, generous and detailed demonstration of Djambawa’s powerful statement.

Names and Naming

A Yolngu child will usually carry their names for life, and therefore carry any connotations or connections they have. Names can be chosen on aesthetic grounds, or because a relative carries it, or because it refers to a significant event or person in the life of the parents, or for a host of other reasons. As is clear from Djambawa’s statement, such considerations form part of the judgements that Yolngu people make when choosing names for their children. Yolngu people generally have more than one name, and older people can have seven or more, and this is even before counting nicknames and an English name, most commonly used when interacting with non-Yolngu people. Exploring the ways in which people have been named demonstrates how important names can be, and therefore how they can reflect significant characteristics of Yolngu society and Yolngu understandings of their relationship to the world.

Most authors who have written about Aboriginal names have noted that it is an under-researched topic (Dussart 1988; Hart 1930; MacKnight 1999; Tamisari 2002; Thomson 1946). Other authors to address the issue of Aboriginal modes of address include Goodale (1980) Stanner (1965), and Warner (1937: 90, 513-15) whose early work appears to have gone largely unnoticed by later writers, although Keen (1994:79) was aware of it. The most recent extended accounts of personal names and naming both come from north Australia (MacKnight 1999; Tamisari 2002), and Tamisari’s work is based on Yolngu material, albeit much further to the west at Milingimbi. Given the research emphasis here, one striking aspect of both of these recent accounts is the predominance of names related to the sea, clouds, and weather, and the final part of this chapter will examine that aspect of Yolngu naming. Naming and place is a further focus here, something that Tamisari also analyses in detail. She states that all proper names are ‘ideolocal’ or specific to place, using a broad definition of place that incorporates events and happenings (Tamisari 2002:88) or phenomena which take place on particular country, or at particular times of year (Tamisari 2002:90). Tamisari’s approach is linguistic and focussed on a small number of examples, providing some good contrasts to the broader scale approach taken here. Other ethnographers of the Yolngu such as Keen (1994:79) and Williams (1986:50) have also noted the significance of Yolngu personal names and their origins in Ancestry, kin relations and country, without going into great detail.

names. Dussart notes of the Warlpiri that personal names are used more often now than they were in the past (Dussart 1988:58), and this may also be true of the Yolngu.

106 The emphasis throughout this chapter is on names given to babies rather than adults, but people can give and receive names throughout their lives for a variety of reasons. One sign of seniority and importance is the number of names one possesses, some of which will be kept secret. There is not space here to go into the complex reasons why adults can receive names, but much of this discussion is relevant to those processes.

107 In fact, this point is usually the opening sentence (Dussart 1988; MacKnight 1999; Tamisari 2002; Thomson 1946). Hart makes the same point in his second sentence (Hart 1930).

108 In making both of these comments, she cites Casey’s 1996 essay (Casey 1996), discussed here in the first chapter.
Flows of water and a related sense of place within the Bay are evident in Djambawa’s statement and he connects them directly to the personal names that people carry. Water and place form a part of what follows, but in exploring the way in which people are named, other important strands emerge. One is märi-gutharra, which is a key structuring kinship relationship in Yolngu society. This relationship, the MM(B) to (Z)DC, provides the closest genealogical link between people of the same moiety when traced through women, and it has been the subject of anthropological analysis and discussion over a long period of time (for recent analyses, see (Morphy 1978, 1991:52-56; Williams 1986:52-55). Märi-gutharra kin relations can operate at both a group and an individual level, and in this context, the discussion of märi-gutharra that follows provides an important basis for understanding subsequent chapters about Ancestry and ownership.

A further strand that is introduced is the way that naming processes reflect the passing on of knowledge. Names can be used to remind people of places, of history, and of connections to others, and all of these emerge in different ways in what follows. One noticeable characteristic of Yolngu personal naming is the way that it allows women to express their knowledge, for senior women are often involved in choosing names for children. They use their choices to demonstrate knowledge of the significance of everyday events, of the connections between people and groups, and of the Ancestral domain. Men, particularly the father or grandfather (FF) of the child, can also be involved in naming in a similar way.

The first part of this chapter looks at how children were named within one extended family, the lineage associated with Wakuthi Marawili. It explores how particular names were chosen, who chose them, and what inspired their choices, and through that exploration, it shows that märi-gutharra, the passing on of knowledge, and the role of senior women all emerge as important. The second part of the chapter examines the meanings of names from across the Madarrpa clan. People can have several names, and where possible a number of names for each Madarrpa person were recorded. The multiplicity of names amongst the Madarrpa provides further evidence of the importance of märi-gutharra relationships in Yolngu society, and also explores how naming can connect people to places that can be widely dispersed geographically. Both of the first two parts provide important foundations for the third part of the chapter, which analyses a wider set of name meanings drawn from 8 different clans, totalling over 1000 names. Here the focus of the discussion is on the major themes of water and place, how they manifest themselves in those names, and what that says about the relationships between people, water, and country.

**Naming processes**

Where do Yolngu names come from? A simple response might be that they predominantly come from the Ancestral domain; from the songs, stories, places, figures, and events that those narratives are created by and encompass. The relationship of the Ancestral domain to Yolngu people will be the main focus of the next two chapters, and at this point it is enough to note that the Ancestral realm and the language associated with it are the sources of almost all Yolngu names.

Names come from the Ancestral domain, but they cannot be chosen at random from that source, and the most important limitation on the allowable ‘field’ of Ancestral names is the moiety distinction. People are categorised as the same moiety as their father, and can
only receive names that come from the same moiety. All Ancestral phenomena are moiety specific, and so the moiety system immediately determines which ‘half’ of the total field of Ancestral names can be permissibly given to a particular person. Yet this still leaves a huge array of possibilities. How is a name selected from that array of possibilities and what does that selection reveal? The examples below which address that question come from Wakuthi’s lineage, the people I knew best at Yilpara.

Märi-gutharra

“From naming our grandsons or our nephews or family. Names after names. Before, it was the old people’s names. And in each generation there are people named in this way. From their grandparents, great-grandmothers, aunties, and grandfathers. From the Yolngu that have died, old people, they would name their children”
Djambawa Marawili (Saltwater 1999:14)

When a Yolngu person is asked who names a child, the usual response is the märi, the MM(B). Someone’s märi is occasionally from the same clan or group as them, but more often is from another clan with strong ritual and family ties. Usually the name that they bestow will be a name from their own group, and this means that most people carry a name from one or more märi groups. Malumin, the youngest son of Wakuthi and Mayawuluk, has four daughters and the importance of relations with märi people and groups is clearly evident in their names:

- **Bändil** - Name from Barndil’s Gumatj märi clan 100kms north.
- **Mayitjpirr** - A stone at a freshwater billabong owned by the Manggalili, a märi clan for the Ma’darrpa.
- **Manini** - Saltwater shared between the Ma’darrpa and the Dhal wangpu, a märi clan for the Ma’darrpa.
- **Mamidjamai** - Hook spear, the name of one of her classificatory märi, in this case, her MMZ.

The importance of the märi-gutharra relationship in naming is reflected in the fact that often, when the actual märi is not present, another person with the same classificatory märi relationship will choose a name for the baby. In Nuwandjali’s case, his maternal grandmother (Mayawuluk’s mother) died long before Nuwandjali himself was born. Nuwandjali was given a märi name (Ngurruwanungma 2) by a classificatory märi from the Manggalili group who also carried that name (Ngurruwanungma 1).

Through märi-gutharra and other kinship connections, names can flow between clans over time; they can be passed on and then return. After receiving his name from Ngurruwanungma 1, Ngurruwanungma 2 (Nuwandjali) then gave that name to Ngurruwanungma 3, the Manggalili grandson (SS) of Ngurruwanungma 1. The name passed from the Manggalili, to the Ma’darrpa, and then back again to the Manggalili. Nor was this the only name involved in the connections between these people. Ngurruwanungma 1’s son Yingbithir also gave his name to Nuwandjali’s son, asserting märi-gutharra links between the clans across another generation. The movement of names across clans and down the generations is another way in which individual and group connections are expressed, and patterns revealed.
Women’s Knowledge

The importance of märi-gutharra in naming is not just maintained by having a classificatory märi name the child. Other senior, knowledgeable people can also act in this role, by choosing an appropriate name from a märi group, even if they are not themselves a member of that group. Naming is one way in which women’s knowledge is expressed, and Mayawuluk Wirrpanda has played a pivotal role in the naming of her grandchildren and great grandchildren. By doing so, her knowledge of country, of people, of the Ancestral realm, and of the relationships between them is revealed, yet it is revealed in a way that is not immediately obvious, indeed it only becomes apparent by asking her directly to recall whom she has named. This is one characteristic of women’s Ancestral knowledge in patriarchal Yolngu society, that it is usually expressed in more subtle ways than amidst the heat, intensity, and theatre of the ceremony ground. Mayawuluk gave two of Malumin’s daughters (Mayitjpirr and Mamindjama) their names that were listed above, both names being connected to their märi. Mayawuluk also gave names to Malumin’s other two daughters, in addition to the ones they are known by above. Bändil was given the additional name Maynbaku, which is the name of a cloud from Djarrakpi, and was also the name of Barndil’s actual märi (MM). Mayawuluk gave Manini the additional name Mänydjilnga, which refers to jungle at a place called Dhaniya, also belonging to the Manggalili märi clan. Mayawuluk also named some of her classificatory daughter’s children (ZDC), her actual gutharra, and who are from the Rirratjingu clan who have most of their territory around Yirrkala to the north. Walunguma refers to the sun and is a name from Mayawuluk’s own Dhudi Djapu clan. Another child she gave the name Dakarrawuy, which is a Dhudi Djapu place at Dhurupitjpi also associated with the sun.

Knowledge Flows

Naming people is also a way of passing on knowledge, and of retaining it. When my own partner Keren came to Yilpara, she was adopted by Nuwandjali’s wife Banggawuy, but it was Mayawuluk who gave her a name. Mayawuluk chose Yukuni, an old word for the baler shell, more commonly known as garritjpa, and no one else I told the name to at Yilpara recognized it immediately, as it was such an old word. On another occasion, the men were mapping sites for the Native Title claim to be lodged over the area, and, whilst on a boat trip, had trouble recalling the name of a place near Djarrakpi. They subsequently remembered it as Wamalu, and Nuwandjali later had a grandson (SS), whom he gave that name, saying quite explicitly that it would help people remember it. It was a Manggalili place and name, and so was an appropriate märi name for the young Madarrpa baby.

109 Gender in the names themselves will not be discussed in detail here. Many Yolngu names seem to be gender specific but the rules for that specificity are unclear (Frances Morphy, pers. comm.). Names can refer to gendered figures from the spirit world, but this is not always a guide to a person’s gender. Djambawa’s wife Cathy has the Yolngu name Liyawaday, which is the name of a male spirit, and similarly, there are women named after the Ancestral Harpoon used by male dugong hunters. It may be that names have developed an association with a particular gender because of kin who carried that name in the past, and this is a major basis on which people are able to identify the likely gender of the carrier of that name in the present.

110 On one occasion, Nuwandjali was trying to remember the name of the long green propagules or seeds that fall from the mangrove trees, but could not immediately recall it. Eventually he managed to do so by thinking of a girl at Yirrkala whom he knew was named after it.

111 Nuwandjali also gave Wamalu the English name Marcus, naming him after me. All Yolngu have English names, which are sometimes used in everyday conversation, but they do not have any particular
Naming and Everyday Events

Märi-gutharra connections, women’s knowledge, and the way knowledge is passed on emerge as aspects of naming processes within one extended family. The last example of how a mapping trip gave rise to a naming choice introduces another important element, and this is the role that events in everyday life can have in naming people. So far the emphasis has been on senior people, particularly women, arriving at a name through a knowledge of the Ancestral domain and considering the kinship connections of the person being named, at both a group and an individual level. Yet Wamalu was used not just because it was a märi name, but also because on a particular trip the men could not remember that particular name amongst many others. The broader, structuring elements such as märi-gutharra and senior people expressing their knowledge combines with the minutiae of everyday happenstance and circumstance, as shown by how another of Nuwandjali’s grandchildren received a name:

Nuwandjali and I were travelling down rough tracks in the southern part of Blue Mud Bay. With us was an old Djarrwark woman, Buyutja Murrunyina, a classificatory mother of ours who lived at Gapuwiyak, and so we only saw her infrequently. She was with us because we were mapping coastal sites and she knew that country well, having lived there in her youth. She spoke about the places we were travelling through by car on the way to the coast, and at one point she gestured off the road, saying that out of sight over there was a billabong, a Bunanatjini (freshwater) Madarrpa place. She told Nuwandjali that he could use that name for his first grandchild. A year later Nuwandjali’s daughter-in-law gave birth to a daughter, and one of the baby’s names is Ningmalwuy, the billabong we passed on that day.

Buyutja demonstrated her knowledge of the country, how it related to people and to groups, and her right to express that by naming a child yet to be conceived. The name she chose came from the freshwater Madarrpa, a group who can act in a märi relationship to the saltwater Madarrpa and a group whose numbers are few, so the need to pass on their Ancestral heritage to appropriate people has some resonance. Yet in addition to these, the historical contingency and specificity of this example is striking. Nuwandjali and I were travelling in a relatively unusual location with someone we did not often see, and the name came from a billabong that we did not visit. These contingent circumstances of everyday life, combined with Buyutja’s knowledge of the wider context, led to Nuwandjali’s daughter receiving that name.

However the events and experiences of everyday life that inspire names can be far richer and more intense than simply passing a billabong on the road. These names, and the events they refer to, reveal complex relationships between Yolngu people and the world they live in. Three stories of how people in Wakuthi’s extended family got their names show such relationships between everyday life, kin, knowledge, seniority, and the Ancestral realm. They are stories about conception, as well as about names, for the names refer to the moment people attribute to the arrival of a new baby:

significance, and can often be repeated across a number of people. For example, Dhuka Wirrpanda, Waka Mununggurr, and Djambawa Marawili are around the same age, all grew up together at Numbulwar, and are all called Terry. The Yolngu names of a deceased person are avoided after their death, as are English words that sound like that Yolngu name, and this is for fear of attracting the dangerous aspect of the deceased person’s spirit, the mokuy. However their actual English name can be used unproblematically following their death, for it has no connection to the Ancestral domain.
Story 1:
One day Djambawa went down to the beach in front of Yilpara, carrying his fish spear. On the way he passed Dhukal’s mother Djaparri, sitting under a casuarina tree on the beach. As Djambawa went past, she asked:
“Why are you going there?”
“To go hunting” he replied.
“Watch out for my father. I had a dream last night that he swam up from Matjanga.”

Djambawa began walking along the beach, and, as he walked, he saw something out of the corner of his eye in the water. At first he thought it was a white plastic bag, but then he saw it was moving, and as he looked closer it turned from white to yellow, then silver. It was a fish, a huge fish. It slowly swam closer and he bent down so it could not see his shadow. Then he threw his spear, and struck it behind the head, killing it instantly. It was as long as a person is tall and had a yellow tail and a yellow belly. He dragged it back through the shallows with his spear towards Yilpara. As he approached, Dhukal’s mother was still sitting under the tree. When he got closer he saw that she was crying.
“You’ve killed my father”

Djambawa cut the fish under the casuarina tree on the beach in front of Yilpara, and it was so big that he cut it like a dugong, finding lots of fat everywhere through its flesh. Djambawa’s wife Djangapala became pregnant with his son Ngambulili at this time, and this fish announced Ngambulili’s presence. His name refers to big barramundi.

Story 2:
Yalmakany is Wakuthi’s daughter and Djambawa’s half sister. Her mother Mulkun was pregnant with her when Mulkun, Mayawuluk, Wakuthi, and others were paddling from Garrapara to Yathikpa at night by canoe. Halfway across, Wakuthi thought that they had reached their destination as the water was so shallow, and they all got out of the canoe and started to wade through the water to shore. Then Wakuthi realised that there was water all around them. They were not at Yathikpa yet! He hurried everyone back into the boat, as he realised they were standing on Dhakanjali, the sacred harpoon of Yathikpa, coming up from beneath the sea. The waters began to rise even as they got back into the canoe. Yalmakany has the name Gamaliny, which refers to one aspect of Dhakanjali, and this name was given to her by her father Wakuthi because of this event.

Story 3:
Mayawuluk remembered travelling back to Numbulwar mission for the first time with her baby son Donald (Nuwandjali) who was born elsewhere. On the boat landing she met Numbulwar people she knew well from living there earlier:

Mayawuluk: And they saw that little boy, Donald.
Marcus: Who saw Donald?
Mayawuluk: They dream. They dream. From Numbulwar they dreaming him!
Marcus: What did they dream about?

112 The Ancestral creature most strongly associated with Matjanga is the Yirritja moiety barramundi, balin.
Mayawuluk: I don't know! I don't know… I hearing that story, that's what they told me: “He's coming from Numbulwar, that baby, that Donald”. Those old people there, those people from Numbulwar. They told me that story. Yo! They told me that story (about) having my kid, how I'm catching that baby. And already they knew. They put name (for him) somewhere, but I can't remember (it). Name, another name they gave Nuwandjali. All the Nundhirripala tribe. Nundhirripala tribe, like the Mungayana mob you know? That old man. They dream…

Marcus: I'll ask Nuwandjali, maybe he remembers his name.

Mayawuluk: Yo he know! ...They watching there, meeting me (at the boat landing). Everybody running (to) meeting him. At Numbulwar…. Reminding (telling) me, reminding now: “We dream that little boy. You got him. That little boy there. Yo! We dreamed (him)”

Later, Nuwandjali told me about his Numbulwar name, given to him by members of the Nundhirripala group. It is Wirrithali, and it means ‘fire’. Nuwandjali said that they had had a dream about a baby ‘formed with fire in his hand’. They knew that Mayawuluk and Wakuthi had had a child, for fire is a key element of the Madarrpa Ancestral heritage.

So much can be said about these three stories; how they relate Yolngu to each other, to the physical world around them, and to the Ancestral realm. Indeed part of what they show is how problematic the divisions in English between these three are. The stories speak simultaneously of dreams, of local histories, of physical and psychological experiences, of relationships with others across space and time, of the Ancestral realm impinging on everyday life, of the importance of conception, and so on. Perhaps the most critical point to take from them for the discussion here is how important people’s names can be, how they can speak of deep relationships of great significance. Yet they do this in a particular way. Inspired by and emerging from the Ancestral domain, names are chosen by people, in relationships with other people at particular times and places. There is a specificity to them, as they indirectly, or directly, retain traces of where people lived, whom they were close to, the Ancestral heritage of those places and people, and the local incidents of everyday life that occurred there. Nuwandjali’s name retains the memory of Numbulwar people dreaming of fire, Yalmakany’s of a canoe journey at Yathikpa, Ngambulili’s of a big fish speared at Yilpara by his father. In the previous chapter, it was shown how memory and history were intertwined with place and water. More explicit in the above examples is the infusion of the Ancestral in daily life, the way in which its manifestation in a moment in space and time has been interpreted as the creation of a person, and that person’s name then carries a trace of that manifestation. A fourth story shows the potential implications of such a manifestation, the degree of significance it can be accorded within Yolngu society:

Minyingu Marawili113 had a dream. In the dream, someone was calling ‘aunty, aunty’. In the morning she woke up and told those camped with her that somebody came to Madarrpa country and called to her. People thought it announced the arrival of a Madarrpa baby, but the next baby born was from the closely related Dhalwangu clan. This man, Binindjirri Wunungmurra, is now an adult and is explicitly acknowledged as ‘half-Madarrpa’, having rights to speak for the country where the dream of his

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113 Minyungu Marawili is the deceased sister of Wakuthi Marawili and mother of Waka Mununggurr, an important senior man at Yilpara. His role in community life will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
conception took place and rights to play an important role in Madarrpa ceremonies. His status is signified by an additional name for him that comes from Madarrpa country at Yathikpa, Liyawirringu.

A glimpse of naming processes amongst this small group of people reveals the complexity of people’s relationships to each other and the world they live in. For names are chosen in rich and varied ways: some come from senior people carefully considering the relationships surrounding the new child, and here märi-gutherar and the knowledge of senior women emerged as important. Others come from a confluence of those elements with events in everyday life, events which can be as simple as bypassing a billabong in a car, or as richly metaphorical and complex as the story of Djambawa spearing the fish. A name might come from faraway relatives dreaming of a baby with fire in its hand, or from close at hand when the pregnant mother and her family directly experience a strange Ancestral manifestation in a canoe at night. A name can refer to a dream, the dream accorded such importance that the child whose presence it announced is given special rights in another group’s country because of it.

Other ethnographers of the Yolngu have noted the relationship between unusual events in people’s lives and conception, but only Morphy mentions the personal name that derives from that event. He associates the event with the time that the mother first feels the baby move, and describes how the father may then have a dream that identifies the wangarr being responsible for the conception. The child will receive a name that connects them to that Ancestor and that this relationship “provides a person with his or her most direct spiritual connection with the clan’s Ancestral beings.” (Morphy 1984:19). The stories described here vary from this general pattern in certain respects (whether it was the time the baby first moved, or who had the dream) but the underlying relationship with the Ancestors remains clear. Williams (1986:31) notes that conception spirits come from particular places and that there are several means by which conception may be marked, including an event such as finding desirable food, and this event is then given significance through a dream. But she does not go on to draw the link between conception and personal names, rather between conception and rights in country (Williams 1986:31-32). Keen (1994:106-107) similarly identifies unusual events that mark conception, their relationship to Ancestral power, and the subsequent dream that can inform its meaning, but he does not mention at that point the names that both flow from and mark that event.

The variation and the specificity of the stories of these naming events perform two roles here. The first is to highlight the importance of Yolngu naming decisions, suggesting that analysing name meanings might be one means of drawing out elements of life that are significant to people. The second, conversely, is a caution about over-interpreting the social significance of a name based only on a knowledge of its meaning, without knowing the context of its choice. The large number of Yolngu name meanings given by the people of Blue Mud Bay perhaps allows some scope to balance these considerations, to analyse the meanings for patterns without relying too heavily on the meaning of any one name. The first step in looking for broader patterns will be to look at multiple names for the one person.

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114 Djambawa said that the stories such as the one of him spearing the fish only happen to the father of the child, because the conception spirit wants to ‘meet’ that man. The names that are bestowed are bestowed by the father, and usually relate to spearing or catching an animal with lots of fat.
Multiple Names: The Madārrpa

The emphasis so far has been on how the bestowal of a name occurs and what that bestowal might represent. Naming events have been discussed singly, yet already several people mentioned have been revealed to have more than one name. This is a characteristic of Yolngu naming, and raises the question of what exploring multiple names for one person might tell us about Yolngu names, and about broader social life. The Madārrpa agreed to allow a number of names from each person in their group to be recorded, giving some sense of the pattern of relationships expressed by names within one clan. In all, this meant approximately 250 name meanings from 100 people were recorded, with 2 or 3 names on average and up to 7 in some important older people. A number of people had only one Yolngu name, or revealed only one.

The kinds of naming processes already outlined can be repeated a number of times during the life of a person, giving a sense of the network of relations surrounding them. Indeed in some cases, such as Nuwandjali and Malumin’s names from Numbulwar, names can also retain traces of the changes in those networks, changes in their life history. Names express relatedness to other people, and through them, other clans. The names for two Madārrpa brothers, both in their early 20s, provide a striking example of the complexity of such connections:

Brother 1

Bawana- Place at Bawaka 100km north where a flag representing the Dhalwangu and the Gumatj clans is erected.
Dhuru, Garrang\textsuperscript{115} - Underwater coral found in Gumatj, Warramirri, and Munyuku clan places.
Wālawuy, Djunapi, Wunungdhun- Madārrpa cloud.
Gupuyba - Place at Mayawundji, which is country shared between the Munyuku and the Manggalili clans.

Brother 2

Malati- Macassan knife
Lungburryun- Madārrpa tree waving in the wind
Gamanarra- Path for the Dhalwangu clan at Gurrumuru, 100km northwest
Wuwulyun- Mangrove leaves
Gudiyilnga- Place in the bush at Yarrinya, a Munyuku clan area on the southern part of the same peninsula as Yilpara

Gumatj, Dhalwangu, Munyuku, Manggalili, Warramirri; all of these Yirritja groups can be märi for Madārrpa people, and their territories are scattered across a thousand or more square kilometres northeast Arnhem Land. Yet they are all represented here in the names of two people with the same biological parents. Malati, the name of a Macassan knife, is evidence of historical links and relationships stretching even further afield. Malumin, whose children’s names appeared at the beginning of this chapter, provides an even more complex example of such links. ‘Malumin’ refers to a beach in southern Blue Mud Bay owned by the Nundhirripala group, who dreamt of Nuwandjali with fire in his hand and can act as a märi group for the Madārrpa. Malumin carries that name because he was born at Numbulwar, where a large number of Nundhirripala live. This

\textsuperscript{115} Where two names have been listed, the additional names represent synonyms for the first name. One will usually be favoured in referring to a person, but that person will know the synonyms and respond if they are used.
name connects him to places and people in the south, but two other names also connect him in complex ways to people and places in the north, as one of these names comes from the Yarrwidi Gumatj clan, the other from Wan.gurri clan. The most common märi group for Madarrpa people is the Manggalili, who are not represented in Malumin’s names directly, but they are indirectly present in the märi-gutharra connections stretching further afield. An important märi group for the Manggalili clan is the Yarrwidi Gumatj, and in turn, an important märi group for the Yarrwidi Gumatj is the Wan.gurri clan. This means that Malumin’s other names represent his märi’s märi clan (Yarrwidi Gumatj) and his märi’s märi’s märi clan (Wan.gurri). Such chains of relationships are part of the story underlying the geographic spread of people’s names; sometimes a faraway name represents a direct connection, as in Malumin’s connection to the Nundhirripala, but in other cases they can represent chains of relationships between a number of clans, stretching across time and space. If, as the discussion of naming processes suggests, names are a marker of significant events and connections, then the potential complexity of Yolngu social life becomes apparent.

Each of the two brothers above also carries a name that refers to the Ancestral heritage of their own Madarrpa clan. This was a common characteristic of naming amongst the Madarrpa, and indeed is evident in some of the names already mentioned in the previous section. Nuwandjali, a Madarrpa word for a hook spear, was given his name by his father Wakuthi, who carries that name himself. Yalmakany, whose arrival was heralded by the rising of the sacred harpoon Dakanjali, is called Gamaliny. Gamaliny is part of the Ancestral heritage of her own clan and again was given to her by her father Wakuthi. Djambawa’s son Ngambulili, whose arrival was announced by the big fish, shows an even greater emphasis names from his own clan, particularly when the synonyms for those names are included:

- Ngambulili, Danambarr, Gulwalwal – Big barramundi
- Wurrdhama, Balpa - Big yellow-tailed groper
- Djiandjungga - Another name for Mowandi, the man spearing fish at Yilpara
- Dhangaval - White chop on the sea
- Nâyypandjamurra - Groote name for mokuy man hunting fish at Djarrakpa,

The first four of his names are Madarrpa names, the first three referring to the event of his conception. The fifth, a name from Groote Island, refers to the conception event but also shows the distant märi-gutharra connections so evident in the previous example of the two brothers. Djarrakpi is a place on Groote that looks towards Djarrakpi peninsula on the Blue Mud Bay mainland, and Djarrakpi is the home of the Manggalili group, märi for the Madarrpa. The name refers simultaneously to Ngambulili’s Groote märi, indirectly to his Djarrakpi märi, and to the event of his conception. It also connects him to his mother, whose own Dhuwa clan has very strong ties to Groote Island, and who herself grew up there.

So far, the discussion has explored the significance of Yolngu names, and how they can reflect important events and experiences in the lives of the people who bestow or carry them. Women’s knowledge, the way knowledge is retained or passed on, and märi-

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116 Ancestral names from the person’s own group are not always as straightforward as they first appear. Yeniwuy, a young Madarrpa man, carries the name of a billabong near the Yilpara house where he was born and has spent much of his life. However, the name was given to him by a man from the Yarrwidi Gumatj clan from Birany Birany, 50km from Yilpara. This man has that name himself, and so it has ‘travelled’ socially and literally, to Birany Birany, before returning to Yeniwuy at Yilpara. The kin connections in the name are not apparent just from its meaning.
gutharra relationships emerged as important in naming processes, highlighting how naming can reveal particular characteristics of Yolngu society. This provides the foundations for an analysis of the name meanings in terms of the broader themes of water and place. If Yolngu naming is an important social process, then analysing Yolngu naming in terms of those major themes should shed further light on them.

Naming and Place

“Others have called it ‘just the land’. But every individual in this area has a name, small, special names, sacred names, canoe names. Yolngu have used these names through the ceremonial singing of our ancestors or in the naming of our grandchildren. They are all names in the individual lands; also in the sea. Every small bit of sea has a name. That is how we chose our names”
Djambawa Marawili (Saltwater 1999:14)

“Well, you come from Mars!”
Nuwandjali’s response to my comment that Yolngu names came from all over the place. This was sometime after I had talked about the origin of my own name in the planet Mars and the Roman pantheon.

Pursuing individual Yolngu names that are also ‘place names’ brings up an immediate problem of definition. Just beyond the above passage from Saltwater, Djambawa stated explicitly that “every individuals name is a special name representing country”. Given the diversity of actual name meanings in the overall list of 1000 names, what does this mean? What constitutes a ‘place name’ in this context? Place was introduced in the first chapter, and correlations and distinctions between it and the Yolngu word wanga were noted. When giving the meaning of names, Dholupuyngu people alternated between English and Yolngu, and so at some points used the words ‘place name’ to describe the meaning of a name, and at some points said wänga. How does ‘a special name representing country’ differ from a ‘place name’ as understood by non-Yolngu people? What is necessary here is to explore how a naming relates to the country as a whole, and to particular places.

In the quote above, Djambawa did not say that ‘every individual’s name is a place name’, and although there are many that are place names, this is borne out by an analysis of the name meanings. Rather, he said that names are ‘special names representing country’, and this suggests a broader understanding of the relationship between naming and places is needed. In some cases, acceptance of names as still potentially constituting a ‘place name’ in English terms seems relatively unproblematic; Guyapi is a billabong at Yilpara, Dhukpirri is an off shore reef, and Burumbirr is a path or road at Gurrumuru. These are geographic features commonly receiving names in English. But what of seagrass at Yathikpa? Mud at Wayawu? Freshwater at Gangan? Or Gambali, an area of ocean, the boundary of which is inherently blurred and whose distinctiveness may be invisible to the untrained eye? These names describe physical features of the country that refer to and represent specific places, yet they are not toponyms in the way that the term would be understood in English. Gänyul means ‘mud’ but inherent in that meaning is ‘mud at Wayawu’ where Wayawu is the ‘place name’ in English terms. It is that mud and no other. There is a general word for mud (dholu), but there are also specific words for mud from specific places, and so it
instantaneously communicates a specificity of place not immediately apparent in the English word for mud.

These examples are physical or geographic features, but of course this is not a distinction that is appropriate in a Yolngu context. Moving further from what constitutes an English ‘place name’, there are names that refer to the Ancestral figures directly; Waminirrupu is the Ancestral dugong hunters harpoon at Yathikpa, Yanggurr is the throat of the lightning snake at Baraltja, and Mowandi is the name of a spirit man hunting fish at Yilpara. These speak directly of place, yet they are neither ‘place names’ nor immediately evident geographic features. The ‘name’ describes the harpoon, not a place, but it is a harpoon specified in place, if not in time. Indeed this specificity of place is critical to the name, as it forms part of the Ancestral sphere by which ownership of that country is formally expressed, an issue discussed further in the coming chapters. Similarly, the dialect from which a name comes is part of the Ancestral heritage of the clan that speaks it, and a name from that dialect is immediately associated with the clan, and its country. From this progression it is possible to glimpse what Djambawa’s statement that “every individual’s name is a special name representing country” might mean.117

Looking further at the name meanings, there are names which do not necessarily refer to a place but to kinds of places. The yingapungapu is a sand sculpture that is used to express ceremonial relationships between three groups, all of which share its basic form. There are three permanently established yingapungapu sites on the three peninsulas in northern Blue Mud Bay, and these three Ancestral sites belong to three different clans (Dhalwangu, Madarrpa, Manggali). A name, for example Nänyin (a mauraki tree near a yingapungapu area) or Nyapililngu (a spirit associated with the yingapungapu) can therefore connect directly to one of those three sites, but implicitly and sometimes explicitly refer to the others as well. An even more explicit example was one of the names of the two brothers listed earlier. Dhuru and Garring are words for underwater coral found in the countries of three different clans (Gumatj, Warramirri, and Munyuku) and these countries are widely dispersed. The names represent places, the relationships between them, and the relationships to people who own them.

In a related example, Mungurrri (Yirritja moiety saltwater) is the meaning given for a number of names. It instantly eliminates Dhuwa moiety areas, it is found in certain places but not others, and it follows identified paths or flows within Blue Mud Bay. Mungurrri can be connected together as one entity, yet the number of names that ‘mean’ Mungurrri also point to specificity and diversity. This is the level at which some could argue that ‘place’ is no longer sufficiently specified, unless the Bay itself is considered a place, yet the name is still ‘representing country’ and it contains a recognisable level of specificity. A similar kind of difficulty occurs with names for clouds, which have names that are specific to clans or groups of clans, and which are said to be visible from particular places. Yet the same cloud can be seen from different locations, can be identified with different names, and, like the saltwater, the clouds themselves move over time. Tamisari (2002:97-98) records Yolngu names where movement is an integral part of the meaning, and she describes that movement as either localised movement within a place or movement connecting places. This latter description fits the example of clouds

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117 Djambawa’s comment is echoed by similar statements from anthropologists of the Yolngu. Williams expresses it as names “refer(ring) in some direct or indirect way to land” (Williams 1986:50), whilst Tamisari’s formulation, as noted earlier, is that they are specific to place (Tamisari 2002:88). However her argument progresses to a more sophisticated analysis of corporeality and the way “in which body, language, and place constitute each other” (Tamisari 2002:96).
and water, but only to a degree, and it struggles to adequately incorporate the example above, which was coral found at three discrete geographic locations. Her initial formulation of proper names being specific to place needs be pluralised to ‘places’ to cover fluid terms like Mungurru and cloud names as well as names that are shared between clans and refer to more than one distinct geographic location. Without delving significantly into the complex interrelationships of person, body, history, and Ancestry that Yolngu naming processes represent, those names still present a challenge to the concept of a ‘place name’ on a practical and descriptive level.

Nevertheless there are ‘place names’ in a Yolngu context, and some of those names are also the names of people. The names that were identified as a ‘place’ or ‘wänga’ by the senior Dholupuyngu reviewing the name lists appear on Map 7A. This map shows only the main concentration of names, for the overall geographic spread of the names recorded goes well beyond the map edges, and some names came from as far away as the Wessel Islands more than 250km to the north. The different text colours on the map refer to different clan affiliations of the people who carry the name (rather than the clan affiliation of the name itself), but the clan affiliations of the names themselves can in most places be inferred from the dominant colour amongst the names immediately surrounding it. This is because the most striking aspect of the map, other than the number and geographic spread of person/place names, is the way it highlights particular areas, such as Trial Bay in the northeast corner, as important foci for naming. The names are concentrated rather than spread evenly, and the map is pattern of Ancestral activity rather than residence, for it shows places that play a greater role in ceremonial and ritual life, and, to a lesser degree broader social life. Some of these areas, such as Yilpara, Djarrakpi, and Dhurupitji, are places where homelands are located and where many people live most of their lives, but a number like Baraltja, Mayawundji, Balana and Trial Bay are not. They are foci for naming and Ancestry, but are places where residence is occasional or even nonexistent in contemporary life. Sometimes this is for historical, demographic, and political reasons (the lack of success of homelands at Trial Bay is one example), but in other cases it is because the area itself is uninhabitable. The floodplains of Baraltja and Mayawundji are good examples of how people can strongly identify with places that they rarely visit, and those places can be equally important to wider social life.

The mixed colours on different parts of the map shows how individuals relate to places, but also shows how those relationships occur within overall patterns between clans. This relatedness and exchange, between clans and between individuals is an integral part of Yolngu sociality, for the map expresses the importance of clan groups, but also of the ways in which there are many relationships that crosscut those groups, even in a map where the moiety separation is maintained. The Madarrpa are strongly represented across the map because multiple names were recorded for them, but even taking this greater proportion into account, it is noticeable how many person/place names come from around Yilpara itself. The density of place names in that geographically diverse

118 Personal names are generally avoided in polite conversation. However one consequence of naming a person after a place is that the name can come up regularly in conversation, particularly when the place is a frequent destination. This is noticeable amongst the Madarrpa, for many of them are named after hunting places around Yilpara. An extreme example of a person’s name being in daily use is that the homeland itself was called Bäniyala from its inception until 2000. Bäniyala was the name of one of the senior men, who of necessity had to relinquish any reticence about it being used frequently. However the homeland name was changed to Yilpara when he died, indicating the importance of the prohibition surrounding the names of recently deceased people.
area is one reason for this, but people have also chosen local place names more often than elsewhere, particularly in Mundukul’s lineage.

Yet, as should be clear from the discussion above, place names are just a subset of the names that ‘represent country.’ There are a great many names which code for places because they refer to an aspect of the Ancestors or of the Ancestral action that took place there, and mapping these kinds of names would further emphasise the patterns appearing in Map 7A. The following two maps take a further step in this direction by focussing again on the Madurarpa and on the Yilpara peninsula. The first map (Map 7B) is for comparison purposes, for it reprints the relevant part of the place name map (Map 7A) on the appropriate scale. Map 7C includes the Madurarpa names of people where the place name was given as part of the meaning of their name, or where the name clearly refers to a defined Ancestral feature or event that took place in that area.

The complexity of some areas of map 7C indicate that converting this small scale map to the broader scale of Map 7A would render this area illegible, and the same problem would occur in other Ancestrally important areas on Map 7A. This is even before expanding the definition of names ‘representing country’ to the extent discussed earlier, for there are certainly no clouds or water currents marked on these maps. Furthermore, the maps are based on just a partial sample of the names from this region. Only the Madurarpa group gave multiple names, the other 7 groups (800+ people in total) in the name list only had one name recorded per person which might allow them to represented on any of the maps. Consider here the multiple mări-gutharra links represented in the names of the two Madurarpa brothers discussed earlier, Bawana and Malati. The two men had 4 names each, linking to people and places from 5 different mări groups lying a hundred or more kilometres away in different directions, a number of them well off the edges of Map 7A. Then there was the further example of Malumin, carrying a name with its origins in people at Numbulwar and also a name from his mări’s mări’s mări to the north. Consider the complexity and density of people/place relationships in the region if similar links, expressed through multiple names, existed in the 800 people who only gave one name in generating this data set. More than a thousand people, each linked to other people and other places by shared names, the links crisscrossing the region in every direction. A glimpse of this vision, albeit constructed in a non-Yolngu way, nevertheless gives some clues to the intensity and meaning behind Djambawa’s declaration about the relationship between names, people, and places.

What else does such a glimpse tell us? It tells us that to map ‘place names’ in a narrow sense is not an incoherent thing to do, but it needs to be undertaken with an understanding of the limitations of the exercise, an understanding of the ‘place names’ that will be left out, and, by implication, the people that will be left out. Mapping names that refer to people and to place reveals the density and intensity of human relationships to country; through shared names, places become more human. Understanding the processes of naming- the importance of mări-gutharra and other kin relations, of knowledge being passed on, and of the Ancestral acting in everyday life, deepens and extends the ways in which individual and collective identities are fused with places in complex ways.

The densities of names from particularly important Ancestral country shows how humans have attributed significance to that country, how it is a rich source of human knowledge, spirituality, and identity. Yet these maps also hint at a broader representation of language, for the dense areas of names are strongly associated with
particular clans and with that clan’s dialect and vocabulary. The map is indicative of the geographic density of language, in that it highlights areas of the country where human vocabulary has been extended and refined to express what is important about those places, and what is important about them goes far beyond finding names for the physical geography. Mapping person/place names points to the poetry and metaphor that is necessary to describe both the physical and metaphysical features of the country in sufficient detail to sustain social life. It points to human beings need to articulate and interpret aspects of those places to a greater degree than other places lying around them. The humanness of places once again comes through.

Yet physical and human continuities across space and time have been a constant theme, and the point should be reasserted here. Ancestrally important country is not bounded, and so language pours out from these places, deepening people’s comprehension of wider country and enhancing their capacity to articulate and learn about the world in which they are integrally involved. Some names, particularly water names, simultaneously specify and cohere, as they flow and connect yet also retain their distinctness. The previous chapter was about movement, water, and place, and the same themes resonate here. The final part of this chapter will examine that topic in more detail.

**Naming and Water**

“The saltwater country has names for each clan or tribe. For the sea country, there are people who know about their country, about the deep sea and over to where the clouds stand. Where the big clouds arise from, that explains it further. Inland it explains to us where the clouds stand and where that place is, where it will rain. Also the floodwaters, which become the rivers. Those rivers and streams have little names, which exist along the way. It is not only named as a whole river, for there are also small names. The water flows and goes into a ringgitj where a clan group can be in a neutral area on some other clan’s country. The water flows into clan groups. It is here that they acknowledge themselves. Along the riverbeds there are names, and the names we get are from there, then given to the children. We also have rituals and sacred song, it defines the meaning of our land, from wherever the floodwaters come from. From the freshwater. ...Some of the names represent saltwater and some freshwater. Water that comes down, from the rain, from the inland, it comes down as storm water and it comes down to the sea. The saltwater...here it rests in the saltwater country, but it all has names.”

Djambawa Marawili (Saltwater 1999:15)

Djambawa made this statement in Saltwater, an art collection catalogue with the subtitle “Yirrkala Bark paintings of Sea Country”, a subtitle that was noted in the first chapter to be misleading, for they are paintings of water, not just sea. Djambawa explicitly links water and people’s names, stating that they come from the freshwater, the saltwater, and the clouds. Table 7A shows the names from the overall set of meanings that just describe saltwater.

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119 Ringgitj potentially has a range of meanings. In this context it is being used to refer to small areas in a particular clan’s territory that function as a kind of “embassy site”, a place where people from other clans are legitimately allowed to camp, even when a degree of animosity exists.
Table 7A: Saltwater Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandurra</td>
<td>Mungurru, Yirritja moiety saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulthirirri</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyulma</td>
<td>Saltwater at Balaypalay and Yirrkala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Däkarra</td>
<td>Saltwater at Gurrumuru and Bawaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhakarra</td>
<td>Brackish water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djanggal</td>
<td>Brackish water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundiwuy</td>
<td>Saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhangayal</td>
<td>White chop on the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambali</td>
<td>An area of saltwater in Blue Mud Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gawumala</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gukarrngu</td>
<td>Fresh and saltwater mixing at Baraltja and similar places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumana</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guringgirra</td>
<td>Saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurrina</td>
<td>Marrakulu clan saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakarriny</td>
<td>Marrangu and Marrakulu clan saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liyarangmirri</td>
<td>Brackish water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manini</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mäpungu</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mäkalal</td>
<td>Saltwater at Yarrinya, dirt in the water showing stingray and fish feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matathi</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matuwa</td>
<td>Saltwater at the Dhuwa moiety area of Luthunba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metjmitj</td>
<td>Calm saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milngurr</td>
<td>A waterhole on land, or a freshwater spring bubbling up in the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirikindi</td>
<td>Balamumu, Dhuwa moiety saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morri</td>
<td>Calm saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motitj</td>
<td>Calm saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mungurrapin</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nälırri</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaliri</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritjarrngambi</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanmuła</td>
<td>Saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warranhan</td>
<td>Saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wataljja</td>
<td>Balamumu, Dhuwa moiety saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wunungmuра</td>
<td>Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yalawan</td>
<td>Dhuwa saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanganydja</td>
<td>White bubbles or foam on the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrunydjurra</td>
<td>Saltwater near Gurrumuru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yimakany</td>
<td>Brackish water in Yirritja areas like Baraltja</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here we have 38 names for saltwater. Rough water, calm water, foamy water, brackish water, water in places, water that belongs to clans and groups of clans, and so on. Saltwater as a whole is important, but it is articulated in detailed, localised ways that specify and distinguish even as they cohere. Yet one of the main arguments throughout
has been that the sea should not be taken in isolation, but as part of a world of water. Table 7B shows names that represent clouds.

Table 7B: Cloud Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltha</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balundjapin</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bawutjin</td>
<td>Cloud or blue and white sail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulpungara</td>
<td>Gumatj clan cloud rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bungupin</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharu</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djanukapi</td>
<td>Cloud rising from the horizon on Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djalirrma</td>
<td>Black and grey stormclouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djinimbilil</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djunapi</td>
<td>Madarrpa cloud at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galanggarri</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunapa</td>
<td>Cloud over Mungurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gungupun</td>
<td>Cloud on the sea horizon south of Blue Mud Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunyarrwan</td>
<td>Refers to boomerang shaped clouds in the south called Djalatany. The name is sung in saltwater songs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumaluma</td>
<td>Big rain cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangurr</td>
<td>Black cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manybaku</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayalipin</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maymarriny</td>
<td>Wangupini, cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milarrnga</td>
<td>White clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nätjin</td>
<td>Cloud rising from the sea, the name connects to the casuarina tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natjiny</td>
<td>White cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngalawurr</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niyama</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watjarrngambi</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirilma</td>
<td>Small white clouds floating separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wukun</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wunungdhun</td>
<td>Two meanings: dry season cloud, or rock at Garrapara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wurruluma</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yalmakany</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yananymul</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yinikarrkpathi</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the huge number of possible sources that might inspire personal names, to have almost 70 names out of 1000 that simply specify two states of water is remarkable, and it again reflects the importance of water in Dholupuyngu thinking and Dholupuyngu identity. The cloud names and the water flows were unrepresented in the ‘place name’ maps printed earlier, something that should be noted here given the critique of Western mapping in chapter 1. The clouds are integral to the way that coastal country is conceptualised and articulated, and as the names of the clouds are now shown to be the names of people, the humanness of that articulation and of the country itself shows through.
Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has gradually moved outwards. It began with single names from one extended family and with the particularities and significance of those choices. It then moved to the Madarra clan as a whole, where multiple names for people revealed regional links across hundreds of kilometres in different directions. The final movement, which built on those foundations, was to look at the overall set of name meanings in terms of two of the important themes of this work, place and water. Here the patterns showed the importance of individual historical trajectories and connections to places, but also of group associations with areas of country and the way in which language can both reflect and express those associations. Yolngu names are important, for they are records of deceased relatives and Ancestral manifestations, of vivid memories and close relationships. The meanings and connotations of names are carefully considered when they are chosen, and once given, they are treated with respect and not lightly revealed. Individual naming stories, multiple names for one person, and patterns in wider set of meanings can therefore demonstrate important features of Yolngu life, and märi-gutharra kin relations, women’s knowledge of country and Ancestry, and the significance of events in everyday life were just some of the themes to emerge. Finally, the prevalence of water showed how the eloquent statements in Saltwater are borne out by the reality of Yolngu naming, for clouds and saltwater are critical sources of inspiration for names. Many other themes could be explored in such a large set of names, but there is not the time to undertake that exploration here. What is important to understand is how naming reflects the richness of social life and the fusion between people, history, country, and Ancestry.

One day, sitting on a shell midden, Djambawa emphasised this point. He picked up an old, grey shell fragment and held it in his hand. “They had these ones” he said. “We don’t know about these people but their name been eating it”. The shells may have been eaten by a Djambawa in the distant past, or a Mayawuluk, or a Nuwandjali. The concrete reality of their existence had passed into Ancestry, but traces in everyday contemporary life still remain. Shared names collapse history and memory, blurring the distinctions between more distant forebears and the Ancestral figures of song and myth. It is that Ancestry, and how it articulates with contemporary life and movement across the country, that is the major subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 8

Ancestral Flows I: Spirits, Safety, and Seeing the Snake

Chatting and happy, the women piled into the boat. They were taking advantage of our early return from the hunt to head to Woodah Island for oysters, and as usual there seemed roughly double the recommended amount of people on board. A number of them I did not recognise, for we had a few visitors around Yilpara. With more laughter and cries to people on shore, the boat departed.

We sat under the mauraki tree at Yathikpa as the rest of the day idled by, vehicles leaving and then returning to take cooked turtle meat back to Yilpara. Afternoon slipped towards evening, and the light began to fade. Still no sign of the boat.

Waka Mununggurr slowly became more attentive to the thin strip out across the water that was the flat profile of the distant island. He was an important man at Yilpara, but his job as head schoolteacher was often secondary to his role as the resident senior waku, a descendant of a Madarrpa woman. On the ceremony ground, this meant he was charged with maintaining discipline and protecting the madayin, the sacred core of knowledge and Ancestry that was the wellspring of the clan. Yet his role also included the general care and protection of the community and the country, and in my time this had included such tasks as spearing poisonous snakes that strayed into the homeland, and halting and then thumping a joyriding teenaged car thief from Groote Island. A gentle and humorous man, he was one of those talented people who managed to combine that with the role of disciplinarian. Someone who joked easily and often, but was taken seriously when he needed to be. The shadows deepened as he watched the sea.

A little while later and at his request, he and I drove our cars south along the beach towards Yarrinya, the closest mainland point to the island. We stopped and looked out, but could see no smoke from a signal fire on the island, and no signs of life on the water, which seemed calm enough. The boys with us lit a fire to cook some more turtle as Waka climbed onto his roof rack in the last of the light. He sat cross-legged, gazing across at the island, but there were still no signs of life.

Fig. 8D
It began to get genuinely dark, and after a few minutes more, he sent me back to Yilpara with a message to prepare another boat for a rescue mission in the morning. As I drove out, he reversed his car around and pointed it at the island, engine off, headlights on, and prepared to wait some more.

Later that evening, Waka came over to my tent looking more relaxed, having brought the women back in his car. Scared by a big swell on the return journey and with the boat overloaded, they had sought shelter on nearby Gunyuru until close to dark, then had come back slowly, following the path of his headlights. “Too many people in the boat were strangers in that country, and it came up against them,” he told me over a cup of tea. The area between the islands is the meeting place of the waters of 5 different clans. People who know that country know that it is often rough.

Moving, travelling, and hunting successfully requires practical knowledge and certain skills, but it also requires being known, and not just by other people. The spiritual and Ancestral dimensions of Yolngu life are at their most explicit on the ceremony ground, and therefore it is not surprising that the rituals, objects, and processes of that space have been the subject of many rich anthropological analyses (Keen 1994; Morphy 1984, 1989, 1991; Toner 2001). The Blue Mud Bay people themselves expressed key elements of that Ancestral heritage in the art of the Saltwater catalogue, communicating a rich and expressive message that was simultaneously sacred and political, and communicating it in profoundly Yolngu terms (Saltwater 1999). If some of what appears in that document was at times oblique to the outsider, perhaps that gave an additional sense of mystery to a domain for which mystery and secrecy are fundamental (Keen 1994; Morphy 1991). Yet spirit and Ancestry also play a role in broader daily life, affecting peoples’ attitudes, behaviour, and movements across the country (Biernoff 1978). Sometimes that behaviour is preventative, motivated by respect and concern for the wider powers at work in their world. Sometimes it is responsive, as people identify and reflect upon happenings that then become explicit signs of the presence of those powers. What follows is, in part, an exploration of both of these. It is about spirits and safety, about the Ancestral and spiritual dimensions of human movement, hunting, and daily life in Blue Mud Bay.

“The Country Does Not Know You”

At the end of the previous chapter, Djambawa commented on a shell fragment from a midden, saying “we don’t know these people but their name been eating it”. This was not just a statement about historical continuity in naming, it was part of a conversation about how people and country relate to and engage with one another. I had started the conversation, asking why Yolngu speaking English reversed what non-Yolngu would say about ignorance of a place. I would usually say that I did not know a place well, or at all, yet Yolngu people often reversed the agency in the sentence saying ‘the country does not know you’. The answer Djambawa gave was that the spirits of deceased members of the clan were still present in that country, and if those spirits do not know people, then they may be hostile to them, and strangers are likely to get lost, injured, into trouble, or even die.
because of this unfamiliarity. For there is an earthiness about these spirits, an expectation that they can behave in capricious, mischievous, and humanlike ways, intervening in the processes of daily human life. The comment about the shell fragment arose at the point in the conversation where he was precisely emphasising the concrete reality of the life phase of those spirits, of their presence as human beings in the distant past.

Yet, as the title quote suggests, there is a danger that Djambawa’s explanation could be misunderstood. For those of the West for whom some kind of division between physical and spiritual has deep intellectual and cultural roots, there is the immediate temptation to place an active spirit into a passive country, and think that it is these active spirits that cause the country to rise up against those whom they ‘do not know’. Whilst it is certainly true that the spirits of the deceased are involved, in further conversations with Djambawa and Waka, the djirikay and the senior waku respectively, the two men made it clear that both the mokuy (spirit) and the ‘wänga (place) itself’ were responding. Wänga and mokuy, place and spirit, are both involved in the recognition of a stranger. The country is not just the backdrop, just the stage on which the theatre of life is lived, in which the actors appear. Life is lived in the place, not just on it, as Ingold expresses a similar point “the landscape is not an external background or platform for life, either as lived by the ancestors in the Dreaming or as relived by their ordinary human incarnations in the temporal domain.”(Ingold 2000:54)

So how then does the country ‘know you’? In the Ma’darrpa dialect, the normal expression for the country not recognising a person is bungan ngamuma, literally, does not know your sweat. Being known means being known as a human body, and the country recognises the bodies that belong to it. Waka explained how new people are introduced: “if a stranger from another community comes along that has never been to that place, well we just put our sweat on them, and then ask the country for good luck.” Strange bodies are given the smell of familiar ones to keep them safe and give them luck on the hunt. Similarly, people who are confident that they are known can also use their sweat to aid them. Baluka Maymuru, who lives near rich fishing grounds at Djarrakpi, said that when he fishes, he puts sweat in the saltwater, then puts a handful of water into his mouth and spits it out to ensure a good catch.

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120 Ingold expresses a similar point “the landscape is not an external background or platform for life, either as lived by the ancestors in the Dreaming or as relived by their ordinary human incarnations in the temporal domain.”(Ingold 2000:54)
the sign of the presence of a crocodile, and he was noticeably more wary near the water from then on.

People who are confident that their country knows them, that they are familiar bodies, are still aware of the risks, and still take precautions. The sense of confidence about their own place is underpinned and augmented by practical knowledge borne of long experience, whether this is attentiveness to a distant splash, or the ability to read small bubbles in the water. Dhukal is a senior owner and his sweat is known, but he equally knows what the bubbles might mean, and stays clear of the danger. Moving through and living in a potentially dangerous environment requires both attitudes; the confidence that one has what is required to live there safely, but equally the knowledge to be aware of the risks that nevertheless still exist. Those who are aware that they are strangers may have some of the latter from their experience elsewhere, but if the country does not know their sweat, then they are still at risk.121

“You Talk to the Country”

To be known by the country is to be known as a body, but that is not the only way of being recognised. Known and knowledgeable people are those who can avoid crocodiles through sweat and long experience, but they are also those who can talk to the country, who speak the language and know the names that come from those places. The Yolngu phrase for this kind of speech is ‘liyakurrwuänga’. Liya means ‘head’, for Djambawa explained that sometimes people will talk quietly in their heads rather than out aloud, and wänga is the word for place. However the phrase also refers to the spirits of the deceased people who live there, so talking to one means talking to both spirit and country:

Djambawa: You talk to the country, talk to the (dead) Yolngu, so that he knows you. You talk to them: “Give us something! We are the generation after you! Brrrr!”122

Waka: At Yathikpa, we would call Ngurrumula, Nimbarriki (names for a reef at Yathikpa). . .

Djambawa: Nimbarriki, and we can call outside names123 too like Borra, that man who was hunting in that area. He’s a (dugong) hunter, and his name (means) hunter so we always . . . have respect by calling his name out.

Marcus: So if you are in areas you know, do you worry about the mokuy (spirits) when you are out hunting?

Djambawa and Waka: No!

Marcus: Why not?

121 Povinelli uses material on Aboriginal hunter-gatherers at Belyuen to discuss in greater detail a number of the points touched on in this chapter. One of her examples relates to a boat almost capsizing after being hit by a large wave. Povinelli’s informants reasoned that the men on the boat had gone too near an island with a dangerous Dreaming attached to it (Povinelli 1993:695).
122 ‘Brrrr!’ is the sound people make when calling on the country and the spirits to aid them. It is made by blowing air through lips held lightly together.
123 ‘Outside names’ here refers to names that are used more often in the everyday public domain. The two names just mentioned could not be called restricted in the fullest sense, but they are less likely to appear in everyday conversation.
Djambawa: Well, we can talk to them. Because we can feel it in our life too, they are talking to us too. When you walk around you can have confidence.

Staying safe and hunting successfully means knowing how to talk and how to listen to the generations who came before, to feel them in your life and in that place. Djambawa calls them Yolngu, making no distinction between the living and the dead, even if it is clear from the context that he is talking of the latter. The names that follow emphasise this point, for Borrak is simultaneously the name of the Ancestral Madarrpa dugong hunter, of a long deceased relative, and of Djambawa’s younger brother. Nimbarriki is the rock where Borrak hunted the dugong, and also another name for Djambawa’s father Wakuthi. The calling of such names is a mark of respect, but in areas where the hunters are confident of their place, it is not a sign of fear. The ability to talk to the Yolngu of the past, to call their names, to feel them talking back to you, is the basis for the confidence that both men strongly express. Such confidence would not be felt on country where one is a stranger:

Marcus: If you weren’t from that country, would you worry about them (the spirits of the dead)?
Waka: Yeah! Because that mokuy, he knows that this Yolngu is a stranger, that he has never been to that place before, that’s why the people get scared.
Djambawa: I’m not talking about mokuy at Yilpara, the man who got that parrotfish.
Marcus: Mowandi?
Djambawa: Yo, I don’t worry about him, that that spirit will not give me fish, because I know his answer. He will give me fish. I only have to say just wängany dharuk [one word] and he will give me fish, any fish.
Waka: This wänga knows.

At Yilpara, Djambawa’s position is one of complete strength, for he knows that with ‘one word’ the mokuy will recognise that he belongs there, that he talks the language of that place. Not only would they recognise him, they would give him a positive answer to the unspoken question, they would give him a successful hunt. Waka’s tone in his final comment indicated that he merely intended to echo Djambawa’s statement about the mokuy spirit, but his choice of words, reverting to wänga, again shows the implicit and explicit continuities between people, spirit and country. Like the sweat of familiar bodies, knowing the right names keeps you safe and gives you success on the hunt. I more often heard the distinctive cry of ‘Brrr!’ followed by the names of the animals people were seeking rather than the names of Ancestors, although as the previous chapter and the passage above showed, the names can be both at once. Later, when reflecting on the conversation above, Djambawa gave a progression to calling out names, saying that at first he would call the ordinary names of the animal being sought. If he still had no luck, he might start calling the names of dead ancestors associated with that place, and finally the names of the Ancestral wangarr creatures themselves. The latter is a more powerful way to ask for aid, a more direct call upon the Ancestral power dwelling in that place. It shows ones deeper knowledge and ones ease, albeit respectful, in dealing with the beings that live there.

124 Myers was another ethnographer to note this sense of confidence amongst Aboriginal people (Myers 1986:54).
This calling of names is not just associated with hunting, but with life on country generally. ‘Brrr!’ is a call for assistance, for a change in luck. It might be used, alone or in conjunction with names, for any tasks which thus far have been unsuccessful, from freeing a bogged 4WD, starting a faulty boat engine, or removing a bark from a tree. It might be followed by the name of the boat or car125 or just stand alone as an indirect request for a change in fortune, “Brrr!” The source of the practical problem or frustration is being directly addressed, through relations with the spirits and the country, and through the complexities and specificities of naming. Those who are not known by the country, and who in turn do not know the names, might quickly attribute any problems they experience to not being known, and also will not be so confident of their ability to solve the problems if they occur. They may avoid a place altogether if they can, or quickly alter their behaviour or their movements, as the women did when the sea became rough. Moving and hunting successfully requires not just physical skills and a knowledge of geography, but a familiarity with those who lived in those places in the past, and who continue to live there today in a different form. Knowing they are there, how to talk to them, and that they in turn know you, is important in negotiating hunting, travel, and everyday life in Blue Mud Bay.

**Death and Country**

Nuwandjali and I sat on the bank of the billabong at Mangatjipa, fishing for saratoga. An hour passed slowly as we waited for the first bite. Then Nuwandjali began to have more success, a nibble on the line, then one fish, then another. Things were improving. A third came flipping onto the bank, trapped on his hook. Then I got one, and given my total lack of skill with the hand reel this was a sure sign that the best was yet to come. I rebaited my hook and cast it out, hopefully awaiting the next tug on the line. Nothing grabbed it straight away. Slowly, the minutes ticked by. My line lay slack and still, and so did his. The minutes turned into half an hour and still nothing. Then an hour had passed, then two, before finally, we gave up and went home disappointed. When we got back to the community, Waka told me in that oblique Yolngu way that Garrndjirra, a terminally ill, bedridden Madarrpa brother, had died that afternoon in one of the nearby houses. Sometime later, Nuwandjali reflected on that day: “That fishing going quiet was the country telling us about that death, our brother passing away. Sometimes, the spirit of that person becomes an animal and follows you, a fish, a bird, a dog. Sometimes the sea sends a message, with a big wave rising up. Because the spirit goes back to the land and to the sea, to the country where it comes from. I remember, (an) old (Gupa) Djapu man died right here (at Yilpara). Same time, at Dhalinybuy, inland, a djet [sea eagle] was sitting in a tree all day there, crying. First time anybody saw a djet there! That (Gupa) Djapu man was a waku, his mother (was a) Madarrpa. The djet was a message about that death.”

People must know the country and be known by it to travel and hunt successfully, but those who are sensitive, who feel they can read the signs, may also learn other things. As

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125 Cars and boats are usually given a name by their owners. In the past, canoes were often named after floating objects in Ancestral myths such as mangrove leaves, harpoons, or hollow logs. In contemporary life, cars can often receive the names given to canoes in the past, but they can also be named after other things, such as rocks, frogs and possums.
Nuwandjali describes, the country can react to important events elsewhere, particularly the death of a close kinsman, and pass on that news to those who are present on it. Yet the news may not be recognised for what it is until after the fact, until subsequent information and reflection mark its significance. Later, I asked Djambawa and Waka about the fishing going quiet at Mangatjipa, and the death of our invalid brother.

Waka: that’s his momo wänga [FM’s place], at Mangatjipa. Momo wänga.
Djambawa: This is what will happen sometimes. Those people who passed away, (when) we know them very well, they will, their spirit will come against you just to make you feel bad that you can’t get any fish. Mirriki djawaryun …your… (searching for a translation)…chest…get tired.
Waka: The feeling. If anything happens like that to me I will know straight away that something has happened. There won’t be any trees moving, no birds…
Djambawa: The… fear, the fear it’s almost close to you
Waka: Yo! The fear is all the time with you, like the spirit of the mokuy will be there with you.
Marcus: So the spirit of the mokuy can make the country go quiet?
Djambawa: Quiet and make really…
Waka: Scaring.

The country and the spirits are involved in human life, sending messages to people and responding to changes in the world. Waka also introduces a further element here, talking about the kinship relatedness between the dead person and the country where the sign was received. The sign appeared at his momo wänga (FM place), but it appeared there because living Yolngu were there to perceive it, even though at the time they did not recognise it for what it was. Both Djambawa and Waka are explicit about their capacity to recognise those signs, about how it is not just an external manifestation in the surroundings, but an intensely personal feeling, a weight on the chest. Yet the importance of remembering unusual events, and of reflection upon signs, is clear in Nuwandjali’s thoughts about the same phenomenon. Ingold (2000:57) notes this point as the landscape that is “infused with human meaning- that this meaning has not been ‘pinned on’ but is there to be ‘picked up’ by those with eyes to see and ears to hear”. He goes on to say that “hunter gatherers, in their practices, do not seek to transform the world, they seek revelation” (Ingold 2000:57). A couple of days spent cutting bush tracks with Djambawa would lead me to query the former, but my experience fishing with Nuwandjali the day our brother died could certainly be construed as the latter, as could Waka’s comment that he “would know straightaway that something has happened.” The similarities between this event and the conception stories discussed in the naming chapter are clear, as changes in the spiritual and Ancestral domain are manifested in signs in the country. Part of knowing the country is knowing what is unusual, and recognising that when it happens. That recognition may not include fully understanding the sign, but it does include recalling it so it can be interpreted in the light of information that comes later. Yet deaths can affect people on country for far longer than just on the day they occur.

“I’m thinking about that old man now!”
Batja climbed out of the turtle hunting boat tired and frustrated. They had been out there for a long time and arrived back at Dholuwuy empty handed. There was no
need for further explanation. We had buried Bakulangay Marawili some weeks before.

Deaths shape how people move through and engage with the country in a number of ways, for they can directly affect hunting success in an ongoing way. Nuwandjali’s explanation of why this happens was that when somebody dies, the spirit of the dead person is still with the people close to them, and this spirit can make hunting difficult, chasing away the animals. Waka, responding to a similar question about failed hunts, gave a slightly different interpretation, saying that the spirit of the dead person was still wandering about in the area, chasing the animals away, and this was because the area had not been smoked out. Nuwandjali’s answer related the person’s spirit to those close to them, Waka’s related the spirit to the country, and to whether the appropriate steps had been taken to open it up again after it had been closed. However continuities between spirit and country mean that the two responses are not contradictory, and in both cases there are extra dimensions and ramifications to death that extend beyond the immediate event, and that affect how people move and hunt.126

Closing the Country

Death also affects movement and hunting success in predictable ways, and the most predictable is that areas of the country will be closed when people closely connected to that country die. Deaths are ‘announced’ through unexpected events, albeit sometimes retrospectively interpreted, but closures are planned, usually predictable, and in part aimed at preventing such unexpected interventions in human life by spirits and country. Different but mutually supporting reasons for closing an area can be expressed; it can be done ‘out of respect for that person’, or in order to let the country itself rest, grieve, and recover from the event, or because the spirit of the dead person may still be wandering around in the area and could potentially cause trouble (Biernoff 1978:98). Sometimes it is expressed in terms of concern for the relatives of the person. For example, after the sudden and upsetting death of a young woman, Djambawa said the closure of places close to Yilpara was because “she was travelling in that area and her father doesn’t want to see her footprints and feel sad”. People are concerned about unexplained deaths, and closing country is one way of minimising further harm to the country and to living people. Some months after the death of this young woman, Waka described his thoughts: “we are still worrying about it. And we are still thinking about what happened…still wondering. We always think about it, of finding out ways…where are we going to find the truth? We are still thinking of it and worrying. It’s not over yet.”

After this death Yathikpa was closed because it is the Ancestral home of the Mađarrpa clan, and it remained closed for a significant period, despite its importance as a hunting site. The closure itself prevented certain parts of that country from being accessed, in this case for several weeks. The clan identity of the person is the most important factor determining what areas of country are closed when they die, for areas belonging to their own clan are

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126 It is worth noting here that Nuwandjali’s comment came prior to the Federal Court Native Title hearings in Blue Mud Bay, and Waka’s came after, with Waka himself giving evidence. One very strong focus of the court proceedings was on the processes of the closure of country during funerals and important ceremonies, and the subsequent processes for reopening it.
the most likely to be closed. However other country that could be closed might include that of màri clans, waku clans, places of conception, places which that person is otherwise named after, and, if it did not occur in the community, the place where the person actually died. The decisions about which areas to close and for how long are made by senior people and close relatives, and the factors they weigh up include the importance of the person, the importance of the area, the circumstances of the death, and pragmatic considerations about the practicality of closing particular areas. Practicalities are an important factor, for although Yilpara itself is a Mađarrpa place, it is not ‘closed’ on the death of a Mađarrpa person. Instead the house where a person died may be smoked, daubed with red clay, and left idle for a time.127 Sometimes an area that is an important travelling route is closed to hunting, but people are still allowed to pass through by car or by boat as long as they do not stop. In certain respects, the principle being used to respect the death and the spirits is altered behaviour, and where possible and appropriate that means closing the country fully. But there are other ways of addressing concerns about the presence of potentially harmful spirits and about the health of people and country.

Dholupuyngu understandings of spirit and country can also affect movement and residence more broadly. The spirit of a deceased person is said to journey back to their own Ancestral country after death, and the major function of a funeral ceremony is to guide the spirit on the journey home (Morphy 1984). However the journey is greatly eased when people actually die on their own country, and this has been important in the recent residence patterns and stability of the Yilpara community. Wakuthi and Bakulangay Marawili both chose to die at home, and their long periods of relative invalidity had a significant influence on the residence patterns of younger members of their families.728 In reflecting on part of the motivations for establishing a homeland on Dhalwangu country in the early 1970s, Gawirrin Gumana said simply that he felt sorry for his father, who was always moving around to different missions in his life as a Yolngu regional leader and politician. Gawirrin wanted to create a homeland on important Ancestral Dhalwangu territory so that Birrikitji, who was getting old, would be able to die in peace on his own country. The understanding that people bring to the relationship between spirit, person, and place has had an important impact on movement, presence, and residence on different timescales. However the country of the Dholupuyngu contains more powerful Ancestral manifestations than just the spirits of deceased forebears, and those manifestations can also be encountered in everyday life.

Wangarr: Seeing the Snake

One afternoon, Djambawa, and I were out in the boat with a couple of younger men who were visiting from elsewhere. Idling past Dharupi and Lumatjpi, Djambawa

127 The emphasis here on altered movement through the wider country should not obscure the fact that people can be equally concerned about dangerous spirits wandering close to or into the homeland itself. People are watchful in the days and weeks following a death, particularly after dark and if the death was unexpected. Concern increases when there are buffalo around, for some buffalo are said to be manifestations of the spirits of deceased people. Spirits can also interfere in community life long after they have died. Djambawa’s youngest son Ningiyama was circumcised poorly and was in pain for a few days afterwards. The spirit of a deceased elder, who would otherwise have done the cutting, was believed to be responsible, for pushing the hand of the man who performed the operation.

128 Bakulangay’s brother Garrindjirra also chose to die at Yilpara after a battle with cancer. He was the man who died the day Nuwandjali and I were fishing at Mangatjipa.
told me how Lumatjpi was a place connected with the Lightning Snake, Burrutji. A minute or so later, one of the younger visitors pointed out a strange, v-shaped current in the water behind us. He suggested that it might be a green turtle, but it looked strange, not quite right, even to me. Djambawa turned to look and said confidently “there’s Burrutji now”. I was struck by the ordinary tone in his voice, matter of fact rather than vindicated or excited, and our journey continued without any real further comment about what we had seen. Yet when I asked about it more than a year later, he still remembered that day. He said that the most important place for Burrutji was at Baraltja, and it was ‘more clear’ there. At places like Lumatjpi the snake “was just moving away and shining lights”.

The wangarr created the country in the Ancestral past, but they are not solely of the past. For Yolngu they still live and breathe, still inhabit the country, and although they are rarely seen, it can still happen. People need to be aware of them, of places where they might be found, and of places where they have left potentially dangerous reservoirs of Ancestral power. These places can be quite small and the roads that are critical to contemporary travel usually skirt or avoid them, so they have little effect on people’s everyday movements in contemporary life unless a wider closure has been agreed to because of a death. However in the case of some, such as Yathikpa, those places can be close to, or even part of, a major hunting ground. People do not expect the same responses from the Ancestral beings as they do from the spirits of the deceased, there is not the same concern about them capriciously or mischievously intervening in mundane human affairs. However they are given great respect as sources of great power, and they do respond to changes in the world.

We were all sleeping out on the beach near Dholuwuy, close to Yathikpa. With us was Bandipandi Wunungmurra, a Dhalwangu man who lived at Bälma, a homeland in southern Blue Mud Bay, and his younger brother Mickey, who was the town clerk at the big township of Gapuwiyak. That night, whilst everyone was asleep, Mickey woke up and saw a ‘creature’ out in the water. In the morning there was considerable discussion about what it had been. Mickey said that it had been watching us, but had no tail. Someone said it was a mammal, but my suggestion of seals and whales were both rejected, and not just by Mickey. I went to get my fish species identification book, but there was no great enthusiasm to search it. This was definitely ‘something else’. Nuwandjali, who was a participant in the conversation, emphasised to me that this was the first night that Mickey had ever spent here at Dholuwuy, something that he felt made the event more important and remarkable.

Later in the day, after a turtle hunt, a group of men sat on a tarpaulin on the beach, still engaged in considered conversation about Mickey’s sighting. Sitting with Bandipandi, Nuwandjali, and Mickey was Gambali Ngurruwuthun, who had driven down from his homeland at Rurrangalla. He was one of the two Munyuku brothers who had extensive ritual knowledge and acted as djirikay throughout the region. By

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129 The Lightning Snake is found in a great many Aboriginal myths from across Australia. Dholupuyngu versions, like many others, speak of it communicating with the snakes in other places through flashes of lightning, and also of the Snake travelling to those places.
“this time, more details had emerged. The creature was Burrutji the Lightning Snake, and Mickey had heard the old people\textsuperscript{130} singing when he saw the Snake.”

A long time later, I asked Djambawa and Waka, neither of whom were there for the later conversation, what they remembered of Mickey’s sighting.

\textit{Marcus:} Mickey said he saw something that night. Now I don’t really remember what he said he saw, that was early days for me and I did not really understand it…
\textit{Djambawa:} It was the Burrutji.
\textit{Waka:} Burrutji.
\textit{Marcus:} That’s what he said?
\textit{Djambawa:} Yo, he dreamt on that night
\textit{Waka:} He was telling us, when he goes to sleep, then he dreamed about it.
\textit{Burrutji was talking to him.}
\textit{Djambawa:} Talking to him. (At) the same time the old man, old Wakuthi, was talking to the Burrutji too, on the same night! He was asking (Burrutji): ‘why (are) you going away? Why (are) you moving away from that Baraltja?’ and the Burrutji said: “there is somebody blocking my place!”
\textit{Waka:} He was talking about, remember that crabbers boat?\textsuperscript{131}
\textit{Marcus:} Yo.
\textit{Djambawa:} So he moved away, he wanted to stay somewhere else, because he couldn’t…
\textit{Waka:} Sleep properly.
\textit{Marcus:} So that was the story of that night and that’s why Mickey saw him?
\textit{Djambawa:} Yo, Mickey. I was telling old Wakuthi [the] story and same time Mickey was telling the same story.

Here is an encounter with the wangarr far more complex than Djambawa’s confident and relatively unremarked upon identification of a strange current. The interpretation of the initial sighting develops in stages, with growing confidence, as more evidence emerges to support it, that it was the Lightning Snake that Mickey saw. At first the men are sure only that it was not an ordinary animal. Then, later in the day, following more conversation, the presence of a djirikay, and more details from Mickey, there is greater confidence that it was Burrutji. Mickey remembers that he heard ‘the old people’ singing. Some years later, the event has substantially grown in significance, in complexity and in reliability. Mickey’s knowledge of Burrutji comes from his dream, a dream that was not directly related to me on the day. Yet it was corroborated on the ‘same night’ by a dream of Wakuthi’s, the oldest Yolngu and perhaps the most influential in the region in matters of Dholupuynngu Ancestry. Wakuthi’s dream not only corroborates Mickey’s dream and his sighting of the Burrutji, it has provided the reason for the snake’s travel, that there is a sunken boat blocking the Snake’s hole and so it cannot ‘sleep properly’. I first heard from Nuwandjali a story of this boat blocking the hole nine months after Mickey saw the Snake, and again from him a year

\textsuperscript{130} Mayawuluk used this same phrase in Chapter 6, saying both the Yolngu word ‘ngalapalmi’ and the English ‘old people’. She was referring to the Djan’kawu Sisters of a major Ancestral narrative, but here the context and emphasis suggest a reference to deceased people from the past. However the two are different aspects of the same Ancestry, so the distinction is not a strong one.

\textsuperscript{131} Burrutji is said to live in a hole at the mouth of the creek at Baraltja. A crabbers boat had sunk and been partly buried by sand near the creek.
and a half later. He described how the Snake was now wandering around and had visited some faraway places, something that accords with its mythical role of linking faraway places together.\footnote{Similar to this story, Keen notes how in another part of Arnhem Land that the Lightning Snake Dreaming was still around and will be disturbed by fishermen (Keen 1984:428).} Mickey’s sighting has been interpreted in the light of other events, both the dream and the sunken boat, which are now said to be contemporaneous with his sighting. Whether they were or not does not now matter, indeed it may never have mattered, for strict questions of time and causality do not have the same resonance for Yolngu that they might for others, particularly in reference to the wangarr. Even if they were, the fact that the Burrutji was travelling across the country for any reason and could be seen by living Yolngu was not in question, for the wangarr are still believed to be alive and active in contemporary life.

There is a structural correlation between the conception stories of the previous chapter and Mickey’s sighting of Burrutji. In both cases there was a moment in everyday life that was identified as significant, but the significance was unclear until further reflection and later events confirmed a particular interpretation of the initial event. People became sensitive to these later events, bringing them to bear on the question of whether the initial one represented a manifestation of the wangarr in everyday life. When it was collectively decided that this was what had happened, it became an accepted part of the stories and the memories about Mickey and about that place. The wangarr impinge unexpectedly on life less frequently, but they are nevertheless engaged with the world, responding to the sinking of a crab boat and creating strange swirls in the water.

\section*{Hunting with Madayin}

“If you know where the madayin is, you know where the gapu (water) is, you know where you can find kangaroo or miyapunu (turtle and dugong). Like in the sea, we call it batpa (reef and seagrass where miyapunu feed). You know where you can find batpa. Or inland, you know where the water is and where the wallaby is and where the tortoise (is). You can catch those ones. Swamps. You know those places. Only these days all the piggypiggy spoil them! Those pigs, they haven’t got any story about that country.”\footnote{Wild pigs were introduced into the Northern Territory in living memory and are now in plague proportions in some places. Although there is not the space to explore it here, Djambawa’s statement about the animals ‘knowing the story of the country’ could certainly bear further analysis.}

Djambawa Marawili

Madayin is the word that Yolngu people use to describe the Ancestral heritage as a whole, including art, song, myth, dance, and ritual. Morphy describes the relationship between three key features of the Ancestral world and Yolngu ritual life in this way. The wangarr constitute the Ancestral world, the madayin represent manifestations of the Ancestral world such as art and song, and marr, a term that will not be discussed here, is the power emanating from those manifestations of the Ancestral world (Morphy 1996:177).\footnote{Thomson produced an extended discussion of marr (Thomson 1975).} As Djambawa makes clear, knowledge of the madayin does more than assist in avoiding dangerous places or in identifying a sighting of the wangarr, it tells you where to hunt. This
seems to represent a challenge to Ingold’s formulation of the role of such sacra, in which he denies that they are representations which Aboriginal people can consult as Westerners would consult a map (Ingold 2000:56). Indeed the dominant words in the quote above are about location: ‘you know where’. Ingold (2000:56) uses Myers’ comment that the meanings of songs remain obscure to those who do not already know the country to argue that this means that such songs cannot function as maps. I would modify Myers’ position simply by saying that the full meaning remains obscure until one has been there. From Djambawa’s comment, a first time visitor who knows the songs would clearly be in a more favourable position to one who did not, and indeed, would probably find great pleasure in their existing knowledge being confirmed in all sorts of ways. The songs contain place names, local features, environmental detail, the names of spirits and Ancestors, and so on, and all of these can assist in moving through and visiting places. Ingold (2000: 56) is right to note the wider role of song in conducting the attention of people into the world, and indeed of their potential to dissolve the boundaries between people and place. But it is equally true that they can also function as a map; the madayin can tell you where to go, and how to negotiate that place once you arrive there.

Yet as should already be clear, there is much more than location involved in such sacra, and the complex knowledge encoded in madayin has been an important element of recent publications on Yolngu art (Morphy 1991; 1999), and music (Toner 2001). The emphasis on hunting, travel and practices on the country is the major focus here, and a brief excerpt from the conversation between songs during a circumcision ceremony makes clear the way in which those songs can express further facets of place, animals, and the wider environment, thereby helping Yolngu hunters and travellers:

Ngulpurr Marawili:135 That song was minyga [garfish] swimming under that leaf (mangrove leaves floating on the water was the topic of the previous song).136
Binindjirri:137 Swimming, maybe feeding himself, with the current pushing him, he makes his way out into the Bay.
(The next song is sung, about getkit, the seagull)
Marcus: What is the seagull doing in that part of the song?
Nuwandjali: The seagull, he hunts, he sees the garfish, and the (mangrove) leaves. The bird is always there, when you go out into the boat, he is always there on the sea, along the coast. Like djet [sea eagle]. The hunter. Like the Yolngu hunts for miyapunu [turtle and dugong].

Knowledge of the madayin helps people travel, hunt, find water, and avoid places important to the wangarr. Furthermore, the madayin describes more than simply information about the wider environment, as a significant number of the songs and paintings emphasise processes, particularly hunting processes. The Madarrrpa, along with the other yingapungapu clans, sing often about a group of fishers paddling out from shore to fish from the reefs, then returning to shore in rough weather, making a fire, cooking and eating their catch, and

135 Ngulpurr Marawili is a member of Mundukul’s lineage and the head of one of the smaller families at Yilpara.
136 Yolngu songs often follow a progression in which one element of the previous song occurs in the lyrics of the next.
137 Binindjirri was the man identified as ‘half-Madarrrpa’ in Chapter 7 because his conception dream took place at Yathikpa.
discarding the bones. The Madarra Dugong Hunters’ ceremony relates how they search for harpoon materials, manufacture their hunting weapons on shore and then travel out to hunt the dugong in appropriate places. Djambawa, when out hunting on the boat one day, explicitly made the point that he was undertaking the same actions as the wangarr dugong hunters had in the past, and clear from the context of the comment was that he was emphasising the physical similarities, the congruence of action between himself and the Ancestors. The maadjayin was part of what told him where to go, what he would find there, and gave him confidence that he would be successful. It was also a source of personal pride and affirmation that he was undertaking the same actions as the famous Ancestors of the past.

Nor is this information only coded in major stories about important wangarr figures. Blue Mud Bay is a spiritually busy place, with many stories of different kinds told about various parts of the country, and the knowledge that is encoded in them can relate to the full spectrum of human life. In some places the narrative is stripped away, just a memory of the name of a spirit and what he/she was doing there. Yet the name conveys to whom the place belongs, and the activity can speak of what kind of resources are found there. It is the recall of the barest bones of a narrative whose details have faded, not a loss attributable to colonisation, but to the significance of the story for ongoing life. Nevertheless such minor figures still play their role in constituting places, and still find their way in the songs and stories of the larger Ancestral narratives that shape the country.

There are also other stories that are much more detailed, yet still do not play a major role in ceremonial activity. The story of Djetj, the sea eagle, is often referred to as a ‘kids story’, but it contains a moral about sharing as well as information about the coastline south of Yilpara and what resources are available there. The eagle remains an important animal to the Madarra, and can appear in paintings and stories about Madarra country. Another children’s story of a bird of prey, Gurrujiju, tells of a dramatic running race between five sisters, the kidnap of one of them by Gurrujiju, and her subsequent escape with the help of her father. It takes place on the Dhuwa country lying to the northwest of the community. The stories, and others like them, are the ‘outside stories’ of places which are not overburdened with significance, yet are also not lacking it, which have their own poetry, metaphor, and richness, even if they do not emanate power and grandeur in the manner of Burrutji the Snake. They give the storyteller the latitude to create, to entertain, and to give meaning to life and place without risk of trespassing into dangerous or deep territory. Amongst a great many other things, the major wangarr figures and associated maadjayin provide people with information about places and country, but there are other stories that function similarly at simpler and less significant levels, both geographically and Ancestrally. In both cases, the information has a profoundly practical, as well as a potentially metaphysical aspect.

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138 The story of Djetj has actually been published as a children’s story (Wunungmurra 2003).
139 There is also usually one or a pair of sea eagles nesting in the area permanently.
The spirits and the country are dynamic and changeable, and so are people’s relationships to them. The rules about how to behave and what to do can be altered if there is good reason to do so, and people’s behaviour adjusts accordingly. The changes in life over the recent history of the Dholupuyngu have necessitated changes in the way in which people interact with spirits and country across the region, and Yilpara itself is a notable example of this. Before the homeland was sited there it used to be called Rirruwalwuy and was considered a dangerous place, the name referring both to the lack of a waterhole there but also to the fact that its power meant people could get sores if they were not careful or behaved poorly. It was a restricted hunting area, and only senior men were allowed to eat the catch that came from there. Part of this power and danger came from the yingapungapu at Yilpara, a burial and ceremony ground where the bones of people and of the animals they consumed were thrown, a practice that was necessary if the health of animal, people, spirit, and country was to be maintained. The yingapungapu remains and is still a fundamental part of ceremonial life, but it is no longer used for bones in the way that it was, partly on advice from health professionals in Nhulunbuy. Senior men lifted the food consumption restrictions by conducting a smoking ceremony when the homeland was established, and the place finally became fully safe when a recently deceased man came to his wife in a dream and announced it. Both events are manifestations of the need to establish a viable way of living there, of processes and negotiations with the Ancestral world that were needed to achieve that. The opening up of Yilpara is also symbolic of a wider phenomenon in contemporary Dholupuyngu life. Wangarr and Ancestry remain primary resources in people’s attempts to live happily and healthily, but the degree of secrecy involved in that domain has shifted as life itself has shifted. It still performs a similar social function (Morphy 1991:75-100), but Djambawa talked of giving the younger people access to some of the deeper stories and names that were previously kept secret in order to give them strength and pride, to stop them hurting and killing themselves. The willingness to make some formerly secret aspects more public is one of the ways in Dholupuyngu people have chosen to respond to the changes occurring in their world. Altering Yilpara’s status as a place required negotiating with spirits and Ancestors as well as people, and it reflects wider changes in the interactions between kin, Ancestry, and country.

Conclusion

Human life and human movement is intimately intertwined with a country that recognises its own, that is Ancestral, alive and in motion. The spirits of the dead, the recognition of strangers and countrymen, and the sightings of the wangarr are part of the encounters and experiences of everyday life. Spirits might cause the sea to get rough, create a big wave, spoil the fisherman’s catch, sabotage a circumcision, or appear as buffalos after dark. Being both known and knowledgeable is the best way to live safely with the risks, for there is no way of avoiding them completely. One must smell right and speak the language, but also

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140 Suicide and self-harm, particularly amongst young people, is an extremely serious problem in many Aboriginal communities. I did not learn of any of these kinds of tragedies ever occurring at Yilpara, but they are a feature of life at some of the larger centres such as Yirrkala, Groote Island, and Gapuwiunik.
know that tiny bubbles mean crocodiles and it is best to keep clear. Being knowledgeable also means being sensitive to what the country can communicate, for when one knows what is normal, one can read signs in what is not. Knowing the madayin can tell the hunters where the water is and where the turtles are, for they condense and express moments from many lifetimes in detailed specificities of place and process. People who know how to sing and paint know where to go, what to hunt when they get there, and that the spirits will not rise up against them. The relationships between death, spirit, and country shape how people live, move and hunt, as closures protect country and people, and the old or infirm choose where to die. Such choices can have implications for the location of many other people’s lives. Lastly, places can change as people’s needs and lives change, and those changes must both accommodate considerations of spirit and Ancestry, but in return require accommodation and acceptance from the spirits and the Ancestors. Yilpara is no longer a place where people get sores and where the old men get the proceeds from the hunt, it is the place where everyone lives. The Dholupuyngu live in a different world now, and the nature of the relationships between people, country and Ancestry, means that, at least in some ways, the spirits and the Snake do as well. Yet many patterns strongly linked to the past are patterns that still matter a great deal to the present. The next chapter presents some patterns whose legal status and political ramifications are being debated in the Australian courts at the time of writing. They are the patterns of coastal ownership.
Chapter 9

Ancestral Flows II: Coastal Ownership

“We need this place, and we belong to this place.”
Bakulangay Marawili

Ownership is one aspect, one expression, of the relationships between people and places, and these relationships are both deeper and more general than the term ownership often conveys. It does not express all that people feel, but in cross-cultural communication in a colonial context, ownership is the element of people and place that is spoken about most often. In this chapter, I describe three interlinked patterns, three mutually supporting ways in which people talk about how country is owned and internally demarcated. There are some strong connections between these patterns and the content of previous chapters, particularly the personal names of chapter 7 and the coastal flows of the opening chapter, but in reality all the chapters are implicated in each other, and it is useful to emphasise this again prior to what follows.

Perhaps the real issue is what the term ‘ownership’ actually means. In English, and in non-indigenous society in general, the major connotations involve legal title rather than emotional, historical, and spiritual attachments to places, but these attachments can also be very important to non-indigenous people as well. As the previous chapter showed, perhaps one difference is the degree to which those places are seen to be active in some way in that relationship. Examining history, spirit, emotion, and everyday life in ownership also pushes the term away from legal definitions, and from definitions and structures of ownership that are firmly fixed. Life has changed substantially for the Dholupuyngu over the past 100 years, and whilst the patterns of ownership have changed less than many other facets of life, they are still shaped and informed by all that has occurred.

Land ownership systems in Aboriginal Australia have been an important focus of anthropological research since the late 1960s, when Land Rights first became prominent in public discourse. Prior to that period, anthropological accounts of Aboriginal land tenure and ownership were fewer, and were sometimes included as smaller sections or relatively restricted comments in ethnographies with a broader focus (Warner 1958:16). The land rights process gave significant impetus to research on the topic, and combined with the legislation which followed in 1976, resulted in some important publications about the indigenous ownership of land (Hiatt 1984; Maddock 1980; Peterson and Langton 1983; Peterson and Long 1986; Williams 1986) and also the sea (Davis 1984; Keen 1984; Morphy 1977). Accounts of Yolngu tenure systems are a prominent feature of writings on ownership, and the relationship between Ancestral beings, estates, and ownership has been the subject of considerable study (Morphy 1989, 1991; Williams 1986). That discussion will not be recapitulated here, for there is a degree of anthropological consensus about the ownership of country, albeit less consensus about the precise terms used to refer to the patrilineal owning group (Morphy 1991:47, 2004b:45; Williams 1986:95). Keen (2003:291-93) uses a looser definition of patrilineal group.

141 Williams reviews some of the early discussions of land ownership (Williams 1986:148-151).
Williams’ detailed account of Yolngu land tenure (Williams 1986) sets out a framework of rights and interests in land that is applicable to Blue Mud Bay, and Morphy has now added a substantial document (H. Morphy 2004) to his initial 1977 publication on rights and interests in the sea. Morphy’s recent account is a detailed exposition of the system of coastal tenure in Blue Mud Bay, oriented towards the requirements of a contemporary legal claim. Working in conjunction with Frances Morphy, who produced detailed genealogical, linguistic, and place name information (F. Morphy 2004), Howard Morphy outlines the systems of social organization, clan estates, and the rights and interests that the Dhölupuyngu claim to hold, a work that complements and significantly extends Williams’ general account of Yolngu land tenure. Rather than reviewing those documents in detail, this chapter provides a summary of some general underlying characteristics, patterns, and principles of coastal tenure, emphasising particular elements that are relevant to this account of contemporary coastal life in Blue Mud Bay.

Two of the patterns of ownership outlined here are a common feature of writings about the Aboriginal ownership of country. The first pattern is the journeys of the Ancestral beings, which traversed the country, creating people, languages, and places, as well as linking them together in complex ways. These journeys can be highly localised, generating the kinds of patterns that were evident in the map of personal names, but they can also connect places and people across wide distances. Much has been written about the ways in which the journeys of Ancestral creatures relate to ownership across Australia, and the major point emphasised here is how so many of those journeys in Blue Mud Bay make the transition between land and sea. The second pattern of ownership is the series of places and clan estates that are located by and through the actions of the wangarr. These places lie along the paths of these journeys and surround the sites of those actions, but spread beyond that core to take in country around them. As was noted in the previous chapter, there are far more stories of the connections between places and humans than just the major Ancestral narratives like that of the Crocodile and Snake, and these other stories are also part of the way places are named and grouped into estates belonging to particular clans.

The third pattern of ownership is the one that will be emphasised here, and indeed in different ways has been emphasised throughout the previous chapters. This is the pattern of the coastal flows, of the way water is linked together in cycles that can shape, create and cohere the country. As was described in the first chapter, the coastal flows are an outline within which particular clan and group specificities are expressed, and this is similar to the models of clan estates and Ancestral journeys, but it is far less common in the literature. In ownership terms, water in its liquid form dominates the discussion, for the relationship between fresh and salt, and between different bodies of saltwater are the major ways in which ownership is expressed. However although clouds and rain will be in the background here, they are still part of the story, for they have their names and places where they appear. Like the deep sea close to the horizon, the sky is not demarcated into estates, its role in the system is integrative, as the waters mix and rise in order that the cycles may begin again. The most important facet in terms of flows and bodies of liquid water is the way that they can be used to describe the relationship between groups, a relationship that specifies ownership, but also expresses the fluidity of sociality. When two bodies of water owned by different groups come together, it simultaneously reflects their distinctiveness and their interrelatedness, and both are important in life and in ownership within Blue Mud Bay.
The first two ownership patterns will be accompanied by images, both maps and paintings. The role of paintings in Yolngu life has been extremely well explicated by Morphy and will not be reviewed, and both sets of images here are simply intended as visual aids to make the discussion clearer. The maps focus on a part of the Yilpara peninsula, stretching from just south of the community around to Ngandharrkpuy to the northeast. This is a densely named and geographically diverse part of the Bay, making it useful as a case study of wider patterns, and although it is a relatively small area, it gives a good indication of the size and patterning of coastal clan estates. It also contains Ancestral activity on local scales, whilst a further map provides some wider examples from northern Blue Mud Bay.

The system of ownership assigns primary associations to the country of one clan, but also significant secondary rights in the country of one’s kin. These secondary rights are of critical importance in everyday life, for Yilpara people hunt all over the peninsula on country belonging to most of the clans from the region. In each case, they can identify a kin relationship between themselves and that country, and this is part of the basis on which they hunt. Gurrutu is the term for this system of kin relations (Morphy 2004:52, 176), but at Yilpara it is usually an implicit rather than explicit system. Other than situations where the country was closed because of a death, Yilpara hunters did not discuss the clan affiliation of that country as being significant in their choice to go and hunt there. Through their gurrutu connections and their local residence, Yilpara people know the country and are known by it, they speak the language and their sweat is familiar. Far more significant in influencing where hunters chose to go is the availability of transport, the time of year, the prevailing weather conditions, and the previous success of others at that site. This is an important reason for the emphasis on ownership as water flows, for weather and season shape human movement, and the water cycles simultaneously suggest a broader, integrated understanding of ‘Dholupuynu country’ that accords with the way Yilpara people normally move and live. This is not to deny the importance of the internal differentiations, for there are a number of contexts in which they are critical, but everyday hunting by Yilpara people was not one of these.

The ownership patterns are complementary rather than contrasting, for they comprise three ways of conceptualising the same system, three ways of talking about, thinking about, and living within a system of coastal ownership. In conversations about their country, people chose the mode that is most appropriate to where they were and what they were talking about; the place where Baru carried the sacred Fire into the sea, country at Yarrinya belonging to the Munyuku clan, or the flows of Mungurru saltwater representing the three Yirritja clans acting together in ceremony and in life. Indeed very often people would combine modes and shift between them. To a degree, there is a relationship between mode and distance, for onshore and in the shallows, the clan estates and Ancestral actions are more important, whilst further out, people speak of water flows, of the saltwater bodies mixing and clouds forming. However the flows are also found inland, and the Djan’kawu sisters paddled from across the sea, so again this distinction is not a strong one. All three

142 People nevertheless are still aware of the country they are on and how it relates to them and to others. Waka referred to Mangatjipa being the ‘momo wanga’ (MFZ’s place) of the dead man in the previous chapter. Occasionally someone would note that we were hunting on their clan country or perhaps their mother’s country, but this was not usually the basis for the decision to be there, merely something to emphasise once we arrived.
modes contribute to the patterns of people, of names, and of coastal ownership, and like the waters themselves, they flow into and through one another, they mix and they distinguish.

Coastal Ownership 1: The Journeys of the Wangarr

The wangarr creatures journeyed across the country, creating places and languages, naming animals and plants, leaving reservoirs of Ancestral power, identifying groups of people with country, and connecting places together, sometimes across wide distances. One striking element of the wangarr journeys of Blue Mud Bay is how many of them involve the transition between land and sea, and Map 9A\(^{143}\) shows a region around Yilpara itself as an example of this. All of the main Ancestral activities in the area involve coastal movement or transitions between sea and land in some way. At the bottom left of the map is the country associated with the Mađarrpa sea eagle Djeta, a story in which a father and then his son go out from shore to fish in a canoe off the fringing reef. Nearby is the path of Lulumu, the stingray that created the country around Yilpara, biting into the land to create billabongs and transforming into the broken line of reef that stretches several kilometres in the direction of Djarrakpi. These reefs are also the place where the fishermen took their canoe out to catch Yambirrku (parrotfish) in a major Mađarrpa narrative related to the yingapungapu sand sculpture at Yilpara. Also crossing the path of the stingray is the path of the Yambirrku, a parrotfish that swam across the small bay in front of Yilpara after it was speared by Mowandi, the mokuy hunter that Djambawa referred to in the previous chapter. Bakulangay Marawili painted this area, showing the path of the stingray and also the fishermen out in their canoe fishing for Yambirrku (Fig 9A). North of Yilpara is Lumatji, the other Yirritja place marked on the map. This is not a major site for the snake, but is the place where the strange current in the water that Djambawa identified as the Lightning Snake in the previous chapter.\(^{144}\)

The other two journeys marked on the map are Dhuwa moiety narratives. A turtle hunter called Yangamawuy harpooned a turtle which then escaped, trailing the turtle rope behind it, out onto the circular reef where it was finally captured, and the sandbar connecting the reef to the shore is the transformed rope. This narrative belongs to a smaller lineage of the Marrakulu clan, who are sometimes referred to by the name of the turtle rope, Bandjawalakuy. However the Gupa Djapu clan also have a substantial stake in this country, and claim ownership over the Bangara reef itself. The second major coastal narrative in this area concerns the Djan’kawu sisters, who paddled their canoe around the Bangara reef and stopped briefly on the shore at on the other side, creating a waterhole with their digging stick before paddling on to other parts of the Bay.\(^{145}\) The Djan’kawu narrative is one that

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\(^{143}\) Information for maps 9A and 9C, specifically the exact positions of Ancestral paths, place names and clan boundaries, are drawn from the data generated by Howard and Frances Morphy for the Native Title claim.

\(^{144}\) In talking about the sighting, Djambawa emphasised that it was not a major site for the snake, but that it did connect to more important places elsewhere such as Baraltja in Jalma Bay and Milngiyawuy in Myaloola Bay. In the last chapter the Snake was seen ‘journeying’ but the predominant way that the Snakes are said to communicate in the Ancestral narratives is through lightning, speaking to other snakes in other places across great distances.

\(^{145}\) In terms of this area, there are slightly different versions of the Djan’kawu narrative. In the version reported by Morphy, the Sisters did not land on the shore, but are nevertheless associated with the djalkiri area at this place, which is also connected to Djarrka the ancestral goanna, and the djota tree (Morphy 2004:108).
Map 9A: Ancestral Paths

- Lightning Snake
- Djan’kawu Sisters
- Turtle Hunters
- Yambirrkú
- Yilpara
- Djet
- Yingapungapu Fishermen
- Lulumu

1cm=0.9km
Fig 9A: Painting by Bakulangay Marawili of the Yingapungapu Fishermen and Lulumu the Stingray

Fig 9B: Detail from a painting by Djambawa Marawili showing the Makani the Queenfish and Nyoka the Mudcrab at Baraltja (also pictured: Getkit the Seagull and Wangupini the Madarrpa Sea Cloud)
(Source: Saltwater, 1999)
connects a number of Dhuwa moiety groups, something that will be discussed further below, but here is predominantly associated with the Gupa Djapu clan.

The journeys and Ancestors depicted on this map show the range of ways in which those journeys can create and connect to the country. The stories of Djetj, Yambirrku, Yingapungapu Fishermen, and the Turtle Hunters take place on a small scale and refer predominantly to local geography. However the Lightning Snake place at Lumatjpi, refers to places a considerable distance away, showing how this distinction should not be drawn too strongly, and the Yingapungapu Fishermen story is similar, for it is grounded at Yilpara but implicitly and sometimes explicitly refers to the Manggalili Yingapungapu country at Djarrakpi and the Dhalwangu Yingapungapu country at Garrapara. Finally, the Djan’kawu narrative involves Ancestors who travel and connect places across country throughout northeast Arnhem Land.

A second map on a wider scale shows three other Ancestral journeys that have a similar linking role to the Djan’kawu in the Bay (Map 9B). These three journeys are depicted as linear, but at certain points in their travel the Ancestral beings encounter country of the opposite moiety, at which point they usually dive underground. The Manggalili clan Nguyenkal (kingfish) travels from Manggalili freshwater country at Wayawu down the rivers to the sea, and then east to the Manggalili saltwater country at Djarrakpi, before turning northwards to Yirrkala. The Dhuwa moiety shark travels from Luthunba in Jalma Bay southwards, past Woodah Island and ends up at Groote Island. A third journey, made by Makani the Queenfish, connects Yirritja people from Numbulwar and southern Blue Mud Bay to the Yirritja people of the northern Bay. The Makani travelled northwards creating long beaches and visiting important Yirritja areas such as Baraltja, until it reached Yathikpa. Nyoka, the Yirritja mud crab followed Makani, smoothing the beaches that the fish had made and creating other features such as mangroves. Djambawa Marawili painted Makani and Nyoka as part of a painting about Baraltja, the Ancestral home of the Lightning Snake (Fig 9B). These three examples connect the people of northern Blue Mud Bay to others throughout the region living in three different directions; north to Yirrkala, south to Numbulwar, and southeast to Groote Island.

The Manggalili kingfish journey also emphasises how many of the important wangarr are animals and/or human figures whose non-wangarr counterparts frequently make the transition between land and sea, or between saltwater and freshwater. The overall Ancestral heritage of the Madarrpa provides a good example of the prevalence of this phenomenon. The crocodile Baru can be found walking on land on a dry floodplain, in rivers many kilometres from the coast, and out at sea, kilometres from shore. It is associated with Madarrpa country at Baykutji 15km inland, but also with the brackish water floodplain at Garrangali, and with the coastline and sea at Yathikpa. In the Yathikpa story, the wangarr Baru starts as a half-human/half-crocodile figure on land before and travelling into the water carrying the sacred Ancestral Fire on his back. This Fire remains in

146 It is worth noting that during the mission era members of the Manggalili clan did predominantly live at Yirrkala mission, whilst the Madarrpa lived predominantly at Numbulwar and Groote Island. Whilst certainly not the major reason for those patterns of residence, the journeys here do match orientations in people’s lives in the past.
147 Baykutji was one of the places that featured in Mayawuluk’s story of the epidemic in chapter 6.
Map 9B: Regional Ancestral Journeys
the water to this day as both a symbol of the Madarrpa,148 and a direct expression of the continuities between terrestrial and aquatic places. In the Dugong Hunter story that also takes place at Yathikpa, the Hunters begin on shore, making what they need for the hunt from the surrounding forest and then take to the water in their canoe to hunt. At Baraltja, the Lightning Snake Burrutji lives in the place where salt meets fresh, whilst another Ancestor for the Madarrpa is the barramundi, a fish that breeds high up in the freshwater rivers before migrating out to sea.149 In all of these stories, the wangarr are animals or humans that move between land and sea and or between saltwater and fresh,150 and these movements can manifest themselves in an ongoing way, as the stories of the Snake in the previous chapter made clear.

The wangarr created paths, places and country, but created them in specific and local ways that emphasise particular areas of the country, as the patterns of the previous chapter about naming indicated. These paths and actions do not form a systematic grid laid across the region, they are not carefully divided, evenly spaced, or continuous with one another. They are generated from within place and their primary purpose is to create and sustain those significant places and the groups of people that hold them. To return to the comparison of the opening chapter, they emerge through the specificities of life from within rather than through a view from above (Ingold 2000:57). Nevertheless, when examining them for overall patterns or consistencies, it is noticeable how many of these stories emphasise creatures that live in both salt and freshwater, and also humanlike figures that journey on both land and sea.

Coastal Ownership II: Estates and Named Places

A second way of thinking about Yolngu ownership of coastal country is the way that wider areas are divided up into estates associated with a clan, or sometimes a few clans of the same moiety. Such areas generally contain at least one important place associated with a wangarr figure belonging to that clan, sometimes called a djalkiri151 place, whilst there are also other named places of lesser power and importance in Ancestral terms that surround it. An important name can be used to refer to the whole estate, and Yilpara is one good

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148 The Madarrpa are sometimes known as the ‘Fire’ clan. In expressing the importance of the Fire one day, Djambawa said “the Fire remains there in our minds. We always use them in deaths and funerals. The fire is written in our minds and souls.” Fire and the Crocodile connect the Madarrpa with Yirritja clans further north at Birany Birany and Mata Mata.

149 The Barramundi is rarely painted on its own, but is often found in association with the crocodile (1999:98).

150 Other Ancestors from other clans show a similar pattern to the Madarrpa. Dhukal and Manman’s Dhudi Djapu homeland at Dhurupitjpi lies on country created by another journey by an Ancestral Shark. It began its journey inland at Guynfitjpi northeast of Garrapara, then dived underground to avoid Yirritja country, resurfaced on the western coast of Grindall Bay, then swam northwards up to the mouth of the river. It dived under again to avoid Yirritja country and resurfaced in the freshwater close to Dhurupitjpi. Sharks do travel up rivers in practice, and have been captured close to Dhurupitjpi, more than 10km inland. There are also shark species in the Northern Territory that live entirely in freshwater.

151 Djalkiri is a term with a number of meanings. One translation often chosen by Dholupuyngu people when discussing it in Ancestral and metaphorical terms is ‘foundation’. However it can also mean ‘footprint’ and ‘foot’ in both a literal and figurative sense, and the root of a tree. Keen uses another term for foot (luku) but discusses the same concept (Keen 1994:106) and Morphy provides an extended discussion of djalkiri places in northern Blue Mud Bay, identifying all of the major sites (Morphy 2004:84) and following.
example of this, but the smaller places within it still have identifiable locations. These surrounding places may have other stories associated with them that can relate to the central Ancestral narrative, or that independently constitute a part of the clans Ancestral heritage. Named places are generally denser around waterholes, along rivers, and along the coastline, and the names and the order of places along a river or coastline are incorporated into the songs for that place. Named places along the coast usually extend some distance out into the water or to the edge of fringing reefs if they exist. Waters and seabed further offshore can be somewhat different in ownership terms, and will be discussed in more detail below.

Estates and places tend to have clearer boundaries along the coastline and rivers than inland, but they are not necessarily fully distinct, and one way of describing this is of a core area from which the name emerges and an outer zone of transition where that place merges into the next. However owners can decide on an exact boundary if and when necessary, something that is increasingly required in their engagements with wider Australian law and, to lesser extent, industry. Similarly, in terms of the Ancestral journeys, the estates and places lie along the paths of that movement and spread out from them. These areas are well known, but again the boundaries can remain imprecise unless the need arises to specify them. However the core places of the country, the djalkiri places, are very well known, as they are the places where the Ancestors were most active.

Map 9C shows the named places and the clan or moiety groupings for the country around Yilpara that was depicted in Map 9A. The potential for dense naming of places was clearly evident in Chapter 7 and here it is possible to see how many smaller names are grouped within a larger estate that is usually owned by one clan. Comparing Map 9C with 9A shows how the density of naming also relates to major Ancestral activity, particularly around Yilpara, where Djet, Yambirru, Lulumu, and the Yingapungapu Fishermen are all active. It is equally clear how many places along the coastline are named relative to places inland. In this respect it is important to note that although lines have been drawn here for demonstration purposes and they are lines that have been drawn by the Dholupuyngu, the boundaries between clan estates inland are not normally determined as specifically as they have been here.

An overall pattern in the map is a moiety one, for the southern and western areas are predominantly Yirritja Madarrpa, and the central, northern, and eastern areas are Dhuwa moiety, Marrakulu and Dhudi Djapu. However the small areas of Dhudi Djapu clan territory in the midst of Yirritja territory indicate that larger patterns can be undercut by variations at smaller scales, and this phenomenon is evident throughout the Bay. A further element of this moiety division is the line dividing Dhuwa saltwater from Yirritja saltwater. The way different kinds of waters mix, separate, and interact will be discussed in more detail below.

152 Some information for this map was generated from a preliminary mapping trip I conducted with Djambawa Marawili in late 2001. These names and locations were augmented by additional information gathered by Howard and Frances Morphy in preparation for the Blue Mud Bay Native Title claim. The place names printed here are those from the map prepared for the claim by Howard and Frances Morphy.

153 There are significant differences between the map of places names that appeared in Chapter 7 and the names reproduced here, and there may be a number of explanations for this. The first is, as Chapter 7 itself discussed, the potential for ambiguity for Yolngu in what the term ‘place name’ covers in English. The second is that there are often synonyms for place names, as there are for people’s names, and the process of reviewing names in Chapter 7 turned up more of these synonyms.
Map 9C: Estates and Places

Key

-----Clan Estate Boundary
-----Moity Sea Boundary

MD-Madarrpa Clan Country
DJ- Gupa Djapu Clan Country
DD-Dhudi Djapu Country
MK- Marrakulu Clan Country

Bangara- Regional Place Name
Wararrpa- Smaller Place Name

1cm=0.9km
detail below, and indeed the Dhuwa waters of this country are more complex than the map represents. What is important to note at this point is that the most common situation is that the waters close to the coast are the same moiety, and indeed usually owned by the same clan, as the adjacent coastline. However it is possible for the waters belonging to one clan and/or moiety to lie immediately adjacent to waters belonging to another clan or moiety, and this situation occurs with the Dhudi Djapu land adjacent to Mungurru sea in the central area of the map. The final pattern of ownership will explore water flows in more detail.

Coastal Ownership III: Coastal Flows

The third way of conceptualising ownership patterns in the country is through flows of water. This conceptualisation has been emphasised from the outset, partly because it emerged strongly from analysing hunting and presence on country in everyday life, but also because the wangarr journeys and clan estates have been the subject of considerable work by others. Again, in drawing out this third way of conceptualising ownership, it is important to stress continuities as much as contrasts, to make explicit that the flows are another variation useful in communication rather than a separate system of ownership. The artworks above contain all three modes simultaneously, because the madayin speaks of Ancestral action, of place and ownership, and of the flows of water. This is also true of the songs, as is demonstrated by comments made by singers between songs at a circumcision ceremony:

(The song ends)
Djambawa: You know that first song that we were singing, about mixed (brackish) water? It's going, when its full tide, into the bay now...right in Jalma bay, Baraltja. Mixed water going into and out of the mangroves.

(The men sing again, and the song sequence moves on)

Djambawa: This song is all about the saltwater. The main Saltwater Dreaming going out to the ocean, at low tide, and then to high tide, bringing those things, trees, leaves, all those things going (back) into the river. Those leaves was coming out before from rivers, and they were floating around in the ocean, the sea. Now, when its full tide, the ocean is gathering them again, and bringing them back to the land, to the river or the land.
Bininydjirri: Sometimes they end up (at) all the wânga[places], the particular Yirritja areas. You have to call (sing) those particular places.
Nuwandjali: All going with the tide.
Djambawa: We are almost at Gunyuru now. We will start from Gunyuru and go back into Jalma Bay.

(The men sing again)

Nuwandjali: The song was about the cloud rising in the sea, over around Gunyuru way. And then after that the sea began to change, the wind from...
Bininydjirri: South.
Nuwandjali: From the cloud called mađirriny. Southeast wind. The wind called mađirriny and also called other names, different names.

Djambawa: When you go by boat you can see the cloud and the wind blowing…

Bininydjirri: All those words that we sing about are words of water. Describing the water, how it goes, where it's coming from.

Djambawa: Some of the names we calling are in the river...

Bininydjirri: That's why sometimes we call the names of the places, the tide. Later on we'll sing about beach, fish, and all that.

The men sing their own clan mađayin and they sing of the coastal flows; wind and cloud, river and sea, floating objects, words of water and the names of the places. Although its main function was to circumcise three boys from the Dhalwangu clan, the ceremony contained numerous sophisticated representation of saltwater country, for the senior participants had chosen that as a particular emphasis. Demonstrating such a detailed familiarity with the environment expresses ownership for the Dholupuyngu, as it indicates that one knows that country intimately. But ownership is integrally linked with wider constellations in social life, and so the water flows simultaneously express ideas about kinship, marriage, fertility and language, to name just a few. The richness of water as a metaphor lies partly in its flexibility, in its capacity to express mixing and separation simultaneously. A deep understanding of the water flows is put to social use, as people are sensitive to the truths which the country has to teach them, but are equally aware of the ways in which the country affirms social realities that they already hold to be true. Natural phenomena and social facts mutually affirm and constitute one another. Put simply, the water must flow in that direction because that is where the country and people it belongs to lies, and the identity of that country and those people are affirmed because the water travels in that direction.

**Water and Kinship**

Waters associated with different clans that come together are expressed in the kin terms märi-gutharra (MM(B)-(Z)DC) and ngändi-waku (M(Z)-(Z)C), and in different ways both of these terms have been introduced in previous chapters. Märi-gutharra was critical to the naming processes of Chapter 7, expressing links between groups of the same moiety. Ngändi-waku was introduced more obliquely, through the figure and roles of Waka Mununggurr. It expresses a relationship that crosses moiety lines, the relationship between mother and child,\(^{154}\) and through that relationship, the child gains both rights and responsibilities in their mothers’ country. Märi-gutharra is the kin term used to express the situation when waters of clans of the same moiety come together, and ngändi-waku expresses contact or mixing between waters of different moieties, or of the more rare situation where water belongs to one moiety and the land belongs to the other. As already noted, this occurs in the estate map above, where Gupa Djapu coastline lies adjacent to Mađarrpa saltwater, whilst the märi-gutharra relationship was expressed between the Dhuwa moiety Gupa Djapu and Marrakulu clans in the northern waters and land on the map.

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\(^{154}\) Ngändi-waku can also be expressed using the term yothu-yindi, which literally means ‘child’ and ‘big one’, but means ‘mother’ and ‘child’ in that context.
Multiple ngāndi-waku and māri-gutharra relationships can be expressed in the same places, as waters and land from different clans meet together. Milngiyawuy is a Yirritja moiety Lightning Snake area at the northern end of Myaloola Bay, and it belongs to the Munyuku clan (Map 9D). The Yirritja Munyuku freshwaters there are ngāndi (mother) to the waku (child) of the Dhuwa moiety Gupa Djapu freshwaters that flow into the same floodplain, whilst the floodplain empties into Dhuwa moiety saltwater belonging to Gupa Djapu on the western side of the Bay, and the Marrakulu on the eastern side, with a central stream of Munyuku water flowing through the centre. The Marrakulu are in turn ngāndi for the Yirritja Munyuku waku, and that two ngāndi-waku relationships involving the Munyuku are complemented by the māri-gutharra relationship between the two Dhuwa clans (Gupa Djapu and Marrakulu). A second example is flows on a single river into Grindall Bay. The water begins at the Yirritja Manggalili freshwater area of Wayawu (māri for the Yirritja Madarrpa clan, ngāndi for the Dhudi Djapu) and flows through the Dhuwa moiety Dhudi Djapu territory at Dhurupitjpi (ngāndi for the Madarrpa, waku for the Manggalili) before arriving at Madarrpa country itself (gutharra for the Manggalili, waku for the Dhudi Djapu). In the previous map of regional Ancestral journeys, this was the path taken by the Nguykal or kingfish heading to Yirrkala. At the point where the Nguykal encountered the Dhuwa section of the waterway, it dives under to emerge again at Yirritja Madarrpa territory. Waka spoke at the beginning of the previous chapter about how the bay through which the women in the boat journeyed is a place where the waters of five clans come together. Such a situation can represent a whole network of connections through multiple relationships of this kind, and, as he said, the water in such places can be rough, reflecting the complexities of social life.

Marriage and Fertility

In a similar way to kin relations, people can also relate water flows to marriage. Dholupuyngu marriages were, and to a lesser degree still are, integrally tied to the complex systems of exchanges between clans. Traditional marriage arrangements cycled through generations in patterns, and in describing these patterns, Djambawa used the example of Dhäkiyarr, a Dhudi Djapu man from the freshwater country at Dhurupitjpi. Dhäkiyarr’s mother was a Manggalili clan woman, and so this relationship could be expressed through the same flows above. The Manggalili ngāndi (represented by the freshwater at Wayawu) gave birth to Dhäkiyarr, the waku from the Dhudi Djapu at Dhurupitjpi, which is downstream from Wayawu. Dhukal is one of Dhäkiyarr’s Dhudi Djapu grandsons (SS) and is married to a Manggalili clan woman. The water flows reflect Dhukal’s marriage, as it goes from Dhurupitjpi downstream to the sea, where it mixes and eventually flows past the Manggalili saltwater country at Djarrakpi, the country of his wife Galuma Maymuru. Water travelling from place to place can reflect the patterns of connections between people, and of marriages down the generations.

Complementing its role in marriage patterns, the mixing of fresh and saltwater is a key symbol of fertility, and many of the most important places in the Bay are places where the

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155 Mayawuluk referred to Dhäkiyarr when recounting the place names on Woodah Island in Chapter 6. He was the man who speared a policeman on the island in the 1930s and was taken to Darwin for trial (Egan 1996).
Map 9D: Waters at Milngiyawuy/Mayawundji
two come together. Both Baraltja and Mayawundji/Milngiyawuy are floodplains where fresh and saltwater meet and are homes to the Lightning Snake of the Madarrpa and Munyuku clans respectively. Garrangali is a crocodile breeding ground belonging to the Madarrpa. It is a remarkable place where a small patch of dense jungle grows like an oasis in the midst of salt flats, the jungle fed by a freshwater spring bubbling up from underneath. Djambawa also recalled an important place at Yathikpa where, as a child, he could drink freshwater out in the middle of the sea. Drinkable freshwater came bubbling up from the seabed and the water was blue all around it, rather than the usual muddy greenish brown. This was said to be the place that the Dhuwa shark and the Manggalilili kingfish travelled through on their journeys. Connections between the mixing of fresh and saltwater and fertility appear explicitly in the descriptions of a number of the artworks in Saltwater related to Blue Mud Bay, particularly at Baraltja (Saltwater 1999: 94, 34, 38). Fertility is further related to water through a connection to the newborn baby. The fontanelle on a newborn baby’s skull is said to be the place where the wisdom and knowledge enters and becomes concentrated in the future. This is correlated with the swirling waters of the whirlpool, in which water enters, then curves around and around, before being released to flow on. Water and conception, and mixing waters and fertility, form an important constellation in Yolngu thinking about the generation of life and its relationship to country.

Language

Similarly, water can also be used as a metaphor for language. In his declaration at the front of ‘Saltwater’ (Saltwater 1999: 10-11) the now deceased djirikay Dula Ngurruwuthun talked of how the freshwaters of his own Munyuku clan flow into the saltwater belonging to other Yirritja clans in Myaloola Bay, and the different taste of this brackish water reflects the dialectical variation of the Munyuku. In return, those dialects can also identify water in highly specific ways. The importance of names for water emerged in Chapter 7, and clan-specific attributes can also be expressed through appropriate use of the vocabularies of those dialects. Water from Yarrinya, the peninsula southwest of Yilpara owned by the Munyuku, is called garrngirr or mäkalal, emphasising that it has been stirred up by the Ancestral stingray. This Munyuku word should not be used at Yathikpa to the north, even though the water has a very similar appearance. Yathikpa water belonging to the Madarrpa is ganumirri (containing ash), a description of its turbidity that refers to the Ancestral Fire in the water at Yathikpa. Similarly, silty water at the Dhuwa area of Luthunba is blown by the strong wind wirrpuma, whilst dulkarama is a Dhuwa word for sand and dust of the land that has come down the rivers, as opposed to being stirred up from the seabed. Water can be a metaphor for language and dialect as it is for marriage and kin, but language can

156 Direct references to the relationship between the mixing of salt and freshwater and fertility are not as common as one might expect in the literature on the Yolngu. Both Warner and Keen relate fertility to water in a number of ways, but do not talk explicitly about mixing. Warner describes clan waterholes which are the sources of conception spirits for the clan, but does not address the mixing of waters directly, except in passing when noting that such places occurring in the ocean are usually associated with a tidal spring (Warner 1958) page 20. Warner’s formulation has been criticised by Williams as emphasising water too much, and she suggests a broader definition of important places being sources of conception (Williams 1986: 33). Keen also draws the link between water and conception (Keen 1994: 107) noting how the wangarr assisted in ongoing reproduction by menstruating in water. He also writes about how people are believed to be conceived ‘of the water’ of a particular group (Keen 1994: 107, 126) and that this can confer certain rights. However he does not directly address waters mixing.
equally identify water in highly detailed, localised ways. Taste, clan affiliation, and name are identifiable markers, which both determine and are determined by location. As was shown in the number of names for saltwater in the last chapter, there is a great capacity to differentiate between different kinds of water at different locations. This capacity to differentiate, to combine, or cohere, means that water can and is used in diverse ways to talk about important characteristics of social life.

We Share the Sea: Saltwater Ownership

Bininydjirri: the Ma'arrpa and the Dhal'wangu are the two clans and they sing all those songs from the top (river) to the sea. As we sing along, we see the importance of those words and where people identify themselves. What they are and their link to the particular song, the land, and the water. The saltwater. Some of those leaves are floating, drifting, from Yirritja wänga [places], you have to call the Yirritja clan and the bundurr. That connect. All the leaves are gathering together as one, that symbolises the people.

Nuwandjali: Yo. They came with the current from different areas. You can't even recognise where they come from, they all come from different places.

Bininydjirri: But you do recognise as you sing along. Recognise that manikay [song].

Marcus: Do the Dhal'wangu and Ma'arrpa sing the same song or do they have slightly different?

Bininydjirri: Yaka [no]. Same song. Meaning same.

Marcus: Same tune?

Bininydjirri: Yaka [no] tune different, but the story, the dhawu, wangany [one story]…. Manggalili including, including singing about that sea

Nuwandjali: Sea from Djarrakpi, Yilpara, Garrapara. Big bay.

Marcus: They have their own places in that area?

Bininydjirri: Yes.

Nuwandjali: But we share the sea.

The men are talking about Mungurru, the Yirritja saltwater that is shared between three clans, the Dhal'wangu, Ma'arrpa, and Manggalili. Each has country on one of the southward pointing peninsulas in the northern part of Blue Mud Bay that Nuwandjali lists, and they are connected through the ceremonies and associated sand sculpture of the yingapungapu. The ‘different places’ that Nuwandjali talks of are like those coastal names that appeared on the map of clan estates above, places that the water flows by and through. The floating leaves have come from such places, so the men must call (sing) their names, as well as the bundurr names of the appropriate Yirritja clans for those places. The Mungurru close to the shore forms part of the Yirritja clan estate, although it can still be identified with the group as a whole. Further offshore the three clans share the waters equally, joining together in communal song, with the ‘dhawu’ the same but the tunes different,

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157 Somewhat surprisingly, in Dhol'upuyngu dialects there are no real words for the colours of water, indeed there are no words for blue or green. ‘Colour’ is usually used in reference to paint or ochre, so there are words for yellow, red, white and black. When necessary, ‘green’ can be described as milkuminy, the word for the vibrant green gall bladder of the turtle, but this is quite a different colour from most seawater.

158 Bundurr are the names that relate to the most important Ancestral places belonging to the clan.
retaining their identity but sharing the sea. Mungurru has Dhuwa counterparts and here the names are Wulamba and Gutultja, names that emphasise the Dhudji Djapu and Marrakulu. In other Dhuwa places there is Balamumu, more strongly associated with the Gupa Djapu clan, but all three connect together in the sea; Dhudi Djapu, Gupa Djapu, and Marrakulu. Keen notes a similar use of water as an interlinking medium elsewhere, signifying the unity of groups of the same moiety (Saltwater 1999:215). Mungurru is an expression of shared ownership but also of social realities on a much broader scale, for the three Yirritja clans lie in märi-gutharra relationships to each other and they can perform collaboratively on the ceremony ground as well as in wider Yolngu political life. Yet at the same time they strongly assert their identities as individual clans.

Further out again, in the deep sea, the strongest idea expressed to me was that the waters all mix together, reflecting how everyone is ‘all one family’, how they intermarry and live their lives side by side. In emphasising this point one day, Djambawa said that in ‘deep ceremonies’ about water, Yirritja songs may contain the names of Dhuwa country, and vice versa, and this emphasises “how the water brings all the Yolngu together”. As the process of the Native Title claim over the sea progressed, moiety distinctions between waters, and the continued separation of them in the deep sea, became a more commonly expressed element of public conversations about water. Morphy’s careful formulation of this point for the claim process is that “the deeper saltwater…combines the forces of both moieties” (Morphy 2004:75) and this formulation reflects this capacity for expressing what occurs in the deep sea in different ways, suggesting a combination of moieties but not a necessarily a collapsing of the distinctions between them.

**Whose Country?: Changing Owners and Moiety Confusion**

These shifting interpretations of what is occurring in the deep sea point to other ways in which ownership can be a shifting historical and political process. The area around Yilpara in Maps 9A and 9C as a case study was chosen because it is both representative and geographically diverse, but also because there is more going on than appears on the surface. Ngandharrkpuy, and the associated coast labelled as Balana, are Dhuwa moiety areas that are identified as Marrakulu on the map, an identification that carried into the courtroom, and which is accurate. Yet the branch of the Marrakulu who own this country is small, fragmented, and dwindling. They are often known as the Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu, in

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159 The same is true of the Dhuwa Balamumu clans, but for a number of historical and political reasons, the Dhuwa clans act collaboratively less often at this point in contemporary Blue Mud Bay life.

160 The term gamma has entered the ethnographic literature through the work of Magowan with Yolngu people further north (Magowan 2001b), and following her, Sharp (2002:128). I did not hear the word gamma being used in Blue Mud Bay, and when I asked about it close to the end of fieldwork, was told that was an important word that previously was only used in restricted ceremonial contexts, but the ‘public’ meaning for it is simply ‘water’. Sharp depicts Magowan’s position as stating that “an ancestral water may cross over and carry along those of another group underneath it; but importantly, they are never dissolved into one another” (Sharp 2002:128). Sharp referenced a conference presentation by Magowan, and this formulation does not seem to be borne out by Magowan’s later publication, in which she explicitly discusses gamma in terms of waters mixing (Magowan 2001b). The other reference Sharp cites for waters remaining separate is one of the statements in ‘Saltwater’ yet this statement also refers to the intermingling of waters of different clans (1999:18). The shift in the way Yilpara people expressed what was occurring in the deep sea indicates the capacity for different ways of interpreting what is occurring in the deep sea.
reference to the rope used by the Ancestral Turtle Hunters, for as Map 9A showed, Ngandharrkpuy and the Gupa Dja'pu reef at Bangara are Ancestrally important areas. The only representative of the Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu who lives in northern Blue Mud Bay is Dhuranggal Wanambi, a woman who therefore will not pass on her clan identity to her children. Because of this, the country at Balana is now undergoing a process of succession, where responsibility for it and ultimately, ownership over it, is passing to other clans of the same moiety. Other authors have described succession processes amongst the Yolngu clans (Morphy 1988, 1990, 2004:87; Williams 1986:174), pointing to the long timeframes required to resolve such contests. The most important clans are those in the gutharra relationship to the deceased or dying clan, as they are in a position take over the madayin of that country, being both of the correct moiety and familiar with that madayin through shared ceremonial activity. In the case of this branch of the Marrakulu clan, the important clans that can act as gutharra are the Gupa and Dhudi Dja'pu, and the other branches of the Marrakulu clan. The Gupa Dja'pu is numerically much larger than either of the other two, a legacy of Waka’s father Wonggu’s ruthless suppression of rivals and very large number of wives. They also occupy positions of power and influence at the homeland support association and Yirrkala, something that neither the Dhudi Dja'pu nor the Marrakulu possess. These remaining branches of the Marrakulu are relatively dispersed, and for a number of historical and political reasons do not currently have their own homeland community. The Dhudi Dja'pu are the clan most closely aligned to the Ma'darrpa, have significant amounts of country in the nearby region, and also have ceremonial connections to the dwindling Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu. All of these factors are influencing the nature of the succession processes that are taking place.

How do these processes manifest themselves in the way people talk in the course of hunting and travel on country, when they are away from formal contexts? Ngandharrkpuy is a long drive from Yilpara, and so was not visited that often, but people did use that country and talk about it as they did so, as well as speaking about it from other places much closer to Yilpara where it was visible, such as Wararrpa. The information they gave was not usually prompted, but was offered at a time people judged as appropriate, and quite often this was when they were speaking to me alone. That people wanted to tell me about the place shows how the status of Ngandharrkpuy is an ongoing issue, and indeed, my first notes about the place were made when I was with Bakulangay, parked alone in a vehicle at Wararrpa. The note says simply; “he wanted to talk about Balana” rather than where we were. The comments people made demonstrate how recognition of the deceased group still occurs, but the way in which that recognition was framed shows how things are changing, and people’s attitudes to that change. It was rare that people simply said that the country belonged to the dwindling Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu, and below are some examples of what was said about Ngandharrkpuy and Balana.

Dhuranggal Wanambi: Balana is my country (Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu). Wakuthi Marawili is now looking after it.

Djambawa Marawili: Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu own this place, but the Gupa Dja'pu and Dhudi Dja'pu sing the songs. Dhuranggal is really the only one left.

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165 Dhuranggal’s husband is Batja Marawili, the boat driver from the turtle hunt narrative of chapter 3. Her children will inherit their father’s Yirritja Ma’darrpa clan identity.
Nuwandjali Marawili: Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu, Dhuranggal’s country. There are different kinds of Marrakulu people with country elsewhere, including the Djarrwark at Luthunba, and they all connect together.

Bangawuy Wanambi162: This is Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu country. There is Gupa Djapu country inland behind it.

Malumin Marawili163: Marrakulu and Ma’darrpa country.

Bakulangay Marawili: Ma’darrpa and Gupa Djapu country. This used to be Djarrwark and Marrakulu country but is now looked after by the Dhuđi Djapu and the Gupa Djapu. There are no Djarrwark left.

Mulkun Wirrpanda164: Balana is Dhuranggal’s country. Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu. My märi place.

Waka Mununggurr and Dhukal Wirrpanda165: The country is shared between both Gupa and Dhuđi Djapu, and the Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu.

Buwatpuy Gumana166: The Gupa Djapu share this country with the Marrakulu.

The comments above show both a common understanding of the nature of the situation, but also a range of attitudes towards it. Dhuranggal, the owner of the country claims it as her own, but goes on to say that others are looking after it, an implicit acknowledgement that currently her people are unable to do so. Yet the person she identifies is Wakuthi, the most senior Yirritja man in the area and a man who cannot take over ownership of that Dhuwa country in the long term. Dhuranggal is implicitly refusing to endorse any of the Dhuwa gutharra clans who might eventually take the place of the Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu.167 In contrast, two men from clans who can take over the country (Waka and Dhukal) both list their clans as sharing it, before mentioning the current owners. Djambawa, in a similar political position to Wakuthi, strikes a compromise position, saying that it is really owned by the Bandjawalakuymirr Marrakulu, but that there are few left and the two Djapu clans ‘sing the songs’. Other people’s attitudes fall within this spectrum, with Djambawa’s two younger brothers Nuwandjali and Malumin both prioritising the Marrakulu rather than the two Djapu clans, probably because both brothers have married into other branches of the Marrakulu. Nuwandjali and Bakulangay each mention the

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162 Banggawuy Wanambi is Nuwandjali’s wife, and a member of another branch of the Marrakulu clan.
163 Malumin is the youngest of Mayawuluk’s three children. The names of Malumin’s own children were used as examples of märi-gutharra naming in Chapter 7. Like Nuwandjali, Malumin is married to a Marrakulu woman.
164 Mulkun Wirrpanda is Wakuthi’s second wife, but she does not normally live at Yilpara. She lives at the homeland on her own country at Dhurupitjpi.
165 The two men are from the Gupa Djapu and Dhuđi Djapu clans respectively. They were sitting together and singing about the country when they made this comment. It is worth noting that Waka’s relationship to the Dhuđi Djapu is closer than many of his Gupa Djapu clansmen and women who reside in or much closer to Yirrkala.
166 A visitor from GanGan and a classificatory son of Gawirrin Gumana’s.
167 The Ma’darrpa occur elsewhere in people’s comments, and this is probably a manifestation of the same point, for there is no Ma’darrpa country in the area. What is therefore being asserted is the Ma’darrpa’s role in the succession process.
Djarrwark, a clan that is also dwindling\textsuperscript{168} and which will be discussed further in the next chapter. The Djarrwark are more closely connected to the rest of the Marrakulu clan that to the Gupa Djapu, and so mentioning Djarrwark involvement also emphasises the links within the Marrakulu.

The Gupa Djapu feature heavily in people’s comments about the situation, and one reason for this is the Ancestral importance of the Gupa Djapu reef at Bangara, directly adjacent to the Marrakulu country that is undergoing succession. The numerical superiority of the Gupa Djapu also gives them considerable power, and leaders of the Gupa Djapu have attempted to assert their claims to the Bandjawalakuymirr country in a very direct and concrete way. In the 1990s, a now deceased leader of the Gupa Djapu clan used his influence over resources at Yirrkala to have an airstrip cleared at Ngandharrkpuy in preparation for building a homeland there. However this homeland was never built, largely because he could not gain the necessary political support from other clans in the region, and the cleared area is now overgrown. The Gupa Djapu do not wield the same influence in Blue Mud Bay as they do at Yirrkala, despite Waka’s presence at Yilpara and the existence of a Gupa Djapu homeland at Wandaawuy, north of Myaloola Bay. Nevertheless, Gupa Djapu people based at Yirrkala still visit the country regularly and on one occasion left behind a well built shade structure on the beach, a marker of their presence. The Ancestral importance of Bangara, the numerical superiority of the Gupa Djapu, and their attempts to gain a foothold through residence have not resolved the succession to this point, and people’s comments about the situation reflect this.

Ngandharrkpuy is Ancestrally significant, a rich hunting ground, and potentially, a site where people might live in the future. It is an important place, and the contest surrounding it, albeit quietly and informally expressed, indicate this importance. It is noticeable how aware people are of the key players involved, and of the links and connections they are using to establish their claims. Yet such knowledge of the detail of places is not always evident elsewhere, even in places that people visit far more regularly in contemporary life than they visit Ngandharrkpuy. Dharupi is a bay in the northwest corner of the map, and is an important hunting site for crabs, stingrays, and fish. Yet despite it being used often over the entire history of the homeland, its clan affiliation was unclear, as the comments made during trips to and past it demonstrate:

\begin{quote}
Djambawa: Occasion 1: Dharupi is Dhudi Djapu (Dhuwa moiety)

Djambawa: Occasion 2: It is Dhuwa Country. (Later that same day, after some thought and after reviewing other place names nearby.) It might be Yirritja. I should ask Wakuthi.

Malumin (with members of the Marrakulu present): Marrakulu country (Dhuwa moiety)

Bakulangay: Djarrwark and Dhudi Djapu, with connections to Marrakulu (all Dhuwa moiety clans).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{168} The Djarrwark are represented by two old women and a number of teenage boys.
On the map of estates, which is based on the information taken to court in 2004, the land at Dharupi is clearly identified as part of Madarrpa territory, and therefore Yirritja moiety. Yet the only person who expressed this possibility whilst out on the country was Djambawa, for other people identified it with varying degrees of confidence as belonging to a range of Dhuwa clans. What became evident over time was that the uncertainty about its status was not so much because it was actively contested, more that the situation was genuinely unclear, and that, in contrast to Ngandharrkpuy, there had not been any great need to resolve it. The map sent to court was agreed to by all of the leaders of the respective Dhulupuyngu clans and is therefore now a definitive version, and Djambawa talking to Wakuthi may well have had a substantial influence on the choice made on that map. However regardless of the actual situation, what is noteworthy is how country used so regularly for hunting can nevertheless remain confused in ownership terms over a long period of time. A similar situation, albeit to a lesser degree, was also evident in people’s identifications of Wararrpa, which is even closer to Yilpara. The similarity between both of these places is that despite their significance to contemporary hunting they are not Ancestrally important, for there are no major narratives or journeys that take place at them. People do not lack knowledge, as their detailed understanding of the situation at Ngandharrkpuy demonstrated, but other parts of the country can have a different status, and be less significant on one level even as they are more important on another. This also emphasises the point made earlier, that Yilpara people are confident of their ability to move across country and between places safely. Regardless of its affiliation, people know the name of Dharupi, what to hunt there, and that their relationship to it will be strong, even if the moiety and clan affiliations are less clear. However ownership can be equally affected by shifts in contemporary life, and given the processes undertaken for the court case, the status of Dharupi is likely to be more widely known now than it was a few years ago.

Conclusion

The relationship between water flows, ownership, and wider patterns in social life have been the main emphasis here, but the three modes of conceptualising ownership are wholly interlinked and implicated in one another, and so all can reflect patterns in wider social life. They describe ways in which country is created, sustained, integrated, and lived in, and they do this by depicting overall patterns, local specificities, myths of tremendous social importance and correlates with the physical environment. People use the mode that is most appropriate to the particular situation; the wangarr journey, the owned estate, or the water flows, and as the paintings of ‘Saltwater’ and the song transcripts demonstrate, the madayin expresses all three modes of these modes simultaneously. Kin relations, marriage, and language can also be expressed through water flows, emphasising its ongoing role in explicating human life. Much has been written about indigenous relations with country, the extension here is to make explicit the point that in Blue Mud Bay this country does not just ‘include the sea’, it is incoherent without it, and incoherent without a wider understanding of the role of water in structuring, expressing, and integrating patterns of ownership. Yet ownership is also a human and political process, prioritising some places and diminishing others. Yet, as the relationship between comments about Dharupi and Balana demonstrate, the ownership that is being claimed is far more than a title deed to territory and a source of
hunting and economic rights. Rather it is the assertion of a way of life, a way of engaging with the world, and a way of being engaged by that world, and by the Ancestrally important places in it. Such an attitude gives claims to ownership a much greater degree of urgency if they remain unrecognised. The next chapter will explore one domain in which that ownership goes both recognised and unrecognised in complex ways, as Yolngu attempt to deal with the increasing encroachment of commercial fishermen onto their country.
Fig. 10A: Severed head of a crocodile strung up in a tree at Yathikpa using a hangman’s noose. It was left by professional barramundi fishermen as a message to the Dholupuyngu just prior to the start of the Blue Mud Bay Native Title claim hearings in August 2004. Yathikpa is the home of the Ancestral Madarrpa Crocodile.
Controlling the sea matters, and not just to Yolngu people. The frontier arrived late to Blue Mud Bay, and the stories of the ghosts and guns of times past are still vivid. Gawirrin Gumana lives near the site of the worst massacre when white men on horseback almost wiped out an entire clan, and his father Birrikitji was the first to find the corpses; close kin lying near the river, decomposing and half eaten by crocodiles. Those who oppose the Yolngu instinctively understand the power that Australia’s colonial past can still wield, and they are not afraid to use it. But the power of the past works in more than one way, for memories of the past can strengthen as well as intimidate

Murder of Japanese, Set Upon by Blacks
Headline from the Melbourne Argus Newspaper, 7th Oct 1932.
National Australian Archives, 130

In 1932 five Japanese trepang fishermen were speared at Caledon Bay, north of Blue Mud Bay, and it was Waka’s own father Wonggu who ordered them killed. In the repercussions that followed, Dhukal and Manman’s grandfather (FF) speared a policeman on Woodah Island, an encounter famous on both sides, and two white fishermen were also killed in northern Blue Mud Bay at around this time (Egan 1996). The recent arrival of the frontier also means that memories of open armed resistance are still fresh, and to this day, Blue Mud Bay has a reputation in the professional fishing industry for being a hostile area. Yet this reputation was not just earned because of memories of seventy years ago:

"If you go sneaking around that country, I will kill you!"
Gawirrin Gumana, speaking to a crab fisherman operating in the waters of Blue Mud Bay without Yolngu permission. November 2002

Quite simply, Blue Mud Bay people believe that they own the sea, and should be able to control who goes there. Gawirrin is an ordained Christian minister as well as a kind and gentle old man, but he is also a Dholupuynngu leader. He made this threat in calculated anger rather than offended, uncontrolled rage, and in full awareness of wider Australian law, yet he still made it, demonstrating the seriousness of his intent to protect what he believes he owns. The Yolngu word for place, wänga, means everything from ‘home’ and hearth to ‘country’, and so, whilst the analogy is imperfect, there is a sense in which entering a local bay like Yathikpa unannounced is the equivalent of walking straight into someone else’s back yard. In the past, Yolngu protocols about visitors were that they should light fires as they approached, and those who did not announce their presence in this way were considered to have ill intent. In contemporary life the telephone has replaced the fire, but the principle is the same. One characteristic of sea space is precisely its openness, the way it lends itself easily to travel and movement, and the attitude non-indigenous society takes to it only enhances this tendency.

However that openness also means that it is country on which movements are hard to disguise, where those out on the water are readily seen, and therefore coastal Aboriginal

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169 Egan recounts the story of this period in Blue Mud Bay history (Egan 1996). There are versions of the story which suggest that Wonggu was actually one of the killers, rather than just ordering it.
people who claim such country are both more vulnerable to incursions and more likely to
be aware of them. Blue Mud Bay is remote, so recreational fishermen do not travel there by
boat, and it is very shallow, poorly charted, and far from major shipping routes, so passing
boat traffic is extremely rare. The incursions that people have to deal with are from
professional fishermen, who seek the valuable mud crabs and barramundi that can be
captured near the mangroves and river mouths. In many ways, Yolngu sea space in the Bay is
far more heavily colonised than the land, something that disrupts the neat picture of
continuities that has been painted to this point by exploring Yolngu understandings of place
and country. The influence of outside forces has been a relatively muted thread of the
ethnographic analysis, partly because of the singular local conditions and partly because of
the research orientation. Here, although the focus will remain on Yolngu responses to
situations, the wider context of colonised Australia is a major frame of reference for
contemporary contests over the sea.

Such encounters demonstrate how Yolngu people think about ownership, how they
understand both their rights and their responsibilities. It is tenure as a complex ongoing
process in everyday life, as an array of responses to situations, both benign and hostile. The
continuities with themes already developed are clear, as manifestations of the importance of
coastal country emerge in another domain of life. Particular characteristics of ownership
can be drawn from such encounters with outsiders, and along with a desire to be recognised
as the owners, these characteristics include controlling access to the country, safety
concerns, care for the country itself, resource sustainability, sharing the value of extracted
resources, building social relationships, and controlling access to information. Yolngu
responses in these encounters are grounded in memories of past engagements and
confrontations, but they are also concerned with the future, for people see greater control
over their country as one of a number of paths to a better future. Although there are echoes
from the colonial past, contemporary life and contemporary engagements with the wider
world have presented new struggles and demanded new articulations of ownership from the
Dholupuyngu. But in those new struggles they also believe they see new opportunities.

**Fishermen Past and Present**

The spearing of the Japanese men was not the first encounter with outside fishers, for
Yolngu people have been dealing with foreigners arriving from over the horizon for
hundreds of years. From at least the early 1700s, Macassan fishermen sailed across from
the Indonesian archipelago to fish for trepang along the Northern Territory coastline
(MacKnight 1976). Yolngu oral accounts today tell of amicable relations, of how the
Macassans respected them as the owners of the country, supplied them with dugout canoes,
and made trading agreements at which flags and knives were exchanged. Some
archaeological evidence suggests that the two groups camped near each other, and the
number of Macassan words in Yolngu dialects and the number of Macassan names as
personal names suggests that at least some interactions were positive. However, not
surprisingly, there is also evidence of cool or indifferent relations, and of conflict
(MacKnight 1976:83-87). For the Dholupuyngu, dealing with outsiders from across the sea,
whether amicably or with hostility, is not a phenomenon of the 20th century, but goes back
much further.
The Macassans, and to an extent the Japanese fishermen of the 1930s also complicate a vision of the frontier as the site of colonial encounters between white and black. The situation in Blue Mud Bay, as with many other places across the north of Australia, has always been more complex than that, and this complexity continues in different forms in the present day. Yolngu people are still engaging with people from Southeast Asia as the professional crab fishermen who now work the bays are migrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. However the owners of the large barramundi boats are wealthy and powerful Anglo-Australians, and much of their workforce shares that heritage. The encounters between these groups and the Yolngu reflect their different histories, cultural backgrounds, individual personalities, status within Australian society, and attitudes to Australian law.

However history and cultural background are only part of the story, for these encounters are also critically shaped by the nature of the fishing operations and by the division between land and sea in law. The public right to fish and to navigate are important parts of maritime law in the Northern Territory, albeit mediated by State regulation of commercial fisheries through licensing and quotas. However through government legislation, the Dholupuyngu control the land down to low water mark, and this control, coupled with their remoteness from coastline which is not controlled by Aboriginal people, is fundamental to their relations with local crab fishermen. These men need convenient access to land and reasonable roads and airstrips in order to efficiently get their live crabs out to Darwin for sale, and so they have had to reach formal agreements with the Dholupuyngu about access conditions and royalty payments. Control over the land has led to de facto control over the sea. Such tight control over crabbers’ in the northern Bay is something that other Aboriginal people to the south around the Roper River and Numbulwar cannot exercise. There the crabbers can use public land and public roads that local indigenous people have no control over, and so there are no formal royalty agreements in place further south. There are some similarities between this situation and that of the Dholupuyngu with respect to the barramundi fishermen. These fishermen operate from large, self-sufficient boats, have no need for land access, and have historically vehemently refused to consider any kind of formal or informal agreement with the people of Blue Mud Bay. The structures of non-indigenous law, and the distinctions it makes between land and sea, are critical in shaping the quality and frequency of the interactions between professional fishermen and the Dholupuyngu. The existence of the crabbers’ contracts, the greater length of their fishing season, and the type of fishing they conduct mean that Dholupuyngu engagements with crabbers are far more frequent than with barramundi fishermen. The contracts have brought people into more regular contact, and through that, broader social relationships are tentatively developing.

The Crabbers

...Djambawa and I walked down the beach in front of Bun’s camp to where he was unloading crab crates from his boat. “Hallo Terry! Mark!” His names for us were functional rather than entirely accurate. I had never quite got used to Djambawa’s

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170 The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 extends to the low water mark.
171 Barramundi fishermen can operate at times during a period of six months or more, but will rarely fish there for more than a couple of months.
English name, it just did not seem to fit. The subsequent conversation flowed between the two men as easily as it could do when both were operating in their second or third language. I kept quiet as they ranged across the usual topics; where Thanh was, how many crabs Bun had caught, visitors to the crabbers camp, and so on. Bun passed engine oil to Djambawa as they talked. Djambawa then asked him if he had seen any dugongs, our quarry for the day. Bun denied any and all knowledge of dugongs. As a professional fisherman should, I thought, smiling inwardly...

...Thanh’s face remained blank and impassive as Gawirrin threatened to kill him. He had endured far worse in his flight from Vietnam, and he knew the police would back up his right to catch crabs where he wanted without Gawirrin’s permission. And yet he was here at the crabbing meeting organised by the Land Council, asking to sign a contract. The logistics of shipping the crabs out were too hard without land access now that flights from Groote Island had become so expensive, and he would have constant trouble with the Yolngu out on the water. But his past actions meant that his chances of getting a ‘yes’ were not good...

...Minh quietly spoke to Nuvandjali and I as the crabbing meeting went on around us. He talked about how the coastline in his home country of Vietnam was completely stripped because of overfishing, and spoke with approval about the fisheries licensing system and crab size limits in Australia. Although he may employ someone to fish for him, he wants to renew his contract with Blue Mud Bay people for another two years at this meeting...

Bun, Thanh, and Minh were the crabbers who had the strongest presence in northern Blue Mud Bay, and by far the most important of these three in the everyday lives of Yilpara people was Bun. A former member of the Thai army, Bun had been in Australia for 15 years and had worked at various jobs before leasing a crabbing contract from its wealthy Darwin owner. The difference between Bun and the other crabbers was that he had chosen to live semi-permanently on the Yilpara peninsula, in a ramshackle hut on the beach at Dholuwuy, near Yathikpa. He fished for most of the year, even sometimes when it was uneconomic to do so, and generally lived in Blue Mud Bay unless he was taking care of shipping and logistics in Nhulunbuy or Darwin. Thanh and Minh, the other two main crabbers in the northern bays, were both from Vietnam and lived in Darwin, where they operated other businesses such as mango farming. All three men had contracts through the NLC, although their monthly royalty payments were often well behind schedule. Thanh caused the most problems, at times abandoned the contracts altogether, and was the least well regarded of the three, Bun was the most reliable payer, and his ongoing presence in the area and developing relationships with the Dholrupuyngu, particularly with Yilpara people, meant that he was the best regarded.
Ownership: Controlling Access to Country

“A little boy sent you!”

Bobby Wunungmurra, in response to Thanh naming a man from Groote Island that he had informally asked for permission to crab in Blue Mud Bay

Yolngu owners want to control access to the country they own and expect to be notified about visitors, and this attitude is found in other accounts of Aboriginal sea tenure and ownership (Bagshaw 1998:163; Cooke and Armstrong 1998:182; Palmer 1998:151; Rigsby and Chase 1998:205; Sharp 2002:131; Williams 1987: 88). Being notified about arrivals was the critical step, and if the reason for travel was justified, such visitors were unlikely to be refused. Those who did not follow such a process were sometimes challenged by Yolngu with the confidence to do so, and as Gawirrin’s threat demonstrated, sometimes these challenges could be genuinely hostile. The desire to be informed was partly a desire to avoid these situations, for it is far easier to prevent people from coming rather than facing the difficult task of sending them away after they have arrived. Although not all did so, 172 crabbers fishing in Grindall and Jalma Bays were expected to have formally negotiated and signed contracts with the NLC, where the appropriate people could be identified and asked to give their consent.

Bun’s camp was a focus for people’s concerns about controlling access to their country. He regularly had other people working for him, and these employees turned over at a very high rate due to the rough conditions, the hard work, and his poor choice of employee. Other crabbers sometimes used his camp to organise food, fuel and repairs or to load and transport crabs, and the drivers who brought the crab trucks in to pick up the load changed frequently as well. Unauthorised access to Bun’s camp was raised by Djambawa and others in my first conversations with them about crabbers, and more than two years later it was still being discussed in crabbing meetings as a serious matter. In one of a number of stories, Djambawa told of how he had encountered men without permits at the camp and had “given them a hard time”, asking why they were here supposedly ‘looking for work’ when there were plenty of jobs in the town. He had tried to locate their car keys, which people often leave in the ignition in the bush, as he knew that once he had them they would do what he told them to. Later he called both the Nhulunbuy and Darwin NLC offices, and the police in Nhulunbuy, informing them of the presence of these men. On another occasion Dhukal and others were camped nearby at Dhöljuwuy and were disturbed by men drinking and smoking marihuana at Bun’s camp. They had returned to Yilpara and contemplated calling the police, but had not done so. 173

Over time, Bun’s camp has become a place known to a number of local itinerant workers and tradesmen in Nhulunbuy, and it is a place to which many feel able to travel to without going through the procedures of getting an NLC permit which would involve senior people at Yilpara being asked for their permission, or even of calling ahead informally. The camp

172 There was no legal requirement to do so if they did not want land access.

173 As with a great many Aboriginal people across the country, the Dhöljuwuyngu regard the police with some suspicion, and contact with them is not normally sought unless the situation is urgent. The only time I saw them at Yilpara was when they arrived unannounced and cruised around the community in a patrol vehicle. Djambawa was extremely upset about them turning up without being requested to do so, and them not calling ahead in advance. He made this point to them strongly before engaging in further conversation.
has become a kind of indeterminate space, acknowledged to be on Aboriginal Land but which is, at least for those other than the Yolngu, a de facto non-indigenous outpost, where people can come and go on what are thin pretexts.\textsuperscript{174} The camp is becoming increasingly established as a place in the local landscape, both for indigenous and non-indigenous people. When I first arrived at the community, there was a sign for Bun’s camp at the fork on the local Yilpara road. By 2003, a sign saying “Bun’s camp, 66km” had been erected on the main highway turnoff next to the official sign for Yilpara. In many ways, the signs are an indication of the intermediate status of the camp, for none of the Yolngu living in this region need to be told where it is. Rather they are signs acknowledging that others need to go there who are not so familiar with their local surroundings. Yet signs that are intended to aid legitimate visitors are read as an open invitation by visitors without permission.

Ownership: Responsibility for People

This desire to aid visitors is noteworthy, for a characteristic of Yolngu and indeed wider Aboriginal ownership is that people feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of those on their country (Cooke 1998:182; Palmer 1998:151). When the owner does not know of someone’s presence, that person can easily come to harm without anyone being aware of it, and the owners then feel responsible. Crabbers have been rescued a number of times in recent years by Yolngu hunters, sometimes from quite dangerous situations, and some of these occurred before they were operating in the area with any kind of permits. Bun has been saved twice; on the first, his boat engine caught fire and the Yolngu came and rescued him from the burning boat, whilst on the second, his boat sank and Djambawa found him standing up to his neck on a rock out in the middle of the shark and crocodile infested ocean. Djambawa said he had kept Bun in the water and had leant over the side and given him a lecture about the importance of making a formal agreement with the Yolngu, which would help avert such mishaps in the future, and only when he had finished his lecture did he let him on board. Further south, Bandipandi has also been involved in numerous rescues of stricken crab boats, driving from his home at Bälma to the beach and then launching his boat to rescue crabbers adrift because of burnt wiring, broken drive shafts, and other mishaps. On one occasion, stranded crabbers wrote ‘Bandi come now’ in large letters on the beach in the hope that it would be seen by aeroplanes flying overhead. These rescues have been part of the basis on which both the Yolngu and the NLC encouraged the crabbers to sign formal contracts. Owners are uncomfortable about people present on their country without their knowledge, who have not been told about the safe places and those to avoid. As the previous chapter showed, such knowledge is important to travelling and living safely.

\textsuperscript{174} On one occasion I saw non-indigenous recreational fishers there for the weekend, claiming that they were there to ‘help fix Bun’s car’, although Bun had not asked them to come. On another occasion the mechanic who worked for an Aboriginal Association at Yirrkala travelled down to Bun’s camp with non-indigenous friends to fish. He had not bothered to call Djambawa or anyone at Yilpara for permission, nor did he intend notifying them.
Ownership: Responsibility for Country

“I’m not worried about rupiyah (money), I’m worried about madayin.”
Gawirrin Gumana, at a crabbing meeting

“We sing, dance, use, and name those areas.”
Djambawa Marawili, emphasising the importance of the places where the crabbers operate

Specifying areas people should avoid introduces a further aspect of ownership, namely care and responsibility for the country itself (Sharp 2002:131). A non-indigenous person who arrives without proper consultation 'won't see' the ownership and Ancestry of the country and therefore may not behave properly, perhaps straying into areas that they should not go, doing damage and/or leaving a mess. As the image that began this chapter showed, sometimes damage by unauthorised visitors is more than accidental. The “Saltwater” art exhibition was a response to an illegal crabbers camp discovered in the mangroves in Grindall Bay, in which Waka found a severed crocodile’s head in a hessian bag.175 Bun’s camp is actually directly adjacent to Yathikpa and concerns about the level of rubbish at the camp were regularly expressed at crabbing meetings. In one meeting, Djambawa emphasised that he was speaking ‘from his heart’ about how he felt when he saw so much rubbish around where the crabbers worked, and he recited the names of the areas being discussed with the crabbers to emphasise their importance. In another meeting, Gawirrin sang the song for the place being discussed, emphasising his ownership over and connection to it. The crabbing contracts specify relatively small zones around important madayin areas such as Yathikpa and Baraltja where crabbers are not meant to put their pots, and at Yathikpa the exclusion area was marked with a float. However the rules were not always obeyed to everyone’s satisfaction.176 Rubbish, incorrect behaviour, accidental damage, and malicious damage were just some of the ways in which people felt the country was damaged or put at risk by the actions of ignorant and/or unauthorised visitors.

A further aspect of this care for the country is the sustainability of resources. Further south around the Roper River and Numbulwar, the number of crabbers operating is far higher than in Blue Mud Bay (approximately 25-30 licences of the 49 in the NT, according to a Land Council estimate), and the crabs are rapidly being depleted in this zone. Crabbing licenses are valid for the whole coastline of the Northern Territory, and so crabbers unable to find sufficient crabs in those areas are pushing north, into the southern and more recently the central and northern reaches of Blue Mud Bay, accepting the greater fuel and transport costs involved in working there without having land access. The Dholupuynu are well aware of the overfishing occurring further south, and do not want it happening near them. These concerns are sometimes pragmatically expressed, as people speak of ensuring that they have enough crabs for their own subsistence needs, or of operating a commercial crab fishery themselves in the future. Yet the Mud Crab is an important Ancestor in the area, and so this pragmatic expression is part of a broader concern about the health of the country and the creatures, human, animal, and Ancestral, that live there.

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175 This was not the head in the image of the start of the chapter, but a separate incident in the late 1990s. Whether the perpetrators of the second incident were aware of the first one is unclear.
176 Waka and I were out turtle hunting and saw Bun working inside what Waka thought was the zone that should be protected.
Ownership: Receiving a Share

As owners, Dholupuyngu also believe they should receive a share of the value of resources being extracted from their country. Chapter 4 discussed this in terms of the subsistence catch, and similar attitudes apply to commercial operations, both in Blue Mud Bay and elsewhere (Cooke 1998). The forcefulness with which people assert their right to a share may be partly related to the poverty of these communities, who do not have access to the rich mining royalties of some of the clans close to Yirrkala, yet it is also about recognition, about the rights that come from being an owner. This is illustrated by an exchange during the first meeting between Gawirrin and Peter Manning, a professional barramundi fisherman who has been operating in the area for a long time without an agreement:

Gawirrin: Barramundi is our Dreaming, our culture. Did you pay Yolngu people?"
Peter: Well, if I see Aboriginal people when I’m out there I always share some of my catch.
Gawirrin: What about the money side?
Peter: I always take fish to the local outstations, like Yilila.177
Gawirrin: What about money? Don't play games with the Yolngu side!
Peter: There are Aboriginal people in the fishing industry. I have been the Chairman of the Seafood Council for a number of years and we’ve been involved in training programs for Aboriginal people in other places like Umbakumba and Galiwinku178…
Gawirrin: (Smiling ironically) It’s a good story! Keep going!

People recognise the monetary value of the resources being extracted, and that they are deriving minimal benefit, or none in some cases, from that extracted value. Receiving money is in principle no different from receiving the share of a subsistence catch, for the return is in the form of the extracted value, and as commercial operations are undertaken to make substantial amounts of money, the owners expect their share to be in equivalent terms. The absence of kin relations or long term reciprocity between the fishermen and the Yolngu makes receiving an adequate monetary share even more important. However everyday reciprocity still has a role to play, particularly with the crabbers.

Ownership: Reciprocal Relations

“I’m talking to my friend Bun now”
Djambawa Marawili, speaking in a crabbing meeting as he shifted the conversation from the subject of royalty money to the importance of Yathikpa as a place to him.

Bun had started living at his camp before I arrived at Yilpara, but he had not been living there long, and over time, there were changes in the way that people related to him and his

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177 Yilila is a very small outstation in southern Blue Mud Bay that is not always inhabited. The Aboriginal people who own it have informal, cash-in-hand arrangements with some professional crab fishermen.
178 Umbakumba is a large community on Groote Island. Galiwinku is a large former mission in central Arnhem Land.
Bun’s regular presence at Dholuwuy and at Yilpara meant that he met Yolngu people regularly, and that he was in a position to engage in the low level reciprocity that Yolngu people value so much as a way of building relationships. Bun and his workers often brought some crabs with them when they came to Yilpara to use a telephone or to get water, and Bun’s camp was a regular stopping place for people in search of crab bait for fishing trips. During late 2000 and the first half of 2001, Bun was very tolerant of the frequent requests for fuel, crabs, and other assistance, and even more tolerant of items going missing from his camp when he was away, including petrol, crabs, food, cooking utensils and tools. His equanimity about these losses was surprising, and may have further contributed to his reputation amongst white people in Nhulunbuy as operating ‘too much like a blackfeller’, living and fishing in Blue Mud Bay all year round even when it was economically unviable, building relationships with people based on low level reciprocity, and so on. Petrol eventually became an issue for him, and at a crabbing meeting in July 2002 Bun estimated that he had lost 7500 litres of fuel in three years, and had also had 6 spare wheels taken from his 4WD. At that meeting it was agreed that money should come from the Yolngu royalty payments to assist Bun to get a padlocked shipping container to store his fuel from then on. Djambawa also said that he would hold a community meeting to make it clear that Bun’s camp and possessions should be respected. I had noticed this process already beginning in the months before this meeting; the longer that Bun was there, the more his camp and his possessions were respected.

In return for the royalty payments and for ongoing in-kind support, Bun derived benefits from his developing relationship with the Yolngu. As the stories of the rescues indicate, one major benefit was safety and security. After a severe tropical storm and very high tides hit the Bay when Bun was away from his camp, Yolngu from Yilpara were sent by Djambawa and Waka to check on it. The site was partially cleaned up, and a dinghy that had been washed off its trailer and buried in the sand was dug out and repositioned on the trailer. People went past Bun’s camp regularly and were often aware of his movements, of where he was and when he was likely to return. As the relationship developed further, Djambawa in particular assisted Bun in other ways. When fisheries police caught Bun with far more crab pots in the water than he was licensed to have, Djambawa was a character witness for him in court in Nhulunbuy, and there was a noticeably changed relationship between them after this event. The tone of their earliest conversations was a little cautious, whereas later ones were characterised by a degree of trust and of mutual recognition of the other’s position.

Ownership: Yolngu Mediators

However the most significant benefit to Bun was the way his position was protected from other crabbers by Dholupuyngu, despite their lack of legal power to do so. His status as an outsider was altered by his permission to be there and by his developing relationships with people who lived there. Their attempts to protect his interests demonstrate a wider aspect of Yolngu ownership, that it is not a desire for total exclusion of outsiders, rather that they should come through appropriate channels. If they do, then their position will be defended against others who have not taken that course, even to the point where the Yolngu themselves may knowingly break non-indigenous law to do so. One story of this type of
intervention was important to the Dholupuyngu and to Bun, and was told to me on several occasions by Waka, Djambawa, and Bun himself.

Bun had recently established his camp at Dholuwuy when a number of other crabbers organised by Thanh began fishing in the northern part of Blue Mud Bay. They deliberately placed their pots on either side of Bun’s, greatly diminishing the number of crabs he caught, in order to encourage them to leave the area. Bun complained to Djambawa and Waka, who were heading out to hunt turtle, and the two Yolngu men warned Thanh and the other crabbers to remove their pots. When the hunters returned they found the pots still in position, and so they began pulling up pots themselves, stacking them on the prow of the hunting boat. The crabbers saw what was happening and chased the Yolngu boat, and when they caught up they demanded their crabs and pots back. Djambawa and Waka refused and the argument continued as the boats headed towards the shore at Dholuwuy, both groups aware of the fish spears and the turtle harpoon in the Yolngu boat. One of the crabbers was so angry at the situation that he swerved his boat too fast and fell overboard, meaning that the other crabbers had to stop to pick him up and then wait for the driverless boat that was circling at high speed to run out of fuel. Djambawa and Waka returned to shore, where they offered the crabs and pots to Bun, but he was keen to avoid trouble and so refused them. The hunters asked him to tie up the crabs instead whilst they threw the crab pots in the bush, and the tied up crabs were then sold to Yilpara people through the store. Thanh and the other crabbers rang the police in Nhulunbuy, who then contacted Djambawa, and he told them they were welcome to come down and that he would like to talk to them. The police never came and some of the crabbers involved in this incident have not been back to the area since.

There were a number of other less dramatic instances of Yolngu people mediating between the different crabbers, or attempting to organise crabbers activities in such a way as to minimise conflicts. This included Yilpara people trying to get the other crabbers to use different coastal access points than Bun’s camp, even though they themselves would lose royalty money if the crabbers camped elsewhere. However without control over the sea areas, their power to minimise conflicts out on the water is limited. For example, at another crabbing meeting Thanh asked to return to Blue Mud Bay under a contract allowing him to use two licenses179 and before deciding, Djambawa drove out to Dholuwuy to ask Bun his opinion. Bun was vehemently opposed, and this was one factor in the decision not to allow Thanh to take out a contract, but this did not stop Thanh and other crabbers operating in the area. Although Bun reported other boats operating without permits to the Yolngu, and asked them to intercede on a number of occasions, they were rarely able to respond in time. Bun found challenging Thanh himself of little use, as Thanh refused to acknowledge him beyond saying that Bun was not the owner of the area and had no right to talk to him.

**Recognition?**

Of course, implicit in Thanh’s statement is the recognition that there are people who own the area. Although Thanh probably said this just to be rid of Bun, there was some

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179 The additional license he was leasing would allow him to place 120 pots rather than the 60 allowed by a single leased license.
recognition amongst the crabbers that the Dholupuyngu did own the sea, even if both groups knew that claim was not recognised by the State, and that the crabbers in turn were not bound to recognise it. The recognition that did occur had multiple bases; it was mostly about land access, partly about strategic positioning in current arguments about fishing territory, and partly about longer term positioning, for the crabbers were aware of the Native Title sea claim proceedings, although they may not have understood that the impacts on them were likely to be minimal. If, at some future point the Dholupuyngu did gain full control over the sea, then they could and would enforce their frequently stated position that only a couple of crabbers should operate in the area. Following the last crabbing meeting I witnessed, Bun talked of his plans for fishing other species to give him some income when there were no crabs, in the tone of a man who has decided he will be there for the longer term. His acknowledgement of the Dholupuyngu as the owners of the sea country was evident, and given his relationship with Djambawa in particular, there was and still is a competitive advantage for him in having Dholupuyngu ownership recognised, for it will give him privileged access to a valuable and diminishing resource. However despite the development of Bun and Djambawa’s relationship there were still sources of friction; unauthorised visitors, rubbish, the placement of crab pots, and the commercial nature of Bun’s operations all contributed to a certain level of distance being maintained.

Brother Bun?

“Here comes that Bun Bun guy”
Djambawa on a turtle hunt, speaking about an approaching boat.

Perhaps the most revealing indication of this distance was in what Bun was called. When I first arrived at Yilpara, Mayawuluk told me that she had adopted Bun, and I saw him call her ‘Mum’ on several occasions. The process of adoption by one person allows other Yolngu people to place that person in moiety, skin, and kinship categories, and so they can then be called the appropriate terms, and this had happened to me upon my arrival there. Yet despite Bun’s adoption by Mayawuluk, I never heard him referred to as anything other than Bun. Most noticeably, Mayawuluk’s own son Djambawa never called Bun brother, wäwa, even as their relationship progressed to the point where I was able to write of it in terms of friendship and a degree of trust. The way in which Bun was addressed reflected the desire of people, and of Djambawa in particular, to maintain some distance in the light of the commercial basis on which Bun was present in the area, and this distance remained despite Bun engaging in the low level reciprocity that is a characteristic of Yolngu kin relations.

Ownership: Control of Information

Yolngu owners were also concerned about the control and supply of information about the crabbers. Staff at the Northern Land Council in Darwin managed the contracts, organised the meetings, and ensured the royalties were paid into NLC managed accounts. The 180 ‘Wäwa’ can be used in Yolngu English as a term for any non-indigenous male whose name is unknown. But this is different from the way in which it is used to address people placed within the Yolngu kinship system, as theoretically Bun had been.
crabbers regularly stopped at the NLC to talk about issues and problems they were having, either with the contracts or their operations. The NLC has a wider strategic goal to get as many fishing agreements as possible across the Northern Territory, so as an organization it is unwilling to jeopardise the existence of the agreements by enforcing their conditions too strongly, including the timing of the royalty payments. Whilst the NLC staff kept in regular contact with people in Blue Mud Bay, Djambawa and others sometimes expressed a degree of frustration that decisions should be made in Blue Mud Bay rather than in Darwin. These were not necessarily major decisions, it was as much about access to information as it was about decision-making, but people felt that although they were the owners, they were not always aware of what was going on. However an attitude remained strong that crabbing and other fishing operations should be organised through formal contracts managed by Land Council staff, rather than informal agreements.

Ownership: Contracts

“I’m the middle man in the mess!”
Bandipandi Wunungmurra during a crabbing meeting

This attitude about Land Council involvement was in contrast to the attitude of some Aboriginal people in southern Blue Mud Bay and further south around Numbulwar and the Roper River. Here there are number of informal, cash-in-hand agreements between southern Blue Mud Bay people and crabbers which troubled both the NLC and the Dholupuyngu. This intersection of the formal and informal agreements was in the region around where the road from Bandipandi Wunungmurra’s community at Bälma reaches the coast. He frequently expressed frustration about crabbers who were from his perspective operating illegally, or who said they had permission from people further south but there were no written records of this and it was very hard for him to check. The number of these crabbers claiming informal agreements was growing rapidly in the southern part of the bay and they were pushing northwards as competition increased. The operations of these ‘illegal’ crabbers undermined the validity of the crabbing contracts the Dholupuyngu and the NLC had organised, something they were acutely aware of but at times had difficulty doing anything about. Nevertheless, the contrasting approaches taken by people in the north and the south were more a difference in attitudes to Land Council involvement than they were about ownership of sea space, for in both cases, Aboriginal people expected to and did receive some form of payment from people operating on their sea country.

A further complication for the Dholupuyngu in gaining control over the crabbing was the knowledge that the contracts were negotiated with lessees rather than with the owners of the license. Djambawa regularly expressed a desire to talk to the owners of the licenses, who were in most cases deriving the major financial benefit from the fishing. As owners of the country they wanted to negotiate with the people who wielded the major power in crabbing operations, not just the workers on the ground. A representative of the seafood

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181 Bälma is approximately 10km inland, making Bandipandi’s role in policing the coast even more difficult.
182 License owners received significant rental from the licenses, but in some cases the contract also specified that the lessee must sell his crabs for a fixed amount to the license holder, who then sold them at much higher retail prices. At least one license owner had several licenses and a large live crab holding facility in Darwin to supply customers in Southeast Asia.
company Seaking attended one meeting, but on other occasions the only people present were those operating rather than owning the crab license, and it was the owners who made the most money from the industry. The operators on the ground had the most direct impact on their lives, but as owners the Dhoḻupuyngu believed that they should be negotiating with those receiving the greater proportion of the profits.

Crabbers and Police

“The police are your friends!”
Bandipandi Wunungmurra to Thanh

“You can bring in policemen, I’ll still shoot you!”
Gawirrin Gumana to Thanh at the same meeting.

The complex role of the NLC in relations between the crabbers and the Yolngu is just one of numerous wider influences that affect engagements within the Bay. The Fisheries Act (1995) NT allows licensed crabbers to fish anywhere they choose in Northern Territory waters, something that they are aware of, and on at least one occasion Thanh brought over police from Groote island to assert his right to fish in the region without a contract, and the police made this point clear to the other crabbers in the area. This legal and institutional framework is critical to the rights the fishermen claim, and to the basis in non-indigenous law that the Dhoḻupuyngu have for influencing them. However, as some previous anecdotes have shown, Dhoḻupuyngu have been prepared to knowingly break non-indigenous law to assert their ownership and try to regulate the access and conduct of others. Their engagements with the crabbers reflect the complex array of forces involved in local situations, and the ways in which a Dhoḻupuyngu understanding of coastal ownership is articulated through those everyday engagements. The last aspect of crabbing operations discussed here examines what those operations show about the internal dynamics of Yolngu coastal ownership.

Money Talks: Royalty Distributions

In reality, the royalty payments the crabbers make are payments for land access, but Blue Mud Bay people regard them as being payments for fishing in the bays’ and the contracts reflect this orientation. Given this, it would be reasonable to assume that distributions of crab royalty money reflect the way that sea country is internally differentiated within those bays. This is partly true, but only partly. Despite being relatively small, the crabbing royalty distributions are the focus of some attention, but without being placed in a broader context they are a blunt instrument for understanding local coastal ownership. A range of other influences can affect the distribution, so flows of money to the bank accounts named after particular clans do not necessarily reflect the ownership status of the waters where the crabbers operate.

The distribution to clan accounts from a 2-year contract cycle that ended in November 2000 shows this clearly. Some important clans are excluded, not least Gawirrin’s own Dhalwangu clan, and this is despite their important shared ownership of Baraltja. Dhukal
and Manman’s Dhudi Dja pu clan is also absent, even though they own the waters on the western side of Grindall Bay. Table 10A shows how the royalties were distributed from the contract that ended in November 2000.

Table 10A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jalma Bay</th>
<th>Grindall Bay</th>
<th>Myaloola Bay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madarrpa 50% ($2916)</td>
<td>Madarrpa 100%- $5833</td>
<td>Marrakulu- 50%- $2916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djarrwark 50% ($2916)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Manggalilil/Munyuku- $1458</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Djaju- $1458</td>
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The amounts distributed are relatively small, partly because in a number of cases people decided to distribute only half of the royalties and save the rest ‘for the future’. One future envisaged for this money is that it be used to purchase a crabbing license if and when one became available, but they very rarely come onto the market and are prohibitively expensive making this unlikely.183 More likely is that larger amounts of money will be distributed in the future, and indeed this happened at a later meeting, partly because the principle of saving for the future was not universally supported but rather reflected the emphasis of some of the senior men. Even the full amounts would not go far in some of the larger clans, and the Madarrpa, who derived revenue from two bays in this distribution, still received less than $9000.184

The small royalty amounts and the close relationships between people in the area meant that debates about the distribution were not that intense, although people did sometimes disagree. The small amounts also meant that these distributions did not greatly distort the wider income and circulation of money in the region, and many of the points made in chapter 4, analysing subsistence food distributions, could also be made here. For example, being present at the distribution meeting was important in both receiving a share and influencing the decisions about how the royalties from the new contract would be distributed. When told that the Dhalwangu had chosen not to get on the planes organised by the NLC to help them attend a particular crabbing meeting, Djambawa replied that they would be ‘crying’ when the distribution was decided. At another meeting, a Madarrpa man who had been living for a long time at the Hodgson Downs 200km to the south, attended the meeting and strongly asserted his right to a share of the royalties. He received some, when he would have been highly unlikely to receive a share had he been far away at his usual residence.

Labour was also important, for part of the explicit reasoning for the Madarrpa receiving a greater share of the money was that the Yilpara people were the most involved in the day to day management of crabbing issues. Gawirrin only attended one crabbing meeting, and as is clear from his earlier quotes, he was forced to take a strong leadership role in the absence

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183 Any estimate would be theoretical as the licenses are rarely sold and the value can fluctuate depending on marked conditions, but $250,000 is often mentioned as an approximate figure.

184 The nature of the contracts can also vary. After the termination of this agreement, crabbler ceased fishing in Myaloola Bay because they had been unable to catch enough crabs, and this significantly reduced the number of clans involved in the agreements. However Bun recommenced limited crabbing in Myaloola Bay in 2004-2005.
of other senior men, including Djambawa. During a difficult point in this tense and tiring meeting he voiced that he and his clan were not receiving crabbing royalties, in contrast to the amount of responsibility he was taking for the issue on that day. This was part of the context for his earlier quote about being concerned with madayin rather than money. He was speaking to the Yolngu present, emphasising that his work at the meeting was effectively ‘unpaid’, and that he was acting for other reasons.

Although at first glance it would appear unlikely, labour is also behind the appearance of the Djarrwark clan in the royalty shares for Jalma Bay. The living members of the Djarrwark clan are two old women and some young teenage boys, none of whom are directly involved in crabbing issues. Djarrwark country is a significant component of the Jalma Bay region, but the Dhalwangu also have a very important stake in the Lightning Snake Ancestor in that bay, and they seem to have been omitted from the royalty shares flowing to the clan accounts. However there is an additional element that makes the distribution of royalties make sense. One of the two elderly Djarrwark women is Bandipandi Wunungmurra’s mother, and she lives with him at Bälma, as do some of the younger Djarrwark boys. Bandipandi is heavily involved in monitoring and policing crabbing activities, as, like the Yilpara people, he has access to a boat. He is also a member of the large Dhalwangu clan, and so the flow of royalties has been shaped in such a way that, through the Djarrwark, it reaches the Dhalwangu person who does the most labour and day-to-day oversight of the crabbers. If the money were distributed to a Dhalwangu clan account, many more members of that large clan might have grounds for claiming access to it, and Bandipandi would receive a far reduced share. Royalty flows, like other distributions discussed in Chapter 4, recognise the ownership status of the coast, but also take account of other complexities in local dynamics.

Barramundi Fishermen

...Waka sat braced against the bumping of the boat, facing into the wind as we sped across the bay. I did not notice his head turn, but I saw the pointing arm that followed it. He waved to Bawana at the tiller and the boat swung around. As we moved along our new course I saw the speck that he had been pointing to, the unknown boat that was the reason for temporarily abandoning the turtle hunt. Waka said semi-jokingly over his shoulder that we might ask them for some petrol or some fish. He knew what it was long before it was close enough for me to tell. As we approached I saw that, given the shallow water we were in, the boat was big. Three crewmen were visible on the deck, but it looked like there would be more below. Four large flat-bottomed aluminium dinghies were moored along the sides, each with an engine more than double the size of our own. The back of the main boat had eight or more 44 gallon drums of diesel on it. After months of looking at Aboriginal dinghies and the crabbers’ boats which were only slightly bigger, my first impression of a barramundi boat was of size, wealth, and capability.

One of the men on board threw us a line as we drew near, and Waka held it and sat cross-legged on the prow, asking questions. The conversation, if it could even be called that, was tense. The silences before and after the question and answer were
long enough to be uncomfortable. “Whose boat is this? When did you arrive? Where have you been fishing? When are you leaving?” Another of the crewmen silently watched the exchange with a tight, grim smile on his face and hard eyes. The man with the rope asked if we were from Yilpara, and nodded when he got the response he expected. Yilpara was not only the largest and closest community to where we were, it was people like Djambawa and Waka who were responsible for Blue Mud Bay’s ongoing hostile reputation in the industry.

The boats parted without Waka asking them for anything. Once we were on our way, he said that he had wanted to ask them to leave, but knew that they would not. Later that afternoon, when we were back on shore, he engaged me in a long discussion about the possibility of setting up a permit system and ranger program to monitor people entering the Bay.

Barramundi are caught commercially from long nets strung across the mouths of rivers. The big, self-sufficient boats carry food, water, fuel and refrigeration sufficient for a week or more, and they do not need to touch the land except in emergencies.185 Their boats cost over a million dollars, and although the industry is being challenged by aquaculture-grown barramundi, the licenses have historically been very valuable. Nor do the barramundi fishermen normally compete directly for territory with each other in the way the crabbers do, for they are spread across the NT coastline at lower densities. The barramundi fisherman who has fished in northern Blue Mud Bay most often is Peter Manning. He is not only a millionaire, he is the Chairman of the Seafood Council of the Northern Territory, has strong political connections with the conservative Country Liberal Party186 and in the 2001 NT election he ran for office as the candidate for Northeast Arnhem Land. After fishing in the area for twenty years, Peter Manning attended a meeting with the Yolngu for the first time in late 2002, offering to make an agreement to fish in the area. He was aware of the sea claim proceedings that the people had initiated, and that one aspect of this had the potential to significantly impact on barramundi fishermen.187 He offered a relatively small amount of money, $500 per month for 4 months, for fishing access to the whole coastline of Blue Mud bay. Gawirrin and Bandipandi, who were present at the meeting, commented on the small amount for such a large area, and did not act on the offer, effectively a Yolngu form of rejection. There is still no agreement between the Yolngu and the commercial barramundi fishermen about access to Blue Mud Bay, but barramundi boats continue to operate there in season.

185 This has happened on occasions, and according Djambawa no contact was made with the Dholupuyngu prior to the fishers landing on shore, and no permits were issued to the people who travelled down from Nhulunbuy to bring additional food and equipment.

186 Until recently this party dominated Northern Territory Politics. It lost an election for the first time in 2001, having been in office for more than 20 years.

187 The claim had two parts. The first, under Federal Native Title legislation, covered the sea below low tide and was highly unlikely to deliver exclusive rights to the Dholupuyngu. However the second part was a claim to the waters overlying the intertidal zone, and this claim was being made under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976, potentially conferring much stronger rights to intertidal waters. The barramundi fishermen do not need access to the land itself, but string their nets across river mouths, often in the area defined as the intertidal zone. If this second part of the claim was successful, they would be forced to negotiate access contracts with the Dholupuyngu to the intertidal zone.
Fishing Politics

...Gawirrin wound up the meeting and I was deputised to take Peter Manning, Bun, and Minh back to the airstrip to meet the plane Peter had chartered. Thanh had already left, which at least lightened the mood a little. Peter assumed an air of slightly forced joviality, whilst the two crabbers’ manner was noticeably deferential. He had no direct control over their licenses or their operations, yet as the pilot did the paperwork for the flight, their heads were slightly bowed and I heard them refer to Peter as ‘the big boss’...

Despite being permanent residents, the crabbers’ status within wider Australian life still has a degree of marginality. They are migrants, sometimes quite recent ones, English is not their first language, and some of them struggle with anything more than basic communication. Thanh is an exception in personality terms and it is perhaps no surprise that he has been here far longer than the others, but even he does not carry himself with the confident swagger that is a strong characteristic of Territorian nationalism. The crabbers do not assert, as Anglo-Australian fishermen such as Peter Manning loudly and proudly do, that they were born here, grew up here, and that on this basis they can fish wherever they want. Nor are the crabbers part of the colonial history of Anglo-Australian racism towards Aboriginal people, indeed as migrants they themselves can sometimes find themselves on the receiving end of similar kinds of racism. Land transport for their crabs is fundamental to their business and Yolngu allies are potentially useful in their competitions for fishing territory, but the crabbers’ recognition of Yolngu ownership of the sea is also connected to their own position in their adopted country. To a degree they are already guests, already visitors, and conducting themselves as such amongst the Yolngu involves no great loss of face. The vehement opposition of the barramundi fishermen, at least until legal action threatened, was about more than the pragmatics of land access, it was also about the powerful place that the industry and its people occupy in wider Territory society and politics.

During the first meeting that barramundi fishers attended, Gawirrin asked what to him was a simple question: "Why is it different, crabbers and barramundi? We should make it level for crab and barramundi. We should have the same way. They’re both fishermen!"

Barramundi fishermen string their nets across intertidal rivers, and in some cases these are closer to the ‘shore’ than the pots of the crabbers, who place their crabs on the subtidal mud. It is now possible to appreciate how curious it is from a Yolngu perspective that one needs a contract but the other, who may be fishing closer even to the arbitrary line of the ‘shore’, does not. Unfortunately for the Yolngu, the division between land and sea in Australian law, the different fishing techniques, and the different places the two groups occupy in wider society make treating them ‘the same way’ difficult. The image of the crocodile head that began this chapter shows the anger that can be generated by even the distant possibility of greater Yolngu control, let alone the reality of it.

However there are small steps forward, for turning up to a meeting with a contract offer, however tokenistic and generated by legal action it may be, nevertheless recognises that there is someone to sign a contract with. Similarly, whilst it is true that the crabbers need
land access, are concerned about the legal case, and are competing amongst themselves for territory, relationships are being built that aren’t entirely the results of strategies in the game. Although there are direct confrontations, other engagements might be described in terms of trust, help in dangerous situations, and of reciprocity of different kinds. Things are still moving, and on the ground, or rather, out on the water, new relationships are emerging. Within them can be found some tentative threads of recognition.

Owning a Future

“This meeting is for the future.”
Djambawa Marawili, opening a crabbing meeting.

Preoccupations with access permission, with controlling conduct on country, and with the sustainability of resources are grounded in the present, but they are oriented towards the future. Although the clauses are not often honoured, the crabbing contracts contain statements about Yolngu training and employment, and the ultimate goal for the Dhulupuyngu is still to be able to run a crabbing business for themselves, however challenging and even unrealistic that may be right now without substantial external support. They see commercial fishing as one of a number of solutions to the problem of finding employment for young people that does not require them to move to Yirrkala, where social problems and community dislocation are much greater. More than this, such local business ventures are part of a wider agenda to redirect resources and infrastructure from Yirrkala to Blue Mud Bay, increasing their independence from the former mission. People envisage a future in which they have a greater degree of financial independence and local autonomy, not just from social security and other forms of non-indigenous support, but also from the complex local indigenous politics which affects the volume and the direction of the flow of resources from Yirrkala. Therefore, although they are based on Ancestral connections, a history of frequent interactions, and the realities of everyday coastal life, claims to ownership over sea space and sea resources also have a future orientation. A claim to owning the country is not just a claim for the recognition of past and present connections; it is a claim for a particular kind of future.
Chapter 11
Scanning the Clouds: Coastal life, Coastal Futures

A young woman stands on the wet reef. In her hand is a nylon line, held almost taut as it runs over her outstretched finger and angles away into the silty water. Behind her, the line falls, coils tumbled over a blue plastic reel. A legless mudcrab lies on its back at her feet. She watches the sea, and waits.

Out in the bay, an overloaded aluminium dinghy floats. On the prow, a teenage boy sits cross-legged, fingers waiting expectantly for the tug on the line. Five other people sit on the twin benches of the small boat designed for three. Each of them has a line in the water, save one who is rebaiting her hook with a sand crab. At her feet lies a big green and blue parrotfish with its neck broken, its dead eye gazing blankly up at the sky. When she has baited the hook and cast it out, she lights a cigarette, watches the sea, and waits.

In the shade of a casuarina tree sits an old woman. Beside her, in the soft sand above high tide, her great granddaughter sits with her head bent over a computer game. The carcass of an unwanted mud crab slowly turns black on the ashes of the fire. Clouds are forming out past the island, near the horizon. The old woman watches the sea, and waits.

Where do the clouds stand? In Australian law, it is not exaggerating too much to say that they are waiting over the beach rather than standing out at sea, for the rights they represent have not been achieved. Native Title has extended indigenous ownership into the water, but its grip is very weak, and it offers only a pale shadow of the rights Yolngu people enjoy on land. In recent times nation states have encroached significantly on the ‘freedom of the high seas’ to claim exclusive national sea territories, but there is still great uneasiness about groups within nation states gaining exclusive rights to such territory. Land and sea are still conceptualised very differently, and so the Yolngu continue to wait.

When I first arrived at Yilpara, people there talked unproblematically of their push for ‘Sea Rights’, clearly conceptualised as extending their control over the land into the sea. I remember well numerous ‘sea rights’ conversations around the fire, or driving somewhere, in which I was called upon to try to explain the nature of an ‘intertidal zone’ and the substantial change that existed in Australian law below the low tide mark. It was still harder to make sense of the concept of ‘intertidal waters’ as a separate entity, the waters sitting over the intertidal zone at high tide, and how they were significantly different from the intertidal ground underneath them (and potentially different from the waters lying just beyond a submerged, somewhat arbitrary low tide mark). People still used the phrase ‘Sea Rights’ when I left, but the conversations were shaped by a deeper understanding of the different way that non-indigenous society conceptualises sea space and by some understanding of the legal and legislative barriers that face them. Even more recently, such conversations have been coloured by the experience of actually taking their claim to court, as they did in August and September 2004. The case is
unlikely to end after the first decision, and will wind its way higher through the courts in the coming years, and so people continue to wait.

Trying to explain separate intertidal zones to people who do not a priori begin with a strong distinction between land and sea has a way of underscoring the arbitrariness of the distinction, of making it clear just how strange a demarcation it is in reality. It was an interesting exercise for someone who has grown up with the intuitively compelling, ‘natural’ geographic logic of the land/sea division, and with the maps that powerfully represent it. No doubt many readers, in common with myself, would find the logic of it far more readily apparent than the arbitrariness. The process of stabilising that logic was a critical early step, for the security of it had to be undermined before a different kind of coastal country could be represented.

Of course there also exists a certain strangeness, even arbitrariness, in Dhoḻupuyngu conceptualisations of sea space. The moiety distinctions, the way waters come together and separate, and the complexities of clan and group water ownership can evoke a similar sense of strangeness or arbitrariness amongst those unfamiliar with them. As a way of beginning the transition, I described how Dhoḻupuyngu conceptions are strikingly ‘true’ purely in environmental and geographic terms, with a three-dimensional logic stretching from underground to the clouds in the sky. However the ‘logic’ that infuses these conceptions is much more than that which is covered by the term ‘environmental’. One way in which Dhoḻupuyngu people express complex social categories and distinctions is through water, and there are times where accurately expressing social specificity takes priority over a simple description of the environment. The richness, variability, and complexity of human social life emerges as order is both given to and received from the created world in a reciprocal, ongoing process. People are talking about water, but they are also talking about people. Therefore, what becomes apparent is both a seeming arbitrariness and a compelling environmental, historical, social and spiritual logic lying behind Dhoḻupuyngu understandings of their country.

Presenting this logic, and analysing water in coastal life at a broader level provides a more coherent basis for conversing about sea space than a simple model of marine tenure. By writing about water and coastal country through hunting, sharing, movement, memory, naming, ancestry, spirit, and the struggles of colonialism, a more complex, grounded, and emergent form of ownership can be described, providing a better representation of people’s actual relationships to their country. This by no means contradicts the formal explication and demarcation of the ownership of sea territory by named groups, rather it complements and underpins that depiction. The origins and purposes of such distinctions can be made clearer, as can the continual emergence of them, sometimes in new forms, from the practices of contemporary everyday life.

Is this why ownership claims to the sea in Blue Mud Bay ought to be recognised, as they already have been on land? The Yolŋu were here first, and they had a complex and coherent ownership system that incorporated the sea. Many would argue that these are the moral bases on which any articulation between indigenous sea rights and the Australian state should be negotiated, even if the legal and legislative domains make finer distinctions at times. Dhoḻupuyngu engagements with coastal country remain crucial to who they are and to how they continue to live today in 21st century Australia. Of course this is not necessarily sufficient to win an argument in the legal domain, and the shifts away from self-determination and rights based frameworks in contemporary government policy discourse introduce a further barrier. As the recent decision in the
first phase of their court struggle shows, ‘Sea Rights’ remain a long way off, if they can be achieved at all in the way that Yolngu people would want them.

The stance of wider Australian society that the sea is commons remains critical to contemporary colonial encounters, but Land Rights at least gives the Dholupuyngu a bargaining tool with the crabbers. It is also true that, on the ground, or rather, out on the water, new relationships are emerging. Turning up to a meeting to sign a contract, even if the contract is not honoured as regularly as it should be, is still a recognition that the Dholupuyngu are there to sign a contract with, that they do have a stake in sea space and are trying to exercise it. The crabbers are concerned about the sea rights case, need land access, and are competing amongst themselves for territory, but relationships are being built out on the water that are not entirely the result of strategies in the game. Trust, help in dangerous situations, and reciprocity of different kinds can be found in these interactions, and within them are threads of recognition, albeit tense, patchy, and contested at times.

Such local Yolngu struggles to control fishermen raise a wider point about the articulation between customary marine tenure and Western conservation. Dholupuyngu desires for control over sea country stems not from a desire to get revenue from as many crabbers as possible, but rather to significantly limit the numbers operating in the area. This is partly to maintain a sustainable catch, but of equal importance to the Dholupuyngu is to minimise conflicts out on the water, conflicts that they might be called in to resolve, for social harmony and resource sustainability are related. In terms of professional crabbing in Blue Mud Bay, and probably barramundi fishing as well, significant indigenous control would result in better attempts to manage crab fishing pressure and keep it at sustainable levels. The Dholupuyngu do not want their resource destroyed, as is becoming a real danger been further south. Resource conservation and sustainability should not be the main plank in the argument for indigenous sea rights, but in these circumstances it would be one consequence.

However much western conservation discourse goes well beyond fisheries management issues, and Yolngu knowledge can make a contribution to these wider debates. There are significant changes underway in the earth’s climate system, with even greater ramifications for human beings, and within the small, circumscribed world of Blue Mud Bay we are reminded of the connections between different aspects of the environment that often end up being considered separately. Understanding coastal country through water flows contributes to wider conservation concerns about the coastline; sewage and fertiliser runoff, river and groundwater quality, and the importance of estuaries as fish breeding areas immediately spring to mind. It also draws attention to processes occurring on a broader scale, in terms of the relationship between weather, ocean and climate. It is important not to make too much of such comparisons on a general level, particularly given that one common characteristic of indigenous knowledge is precisely its specificity to local environments, and another is the rejection of a separate category that could be labelled physical/environmental. Nevertheless there are ways in which constructing coastal country differently contributes fresh perspective to some of the critical concerns of non-indigenous conservationists.

...We approached the shape in the water and idled alongside. Petrol outboards made the chase far easier than for the paddlers of times past. Rolling and turning beside the boat was a rubbery grey shape, two harpoon nails embedded in its back. The dugong was exhausted and tangled in the ropes and it took a rasping gasp of air and held it as the boat slowed. Turtles do the same thing,
holding their breath to swim and feed, for evolution had made improvements, but lungs are only so useful underwater. Djambawa sat on the prow, his work done, and Batja motioned to me from his place at the tiller. As the free man in the middle of the small boat, the next job was mine. We caught turtles far more often, so I had not done this before, although I knew what to do from being told about it. I took a deep breath (or was it a sigh?) and leaned over the side, wrapping my hands around the dugong at the narrow point just behind the tail. Slowly standing up in the boat, I brought the tail up with me. Djambawa signalled with his hands and I clasped the tail to my chest, the flukes touching each shoulder. The dugong’s body stretched out in front of me, its head beneath the water. It tried to swim, but the thick muscles were useless in this position; all that happened was its upper body and head moved forward and back in powerful yet powerless sweeps. I smiled grimly for a moment at the thought of what some of my friends from the marine conservation society might say at this particular point. I stood there for a minute or so, although it seemed longer, as the dugong kept moving back and forth, trying to swim, its head submerged. The motions got slower, and I held it fast as with a slow, quiet, dignity, it drowned. Djambawa looked over the side, and nodded his head. I began tying a rope around the tail so we could drag the carcass back to shore.

Customary marine tenure in Blue Mud Bay means being able to kill dugongs. Or 50-year-old turtles. Or dolphins, although apparently dolphins are more rare and taste a bit greasy. Genuine indigenous rights gives people the capacity to do things that others would prefer they did not, and for those in mining companies, this means blocking exploration and mining, and for those concerned with ecological conservation, this means hunting charismatic and endangered species for food. The concerns of indigenous people and non-indigenous conservation can intersect, but do not automatically do so, as the Dhołupyungu are trying to keep crabbing at sustainable levels and simultaneously killing dugongs. They have tried to bring barramundi fishermen to account for accidentally catching dugongs in their fishing nets, whilst themselves taking turtles off the beach as they come up to lay their eggs. Advocating indigenous ownership of sea space simply to meet ecological or conservation objectives does not take into account when those interests may diverge, and there are a number of situations where they do diverge, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Taking indigenous rights seriously within a broader Western conservation framework means involving local people in the management of fishing pressure, habitat conservation, and charismatic or endangered species. Effective management of all of these issues requires a focus beyond the local, but that does not mean that the local is not critical to successful management. Turtles, dugongs, parrotfish and barramundi are far more than just food sources for the Dhołupyungu; indeed in some cases their symbolic role in social and ceremonial life can be more important than their nutritional value. Indigenous peoples have as much, if not more at stake in keeping these animal populations alive and healthy than do the most committed non-indigenous conservationists. Once they are aware of potential risks, then they can play an important ongoing role in management, a role that recognises their status as holders of significant rights as well as significant responsibilities.

Yet this point requires further comment. As the previous chapter made clear, people in Blue Mud Bay envisage a future in which they themselves are the owners and operators of commercial fishing licenses. Turtle shells and crocodile skins were traded in the
mission period, so there is some precedent, but clearly such a development, were it successful in the long term, would shift the dynamics of ownership, tenure, and conservation outlined here. Indigenous fishing licenses have regularly been suggested as a way of assisting poor coastal communities to gain some valuable income, but keeping the level of exploitation sustainable then becomes, at least in part, a matter of internal indigenous politics. If financial returns are significant there will be pressure to maximise those returns in such poor communities, potentially degrading fish stocks. This is leaving aside the general complexities of running such a business in that environment: solving logistical and operational issues in a remote location whilst simultaneously meeting extensive social obligations. People are yet to face the challenges to social life and to tenure systems that will be posed by trying to run their own commercial fishing operations.

Such a move towards the commercial domain might also prompt queries from non-indigenous people. Although there are historical precedents for selling goods from the sea or allowing others to do so, operating contemporary commercial fishing licenses would be on a significantly different scale. For the Dholupuyngu there would be no issue; it would merely be the extension of their ownership into a new sphere. However if such an operation were begun, would that strengthen or weaken Dholupuyngu claims to sea country in the eyes of others? The debate about ‘traditionality’ has been had many times, and yet it is still a powerful motivating force and justification in wider social and political debates. The best resolution to it is an evolving conception of tradition rather than a static one, and in terms of coastal ownership, that means allowing for changes in the way people are present upon and use coastal country. It similarly recognises that new situations can produce new manifestations of ownership, as the principles of Yolngu law and social life become enmeshed in and applied to new contexts. Sometimes such developments are successful; sometimes they are less so.

...Nuwandjali had a plan. His second-hand Suzuki soft top was running well, and the store had just got some new petrol in. His fishing net had few holes, but would do the job, and he had scrounged a couple of big eskies from nearby houses. Mullet were the target and Gapuwiyak was going to be their destination. He proudly told me that he even knew what he was going to charge: 5 mullet for $50. He had worked out he would get $500 for 50 mullet. $10 each sounded a lot to me but at a big inland community like Gapuwiyak it might be a fair price. I had been out with him to catch mullet around Duwultuwul before, although not to sell. It was pretty straightforward provided the tide was right; stake out the net perpendicular to the shore in the few feet of water lying over the sand flats, and then wait for the fish to swim into it. This time the next step in his plan would be to load them into the eskies and head off on the 2-hour drive to Gapuwiyak. A few days later I saw him again, after the plan had been fully executed. I asked if he had made much money and his face fell a little. The Gapuwiyak families had not felt such a great inclination to pay for something they could demand from their entrepreneurial coastal relative, and the distractions of Gapuwiyak were numerous...

...Dhukal, Mannman, and Djambawa were bent over the map on the table at the centre of the meeting. Dhukal had a frown on his face and was pointing at an area of Jalma Bay. Occasionally Gawirrin commented from where he was sitting a little further back, next to one of the Land Council lawyers. They were talking too fast for me, but I could recognise the names of the places and clans being talked about, and I had been there. They were trying to draw the claim...
line. First one, then the other would point at different areas of the map, tracing lines from Woodah Island and back into the bay. The conversation went on for a while, and Dhukal’s frown deepened, intermittently joined by frowns from the others. They were trying their best, but drawing a line that made real sense in this context was, almost by definition, an impossible exercise. After much discussion, there was agreement, if not satisfaction. Djambawa picked up a pencil and began to draw...

Analysing coastal country in terms of customary marine tenure, fishing, conservation, and the legal domain necessarily pushes the focus towards practical issues and their consequences. Water flows have their poetry and metaphor, but they are also expressions of political ownership and identity. Both orientations are important here and both have appeared in the preceding chapters, for the poetry and the politics of life are mutually implicated in one another in complex ways. Such elements underpin the richness of the engagements between people and places in Blue Mud Bay, engagements that are not static, for new formations are continually emerging. Contact with professional fishermen, the desire to engage in commercial activities, and the ‘Sea Rights’ case are all contexts which require new and different articulations of coastal country. They challenge the Dholupuyngu to use principles in their law and social life to express ownership and relatedness in ways that are comprehensible and practical in such emerging contexts.

In many ways, the focus on practical issues and pragmatic consequences so far in this final discussion strikes a chord with the work itself, for the major orientation has been towards practices in everyday life rather than overt theoretical reflections. Yet from the very outset this work has been about transformations of perspective, indeed more than that, about different ways of thinking about and being in coastal country. Such a redefinition does more than simply address questions of marine tenure, or the prospects for commercial fishing and conservation. Emphasising everyday life on coastal country also develops threads on other levels, suggesting some important foundations for Yolngu epistemologies and ontologies, and generating a complementary approach to some of the existing emphases in ethnographies of the Yolngu. Therefore, although the implications have not been drawn out here in great detail, such an approach can constitute a theoretical as well as an ethnographic contribution. The foundations have been laid for a wider analysis of life beyond the more focused questions of tenure, conservation, sea space, and rights claims.

Prioritising flow and movement gives a particular character to the text, for it emphasises continuities, even when change is the major topic of discussion. The strategy here was not to juxtapose discordant images, ideas, or aspects of Dholupuyngu life, but rather to explore common ways of understanding and living in coastal country, whilst at the same time highlighting the diversity of individuals. The places that people interact with, and the nature of those interactions, can vary significantly amongst people and across time, but Dholupuyngu engagements with country are also shaped by common ways of thinking. Coherence and consistency are not always immediately apparent in human life, but in ethnographic terms, there is a degree to which those characteristics do apply to the Dholupuyngu and to the places where they live. The late arrival of the frontier, the granting of land rights in the Northern Territory, the physical separation from the worst effects of the Nhulunbuy mine, the absence of drugs and alcohol, and the unusual and unexpected survival of Wakuthi and other senior leaders have lent a particular character to life in the area. Of course the research foci and textual strategies must be
acknowledged in this appearance of consistency, and other aspects of homeland life could have been chosen which would show far less concord; intra and inter-clan rivalries, poor relations with the homeland association at Yirrkala, and welfare and employment issues immediately spring to mind. The struggles with the fishermen introduce an element of discord here and were intended to do so, but they can also be seen as part of a wider pattern, as the Dholupuyngu act out of a particular understanding of people and country. The logic and the origins of this understanding emerge from ways of life and thought that do possess a degree of consistency and coherence. Quite simply, although the future is far less certain, this is what Blue Mud Bay, and Yilpara in particular, is like at this moment in time.

Many people from across the globe have argued for the importance of learning about indigenous knowledge and indigenous ways of being. Some advocate it as a basis for non-indigenous people deepening their understanding of the world around them, others as a necessary step in improving the lot of indigenous people, most would argue for both. Yolngu people have a strong sense of living in a created world, one that is an engaged, active participant in everyday human life, and more than this, they see themselves, their creators, and the world around them as being one and the same. The implications of such an approach to life stretch well beyond discussions of ecological conservation and ownership, and indeed in certain ways beyond conversations about relationships to country. Some would argue that it is at this deeper level that indigenous thinking has the most to contribute to the contemporary lives of non-indigenous people, and thereby change the world for the better. Yet it is also the level at which communication and comprehension is the most challenging, and requires the most effort on both sides for the conversation to be meaningful. It is the work of a lifetime, if not more.

* * *

...I stood in the shallows, letting the warm salty water wash the dust of the drive and the mornings preparations from my feet and sandals. Julia, Gawaratj, Minitja and Yakutja were walking away from me towards the reef, carrying handreels, a bucket, and a fish spear. I watched as they hopped off the end of the dry rocks into the water, and slowly made their way out, half wading, half swimming. Their destination was not immediately apparent from the beach, and Gawaratj’s fish spear seemed somewhat inadequate protection from the crocodiles and sharks, but then what would a new arrival like me know? “We take our chances” Ngulpurr had said to me once, when we were talking about the risks of hunting.

The fishers kept moving out, making the last part of their journey from the homeland to the fishing spot. Finally they stopped, distant specks out in the water. They were fishing off the outer reef without a boat, standing chest deep on the submerged rocks and spinning their handlines overhead to cast them into the deeper water.

High above, Djet the Sea Eagle began to circle, watching the activity below, waiting for the chance to snare a catch. We were fishing near his home, for the nest of this winged Madarrpa kinsman was a kilometre or two back along the beach. I went back to the car and got my camera. A closing image perhaps? They were far enough out that it might not show up. Pressing the shutter, I
captured another scene from everyday life; bodies in the midst of the flows under a cloudy, wet season sky.
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APPENDIX 1

REPORT OF OBSERVATIONS
Explanatory Note

The following Appendix contains relevant material from the report produced by Marcus Barber for the Native Title claim in Blue Mud Bay. Under the terms of reference provide by the Land Council for the report, it had to contain direct observations rather than expert anthropological opinion, as it was deemed that my formal qualifications at that time would not allow me to provide expert opinion sufficient for legal processes. Expert anthropological opinion was provided in a separate report prepared by Professor Howard Morphy (Morphy 2004). Sections of my report are included here to outline the formal methodology of the resource use survey, and to provide further information about hunting skills, hunting foods, and the use of resources at Yilpara and elsewhere. Some sections of my report have been omitted in this appendix, including the introductory statement, the section on resource distribution (which was covered in Chapter 4), and an extended account of observations of ceremonies. Where relevant, individual people have been identified as the source of particular information. The names of people which are enclosed in square brackets are the names of people who had died by April 2004, when this report was written.
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1.1 Introduction

Yilpara lies on a peninsula in the north of Blue Mud Bay (see Map 2B). The homeland centre has an average population of approximately 100 people and is the largest community of those on or near the shores of Blue Mud Bay. Other centres in the area include GanGan, Barraratjpi, Djarrakpi, Dhurupitjpi, and further inland, Wandawuy and Rurrangalla. Except for Wandawuy, all of these communities were visited at some point during the fieldwork (see Section 5), but only for shorter periods. This study is a description of hunting activity based at Yilpara during the fieldwork, rather than a survey of all the activities being undertaken in the claim area.

The core of the Yilpara community is the Yithuwa Ma’darrpa clan, on whose country the homeland centre is built, but due to marriage, kinship ties, and other residence factors, a diverse range of Yolngu clans are represented amongst the regular residents. In 2002, Yilpara had approximately 13 main dwellings, houses which were occupied by senior Yithuwa Ma’darrpa men and/or their wives and descendants. One house was occupied by a senior Gupa Djapu man whose mother was a Yithuwa Ma’darrpa. During the research, a white storekeeper took over the management of the Yilpara store and began residing at Yilpara approximately 60-70% of the time. No other non-Yolngu people permanently reside there.

In Yolngu English, the word ‘hunting’ covers a number of activities (such as fishing with a handline, digging for crabs, collecting shellfish and other activities not covered by the standard English definition). For brevity, this report follows the Yolngu convention, so when written here, ‘hunting’ refers to the broad array of hunting and resource gathering activities Yolngu undertake on the surrounding country. The definition does not include non-food resources. These will be dealt with in a separate section of the report.

The objectives of the resource use survey at Yilpara were as follows:
1. To accurately depict the hunting range of Yilpara residents over the course of a 12 month seasonal cycle
2. To accurately depict the nature of resource use at particular locations over time
3. To assess the extent of hunting and fishing activity over time and space
4. To examine how different groups and individuals in the community might use different areas of the hunting range
5. To examine how seasonal factors affect hunting range and resource use
6. To gather information about the Blue Mud Bay physical environment that is of particular relevance to its residents
7. To gather information about hunting skills, ecological knowledge, and other factors relevant to hunting success
8. To gather information about resource distribution
9. To use daily hunting and shared activity as a way of building relationships with Yilpara residents
10. To allow conversations about life in Blue Mud Bay to occur in the spaces and places where that life is lived out
11. To use the situations and opportunities provided by daily hunting and shared experience to begin exploration of the more complex questions addressed later in the research

1.2 Methodology

The research methodology had to meet a diverse array of objectives. In terms of estimating total resource use in the community, the most effective strategy would have been to systematically survey the catch of Yilpara residents on their return from daily hunting. However this would not have adequately met a number of other objectives, such as gathering information about the physical environment, documenting ecological knowledge, assessing hunting skills, and building relationships with people. In Yolngu social interactions, direct questions about food (particularly quantities) are understood as a request to share the food with the questioner. With such long-term fieldwork planned, good community relations were of great importance in devising an appropriate methodology, and this was an important consideration when structuring the hunting survey. The need to meet multiple objectives, combined with the need to develop a sensitive, long-term methodology, meant that quantifying the total resource use across the community was not an objective of the research.

However, the survey objectives state the need to generate a systematic account of the nature of resource use activities, their frequency, and the range of country over which they occur. These objectives were compatible with other objectives, such as documenting hunting skills, collecting environmental information, and building relationships with others through shared activity. Both types of objectives could be addressed through a participant observation survey of individual hunting trips, with the trips over time collated to create a representative account of hunting range, hunting activities, and hunting frequency. Range and frequency were accurately documented via systematic collection of Global Positioning System (GPS) points at each relevant stop on each hunting trip. The Global Positioning System is a series of satellites that send out constant signals of their time and location. These signals are received by a hand held device approximately the size of a mobile telephone, which uses the transmitted information to calculate its position on the earth’s surface, expressing that position through map coordinates. The system is very accurate, easily able to record movements over the earth’s surface of less than 100 metres, and this level of detail is far more than is required to accurately present maps at the scale presented in this report.

On every trip, notes were made of the following data:

1. The locations visited on the trip (obtained using a GPS)
2. The names of the individuals present on the trip
3. The type of resources collected from each location
4. The person or group who collected the resources
5. The equipment used to obtain the resources
6. An estimate of the amount of resources obtained (where possible/practicable)
7. The uses made of resources from those locations
8. The duration of the stay at any one location
9. Significant movement within any one named location
10. Ecological and environmental information about the area, including seasonal changes
11. Encounters with other hunters who had travelled to a location independently
1.2.1 Participant Observation and Vehicles

One aspect of this methodology that needs to be discussed at the outset is access to vehicles. 4WD vehicles and boats were a critical factor in the observed hunting, which predominantly involved day trips from the homeland centre to the surrounding areas. The majority of the hunting trips reported here involved the use of a 4WD vehicle supplied as part of the Blue Mud Bay SPIRT project. This vehicle played an important role in maintaining good reciprocal relations, a critical aspect of long-term participant observation research in Aboriginal communities. However the presence and use of the vehicle also required that the vehicle’s impact on the research be assessed.

As has already been stated, the focus of the survey was on the hunting range and nature of resource use, rather than on the total amounts of resources collected across the community. In focussing on these two objectives, the critical one is the hunting range, as once hunters can access a particular environment they are likely to exploit all of the useful resources available at that location. The actual hunting range for the participant observation hunting trips could be obtained from a collation of the GPS points from those trips. However in assessing the accuracy of this range, and therefore the relative impact of the research vehicle on hunting range over the year, it was necessary to search for physical evidence of previous hunting activity, and activity occurring independently of the research vehicle.

Evidence in the landscape for previous hunting activity exists in the form of the road and track network across the Yilpara peninsula. These tracks are largely made and kept clear by the passing of vehicles and by regular burning of the country. In many areas, lack of use of tracks leads to deterioration and rapid overgrowth of the track. Much of this track network is not evident on commercial maps of the area, which show the major road only. In order to produce an accurate version of the actual road network being used, all visible tracks across the peninsula were mapped using a GPS and a car odometer to take readings every 500m. These readings were then used to produce an accurate, up-to-date map of the track network, to evaluate vehicle passage in recent history. The peninsula is in a remote area of Aboriginal-controlled land, and such vehicles are almost exclusively those operated by local Aboriginal people and their visiting relatives. The track network therefore represents indigenous presence on the country, and presence is directly related to resource use.

In order to assess the relative importance of the research vehicle on the overall community vehicle cohort, regular notes were taken about the presence and working status of other vehicles in the community. Similar notes were taken about boats, although boats in the community were owned and operated by Aboriginal people, for there was no research vessel. Mapping the road network to assess physical evidence for previous resource use, and noting the presence and condition of vehicles during fieldwork, were two ways in which impact of the research vehicle on local hunting practices was assessed. A third means of assessment was to record observations of Yolngu travelling independently, and collate these observations to produce a map of the hunting range of these independent hunters. This range could then be compared with that of the research vehicle.
1.3 Results

This section contains the formal results of the resource use survey in terms of hunting range and frequency. More detailed reporting and explanation of hunting skills, ecological knowledge, and related matters follows in the subsequent sections of this report. Most hunting trips lasted between a few hours and a day, although at certain times of the year Yolngu were observed camping out overnight in hunting and fishing areas. During the main body of the survey (Oct 2000-Nov 2001) data from 180 trips were recorded as a participant observer.

1.3.1 Location of Food Resources

In order to understand the summary maps of hunting range properly, it is necessary to first describe where particular resources can be found. From the hunting trips, it is possible to construct a map of the locations where particular resources are commonly exploited by Yilpara residents (Map 5A). It is very important to note that this is not a complete account of resources exploited from those areas, as residents from other nearby homeland centre communities are likely to also use the same areas, but may extract different resources from those locations. Yilpara people may also extract multiple resources from the same site. However this map shows in general terms what resources are important to Yilpara people from the respective areas.

1.3.2 Access to Food Resources

Map 5B shows the roads marked on the standard commercial maps of the area, roads which cover a limited range. Map 5C shows the Aboriginal-made vehicle tracks present on the Yilpara peninsula that were mapped during fieldwork. A comparison of Map 5C with the resources in Map 5A shows that the tracks made and maintained by Yolngu vehicles lead directly to the sites of key resources.

The map of Aboriginal roads indicates the presence of Yolngu vehicles on a significant proportion of the peninsula, with an emphasis on the coastal margin. Many tracks run along the beach, and at such times, there are usually two tracks. One permanently visible track is above the high tide line, whilst the second track runs along on the intertidal hard sand at lower tides and is erased with every high tide. Like the tracks through the bush, the beach tracks above high tide also disappear or become overgrown if they are unused for an extended period.

1.3.3 Vehicles

A list of vehicles present at Yilpara during the survey period appears below. 12 other vehicles unrelated to the research were either permanently based at Yilpara or present for extended periods. On occasions it was possible for the number of vehicles present to exceed this number on a single day, usually during peak ceremony times.


Vehicles present at Yilpara for one month or more during the resource use survey conducted between Oct 2000 and November 2001. The owner or most regular driver is in brackets. Many vehicles are unregistered and so exact ages are uncertain.
1997 Toyota troop carrier (Djambawa Marawili)
1999 Toyota troop carrier (Dukha Wirrpanda)
Mid-1980’s Nissan Patrol LWB (Ngulpurr Marawili)
Late 1980’s Subaru utility (Djawila Marawili)
Early 1990’s Suzuki Sierra (Nuwendjali Marawili)
Early 1980’s Nissan Patrol SWB (Nuwendjali Marawili)
Early 1980’s Subaru Wagon (Bakulangay Marawili)
Mid-1990’s Toyota Landcruiser Wagon (Wanyipi Marika)
Late 1980’s Toyota Hilux Surf (Garindjira Marawili)
Mid-1980’s Nissan Patrol LWB (Wäka Mununggurr)
1995 Toyota Hilux Utility (Ron – Non-indigenous storekeeper)
1996 Toyota Troop Carrier (Blue Mud Bay Project- Archaeology)
1997 Toyota Troop Carrier (Blue Mud Bay Project- Anthropology)

1.3.4 Hunting Range

Map 5D shows the total number of GPS points obtained on hunting trips over the course of the initial 13 month survey. By comparing the location of the points with the resources shown on Map 5A, some key areas of activity are clear:

1. Turtle and dugong hunting in Grindall Bay (Yathikpa), turtle hunting at Round Hill Island (Gunyuru) and turtle hunting and oyster gathering at Woodah Island (Wangurarrirripa).
2. Linefishing for parrotfish, yam digging, and spearing for mullet and stingray along the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula (Yarrinya, Point Blane).
3. Mudcrab hunting in the mangroves and line fishing in boats off the reefs near Yilpara on the eastern side.
4. Hunting for stingray and fishing for trevally in the bays directly north and northeast of Yilpara.
5. Shooting waterbirds in the marshes and riverflats northeast of Grindall Bay.
6. Fishing for freshwater fish at the waterhole (Mangatjipa) at the far north of the map.

Hunting range in map 5D correlates strongly with the track network in Map 5C. This suggests that the existing track network is a reliable guide to resource use activity prior to the commencement of the resource survey.

1.3.5 Seasonal Hunting Range

Map 5E and Map 5F show the hunting ranges during the wet season and dry season respectively. The ranges in the two seasons are similar, despite the more difficult weather conditions in the wet season. Yolngu hunting and presence on country was not severely impacted by the onset of the wet season, and this is due to a number of factors:

1. alternative wet season routes on land to avoid flooded rivers
2. travel to sites during the periods between significant rainfall events (these periods can be weeks)
3. extensive knowledge of the movements of weather and storms, and of the places offering boat shelter. This means that boat travel was not restricted by location, only by the need to avoid temporary weather patterns
4. Particular animals (such as parrotfish) are ‘in season’ during the wetter months in particular habitats. Coastal and marine resource use was intensified during the wet season, and the bulk of resource use at Yilpara was coastal regardless of season because of the location of the community
5. Significant numbers of Yolngu from Nhulunbuy and other homeland centres came to visit relatives during the school holidays over Christmas and January, further increasing hunting activity during the wetter months.

The main variation in hunting range between dry and wet seasons was the use of the freshwater fishing hole at Mangatjipa, and a reduced emphasis on shooting birds on the floodplain northwest of Yilpara. Mangatjipa is cut off during the wet season, and the flooded plain makes birds harder to shoot during the wet. On the sea, hunting range from Yilpara was similar between wet and dry seasons. Further discussion of Yolngu seasons follows in a subsequent section of this report.

1.3.6 Encounters with Independent Hunters

Separate records were kept of encounters with hunters who travelled independently of the research vehicle. Although not all encounters were recorded with a GPS point, a note was made of the name of the place where the encounter occurred. A general location can be identified from this name and a representative GPS point created. Combined with those for which a GPS was recorded, these locations form the basis of Map A1. Map A1 is therefore a guide to where encounters with other Yolngu occurred during the course of the survey. Encounters on the water are rare, but the researcher was travelling in boats owned and used by Yolngu people. Sea travel therefore represents a separate category, where trips were made independently with the researcher on board. The hunting range of encountered vehicles corresponds closely with the hunting range of the research vehicle, providing further evidence that the hunting range described here is accurate for the survey period.

1.3.7 Hunting during 2002 Fieldwork

During the second fieldwork period in 2002, resource use was not made a priority for research. However a number of hunting trips were made, focussing on turtle hunts and on unfamiliar resources or locations, but also including many trips of a more general nature. An examination of the hunting locations for this more restricted period (Map A2) provides further evidence that the hunting range for Yilpara residents obtained during the main study in 2000-2001 is accurate.

1.3.8 Community Involvement in Hunting

Yilpara generally had a population of between 80 and 120 people during the fieldwork. Over 180 individuals participated in a hunting trip in which the researcher was present. No accurate figure can be provided for the number of people who were encountered or observed hunting independently, as in many circumstances it was not possible to note more than a few people travelling in another loaded vehicle. It should be noted that in terms of independent travellers, it is likely that a much greater number of trips were made which the researcher did not encounter or observe, than are reported here.
Map A1: Independent Hunters Encountered or Observed
1.4 Summary

Yilpara hunters were observed using a wide variety of resources from across the northern part of Blue Mud Bay. The resource use survey conducted between Oct 2000 and November 2001 describes a range for this hunting activity. The bush track network, encounters with independent hunters, and data from subsequent fieldwork provide evidence that this range is accurate. The presence of a significant number of Yolngu-owned vehicles indicates the capacity for Yolngu hunters to access the surrounding environment, and a substantial number of observations of independent travel on land and sea were recorded during the survey. With the exception of two land sites inaccessible by road, hunting range was not substantially affected by the onset of the wet season. Similarly, with the exception of three invalid or elderly people, all Yilpara residents participated in at least one hunting trip during the survey period, and most undertook many. The data described here is a minimum for activity in the area, as the total amount of hunting activity for the Yilpara community was significantly larger than that observed by the researcher. Finally it should also be stated again that this represents an account of activity based at Yilpara. There are a number of other nearby communities that also hunt in the claim area and its immediate surrounds. A brief discussion of these other communities appears in Section 5.

Section 2: Habitats and Seasons

2.1 Introduction

The following section contains observations and information related to how Yolngu people conceptualise ecological zones and food resource habitats. It also outlines the seasons over a calendar year in Blue Mud Bay. This information is relevant to the hunting survey outlined above, and to the observations of hunting and fishing techniques discussed in Section 2.

2.2 Ecological Zones

Yolngu hunters were often observed referring to particular areas of country using words that correlate with identifiable ecological zones in English. These terms describe physical characteristics and/or environmental categories. Some of these basic terms include:

- Rangi- beach, sand. Coastal or beach areas as distinct from inland ones.
- Gunda- rock, stone, reef. The word can refer to a shoreline reef or an underwater rock.
- Batpa- turtle and dugong feeding habitat, undersea rocky reef or seagrass beds.
- Gathul- mangrove trees, mangrove area
- Dholu- mud, muddy area
- Moŋuk gapu- saltwater, sea, ocean
- Raypiny gapu- freshwater
- Mayang- river
- Mangutji- waterhole, billabong
- Ninydiya- floodplain
- Retja-jungle
- Diltji- bush or inland areas (as distinct from coastal or beach zones).
2.3 Dhiyuwining: Resource habitats

The map referred to previously in the resource use survey section shows the resources generally exploited from particular habitat areas in the Yilpara area (Map 5A). Again it should be noted that this map is a guide only, as resources such as highly mobile fish species can obviously be found across a wide range. Nevertheless there are some defined habitats where people expect to obtain particular resources, and others resources such as freshwater fish and shellfish can be highly localised.

Map 5A was generated from direct observations of Yolngu hunting activities. However it also reflects a Yolngu conception of country and resource use, that of Dhiyuwining. This term refers to locations where particular resources are reliably available, year after year, often during a specific season. In Yolngu speech, the location can be a reference to the resource itself at that location. A powerful ancestral story associated with an area further enhances the richness of it as a Dhiyuwining place. Some examples of Dhiyuwining areas are listed below (note locations in English found on Map A3). These areas were supplied as examples by Djambawa Marawili in a conversation about Dhiyuwining:

Stingrays-Yilpara
Turtles- Yathikpa (Grindall Bay), Gunyuru (Round Hill Island), Wangurrarrikpa (Woodah Island)
Parrotfish- Djarrakpi (Cape Shield), Gurritjinya (eastern side of Blane Peninsula)
Turtle eggs- Djarrakpi (Cape Shield), Wangurrarrikpa (Woodah Island)
Honey- Wangurrarrikpa (Woodah Island), Rurrangalla (inland homeland centre)
Yams and nuts- Wapiyarrkpa (Nicol Island)

Dhiyuwining is a way in which hunting areas with rich resources are expressed in Yolngu speech and thinking, as distinct from the ecological zones described above. The term therefore encompasses more than the English word ‘habitat’ as it refers to areas of particularly rich hunting resources. It further incorporates the seasonality of resources, as dhiyuwining refers to not just an area but the time of year that that area provides the resources. Finally, Dhiyuwining areas are often sites of ancestral activity.

2.4 Winds

Yolngu seasons are heavily interwoven with winds from particular directions. Information on winds and seasons was obtained throughout the survey, and was checked and systematised in formal conversations with Ngulpurr Marawili and Djambawa Marawili. There are four main winds:

Lungurrma- North wind. Yirritja moiety
Dhimmuru/Bulu- East wind. Dhuwa moiety
Mädirriny- South wind. Yirritja moiety.
Barra- West wind, Dhuwa moiety.

These four major wind directions are complemented by local winds named in particular places. Many of these names come from songs and there are multiple names for the winds. One example of a localized wind was bununu (also called yalyal or galena). This is Dhuwa moiety, a light breeze found at inland Dhuwa places like Dhurupitjpi. A second example is gaypirrayn (also called madayalyal or mapulany). This is a Yirritja wind found at important inland areas such as GanGan, Baykutji, and Wayawu.
The words for calm are also localized and can be different at different places. Calm at Dhuwa areas such as Ngandharkpuy is called mit’mit’. Calm weather at the Yirritja area of Yathikpa is called marawulwulj, wapurrarr, or gunbilk. This specificity of language when referring to the physical environment was also noted in other domains, such as states and locations of water, but these will not be discussed here.

2.5 Seasons

The four major winds frame and partly define Yolngu seasons, but the list below also contains other indicators of seasons beyond those of the winds. Of particular note is the way that plants indicate when particular marine resources are ready to be exploited. The words for these seasons are used in areas other than Blue Mud Bay, but the timing of the seasons can vary in different parts of Arnhem Land, as can the local phenomena that signify the change of season. The timing of the seasons and the phenomena described here apply to the Blue Mud Bay region. They were obtained from direct observation, and conversations with Djambawa Marawili and Ngulpurr Marawili.

*Dhulu$dur* (October). The first rains come, and there is distant thunder and lightning

*Lunggurrma* (October-December) The seas are calm and there is some new growth from the first rains, brought by barra, the west wind. The bush berries munduytj and bundjungu are ready, indicating that the parrotfish is also becoming fat. Flowering plants that signify that the livers of the maranydjalk (shark and stingray) are ready. These include balwurr (the red flowering Kurrajong), warrkarr (white sand lily), and a creeper, wurluymung.

*Wolma* (December)- Lightning becomes much more prevalent, particularly in the evening after the afternoon clouds have built up. At first the lightning is silent, and the thunder is heard after a few weeks. The weather is hot and the mosquitoes come out. Barra, the west wind, bring rains during this time. This is nguykal (kingfish) season, where the kingfish travels from freshwater at Wayawu river northwest of Yilpara and down the rivers, passing out to sea towards Djarrakpi. People spear nguykal off the rocks at Djarrakpi.

*Bulunu* (January-March)- High wind season, and high tides during the full moon. There is lush growth from the rains, but the bush foods are not yet ready. Yellow flowers show that the freshwater baypinnga (saratoga) are carrying eggs. Black berries appear on a palm tree at this time, signifying that the emus are fat. White flowers on the paperbark also signify this time. There are still some munduytj (bush fruit of the early wet) to be found, as well as other bush fruits such as bundjungu.

*Midawarr* (March-April)- The season just after the wet when bush foods are ripe, animals are fat, seafoods are plentiful, and the wind blows more softly from the east (dhimmurru). It is a good time to hunt turtle and dugong. The wattle tree flower which grows at this time tells Yolngu that it is the right time for mekawu (oysters), seagull eggs, and turtle eggs. The wind dhimmurru/bulunu is associated with white berries (called bulunu) and sometimes the rains come when they are ripe. Soft yams (namukaliya) are ready to eat at this time.
Dharra/Gadayka (May-August) - Cold weather and rough seas with plenty of yams and bush food. Wadut is the name of the strong wind in this season, which flattens the grass, and the morning is sometimes foggy, caused by the bushfires lit in the dry grass. It is the time when all of the animals go into their holes, and Yolngu set bushfires (wurrk) to burn off the undergrowth, making the holes easier to locate.

Rarranhdharr (September-October) - the late dry season when it is hot, freshwater is becoming scarce, and some bush animals are getting thin. Freshwater fish and tortoises become concentrated in the deeper pools, and become the focus for hunting effort. In the past, coastal Yolngu tended to head inland during this season, and built fish traps (buyku) across the narrow creeks, taking advantage of the low water flow. These traps were not observed being built during the fieldwork. Rakay (lily roots) and freshwater tortoises (minhala) can be found in the drying up mud. The stringybark blossoms signal wild honey, geese, bālkpālk nuts, and darrangul (orange-red flowered bush with a nut inside) are ready.

2.6 Summary

Yolngu possess a detailed ecological knowledge of their local environment which enables them to hunt effectively. Ecological zones, winds and seasons comprise parts of this knowledge, directing Yolngu hunters towards particular resources, and connecting different sets of resources together. Dhiyuwining, which incorporates habitat, season, and hunting resources into one concept, is an important way in which such knowledge is encapsulated and expressed. Further discussion of such knowledge will appear in the next section, which outlines hunting and fishing techniques.

Section 4: Obtaining Food Resources- Hunting, Gathering and Fishing Techniques

The Yilpara residents were observed using a wide range of marine and terrestrial resources and employing a diverse array of hunting skills to obtain them effectively. The following section describes these resources, the categories of people who collected them, and how they were collected and processed into food. A hunting trip often involved people obtaining several of the resources described below, either by delegating particular tasks to certain people, or by individuals employing some combination of hunting methods over the course of a trip. This must be borne in mind when discussing each of the resources in turn.

3.1 Handline Fishing

Handline fishing from the beach or shore reef was the most frequent form of hunting observed and was the only hunting activity regularly performed by both genders and all ages. Adult Yilpara residents have an excellent understanding of fish behaviour and of the effect of tides, seasons, and local weather conditions on likely fishing success. Whilst fish are highly mobile, certain species are known to be associated with certain habitats. List 2 shows some of the main species caught by Yilpara residents. The key target species for Yolngu fishing off rocky reefs on the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula was Yambirrku (Blue tusk fish or parrotfish, *Choerodon schoenleinii*). Also caught frequently off these reefs was Wamungu (*Lethrinus laticandis*), and Nyirrka (Estuarine Rock Cod, *Epinephelus cooides*). On the northern coast above Yilpara, another fish, Darrapa (trevally, *Gnathanodon speciosus*) was more commonly caught.
The target species when fishing in the muddy, sheltered areas in the upper bays near river estuaries was Mithurrungu (Catfish species, *Arius spp*) and Makani (Queenfish, *Scomberoides commersonianus*). Balin (Barramundi, *Lates calcarifer*) were caught in both muddy and rocky areas, and were a prized catch in both environments. Some fish (such as Yambirrku) are known to taste better at certain times of the year as their flesh and livers (djukurr) become fat. Fishing effort was directed towards these species during these periods.

**List 2: Marine species observed being caught during fieldwork**

1) **Fish Caught on Handlines and/or Speared**

- Dhinimbu- Spanish Mackerel, *Scomberomorus commerson*
- Banang- golden pufferfish, *Lagocephalus clunaris*
- Wurt’ji- rabbitfish, *Sigonus lineatus*
- Wamungu-*Lethrinus laticandis* (or undescribed *Lethrinus* species)
- Djembirri-Mangrove jack, *lutjanus argentineanus*
- Maliarrk-flathead, *Cymbacephalus nematoptalmus* or *staigeri*
- Garringirri- lookdown trevally, *Alectis indica*
- Dhakuđa- Golden trevally *Gnathanodon speciosus*
- Darrawarta- Yellowfin bream, *Acanthopagrus latus*
- Djumbarr- grey sweetlip, *Diagramma labiosum*
- Mungudadi- flagtail grunter, *Amiatata candarattata*
- Yambirrku- Blue Tus fish- *Choerodon schoeleinii*
- Yalangi’naning- Stripey- *Lutjanus carponotatus*
- Djembirri- Mangrove Jack- *Lutjanus argentineanus*
- Mithurrungu- Fork-tailed Catfish- *Arius sp.*
- Dayng’be- Coral Trout- *Plectropomus maculatus*
- Balin- Barramundi- *Lates calcarifer*
- Nyirrkarda-Estuarine Rock cod- *Epinephelus malabaricus* or reef grouper, *Epinephelus quoyanus*
- Gurrutu,Nyirrkarda-groper
- Makani- Queenfish- *Scomberoides commersonianus*
- Darrapa- Trevally- *Caranx sp.*
- Warrwarra-Milkfish- *Chanos chanos*
- Wakin- bluetail mullet- *Valamugil buchanarii*
- Gundirrnaning- stonefish, *Synanceia horrida*
- Mandannganing- sucker fish, *Echeneis naucrates*
- Gulku- Diamond scaled mullet, *Liza viagensis*
- Warrukay- barracuda, *Sphyraena spp*

2) **Freshwater Fish Species**

- Baypinga- freshwater Saratoga, *Scleropages jardinii*
- Dhunum- Sleepy Cod, *Oxyeleotris linealoatus*
- Måtbuna- Sooty grunter, *Hephaestus fuliginosus*

3) **Crabs**

- Dżinydżalma- Mud Crab- *Scylla serrata*
- Gatjini- sand crab (bait)
- Ginybirrk- mangrove crab (*Sesarma spp*) (bait)
- Yalku- Blue rock crab (bait)
- Ngukaliya- intertidal/reef hermit crab (bait)
Gomu- small hermit crab living in the roots of beach/dune foliage (bait)

4) Sharks and Stingrays
Gurritjipi- Cowtail ray, *Pastinachus sephens*
Barnbi-Himantura uarnak
Nganalk’mi-Mangrove whipray, *Himantura granulata*
Marrt’gala- manta ray, *Manta hirostris*
Barrika-Sawfish, *Pristis spp*
Garrungunung- hammerhead shark- *Sphyma spp*
Mana- sharks, including Lemon Shark (*Negaprion acutidens*) and Nervous Shark (*Carcharhinus cautas*)

5) Shellfish
Buyn’bu, Ngukaliya- Lesser longbum, *Terebralia palustris*
Dhan’pala- Mud mussel (*Polymesoda erosa*)
Mekawu- oysters in rocky reef areas
Ngiriwany- oysters growing on rocks in muddy estuarine areas

6) Turtles and Dugongs
Dhalwatpu- Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)
Guwarrtji- Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
Muduthu- Olive Ridley Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)
Ngarriwa- Flatback Turtle (*Chelonia depressa*)
Garan- Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)
Warrumbili- Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)
Djunuguyangu- dugong

Participant observation revealed that in addition to a detailed knowledge of the environment and animal behaviour, handline fishing requires considerable physical skill. There is no rod to cast the line out and so Yolngu fishers whirled a length of line above their heads, then let it go at precisely the right moment of rotation so that it flew out into the water. Exact timing was required to cast the line a reasonable distance. The difference between an effective cast and a poor one is fine, but has a huge effect on fishing success, as larger fish are more prevalent further out. Clearing a hook that has become snagged on a rock or sensing a fish nibbling on the bait requires soft, sensitive hands, and knowing the exact moment to pull the line when a fish bites is also extremely difficult, particularly for the prized parrotfish. Pulling in a large fish with a handline requires tough hands (to endure the line friction), arm strength and an understanding of when the line is in danger of breaking and should be allowed to run free. When the fish are biting, the speed with which a hook can be tied, baited and recast after a successful catch can make a substantial difference to the final outcome of the fishing effort. Yolngu children as young as 4 or 5 were observed fishing, having mastered the basic technique, and a high level of skill was observed in children of early teenage years. Without exception, all able-bodied community members observed who were over this age displayed a very high level of line fishing skill.

3.1.1 Boat Fishing

Fishing from the shore was the most common form of handline fishing, but fishing also occurred from boats. Boat fishing trips were generally of two types. The first and more common type targetted Yambirrku (parrotfish) and involved motoring or rowing a few
hundred metres offshore to fish off the outer fringing reef. This type of fishing was observed on 11/03/01 and 5/05/01, to name two examples. A second type targeted darrapa (trevally) and this took place further north in Myaloola bay, but also involved staying within a few hundred metres of the shore. A float has been positioned by Yilpara residents at a particular spot a few hundred metres offshore from where schools of trevally are present at certain tide times. Boat fishing trips of five fishers near this float produced several hauls of over 50 darrapa (trevally) in less than two hours, and two such trips witnessed were on 6/04/01 and 7/04/01. Boat fishing trips were made along the coast north of this place and also produced substantial numbers of darrapa and other fishes (for example, on 4/5/01).

On 26/02/01, on an unusually low tide, Yolngu fishers (men and women) decided to fish off the outer reef without a boat. They waded and then swam approximately 200m offshore and stood up to their chests in water, fishing for parrotfish for over an hour. This type of fishing was only observed once, but was a familiar technique to other Yolngu (Ngulpurr Marawili, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda]) who had not witnessed this instance but were asked about it.

3.1.2 Cooking Fish

Fish were rarely gutted, but sometimes the liver of particular species (such as Yambirrku (parrotfish), and Wamungu (emperors) were cut out and cooked separately, or eaten raw. The bulk of fish were cooked simply by throwing them whole and unscaled directly onto the coals of an open fire, but there were other methods. When time permits, Yambirrku or Balin (barramundi) can be cooked slowly and gently by building a rock platform on the hot side of the fire (where the wind is blowing the heat and flames). The fish is stood upright on the platform base, leaning up against the side of the platform. It roasts slowly as the flames and heat are blown towards it by the wind. This method of cooking is known as nylon ynal watan or litan marra, and was observed on 12/02/01, under the direction of [Bakulangay Marawili]. Fish can be cooked quickly by slicing them along the length of the spine, opening out the fish flesh into two halves connected near the tail. The split fish is then put scale-side down on the coals. This method is called Galurr mith’un. Another way of cooking is to build the fire on a bed of shells or rocks and cook the fish on the hot shells once the fire has burned down to ash (observed 17/05/01). Fish (particularly catfish) were also observed being boiled whole in large pots on a number of occasions.

3.2 Crabs and Bait

Djinydjalma (Mud Crabs, Scylla serrata) were an important source of food as well as being the favoured bait for handline fishing. Crabs were preferred for bait because the prized Yambirrku fish will not take other kinds of bait, whilst other edible fish were observed taking crabs as often as other bait types. Djinydjalma were most often collected from the dense stands of mangroves along stretches of the coast, where they were either buried in burrows or hidden between the mangrove roots. Locating and digging out burrows in the mangroves is hard work, and the crabs must be handled with care as their claws are large and strong enough to inflict a nasty wound that is potentially dangerous in a remote tropical environment. The whole crab can be eaten but the most common (and most efficient) means of using a mud crab was to cook and eat the claws, then break up the rest of the crab into individual leg segments to use as bait.

[1] [Bakulangay Marawili], 12/02/01
The claws hold the bulk of the meat and the crab body can be used to catch several fish on a good day.

Other types of smaller crabs are gathered for bait purposes. An important bait crab is the sand crab gatjini. This crab digs a deep burrow above the high tide mark. It must be dug out, and skill and patience are required to follow the long, winding, continually collapsing burrow whilst digging rapidly to prevent the crab escaping. Older people who find walking on the reefs or in the mangroves more difficult often prefer to dig for sand crabs, despite the hard work it entails. These crabs can also be collected at night by torchlight as they were observed coming out of their holes to feed. The sand crab has a soft shell, making it attractive to crab-eating parrotfish. Another type of small (5-10cm) mangrove crab is called ginybirrk (*Sesarma spp*) and people collect these when the larger ones mud crabs cannot be found. On the rocky reefs, a slightly larger blue crab called yàlkù is collected for bait, often once the mangrove crab bait supply has been depleted by a few hours fishing. Another small crab (guwarnmu) is also collected off the reefs for bait. A rarely used crab is gomu (small hermit crabs). People know small hermit crabs can be found at the base of trees growing on the dunes but were only observed using them when other alternatives had been exhausted (for example on 10/08/02). Hermit crabs aren’t favoured because of their small size and the processing time needed to get them out of their shell. Larger hermit crabs (ngukaliya) found on rocky reefs were sometimes used, but again the amount of processing time meant that they were not favoured. Crabs were preferred as bait for all reef fishing where catching Yambirrku (parrot fish) was a possibility. In other fishing environments (such as freshwater billabongs and muddy marine environments), or when the crabs are exhausted, people will use pieces of fish flesh from fish already caught, or they will use shellfish (see Section 3.7).

### 3.3 Miyapunu: Turtle and dugong hunting

#### 3.3.1 Miyapunu

Turtles, dugongs and dolphins are grouped under the collective Yolngu term of miyapunu. This grouping is sensible because the areas where the animals are found and the hunting techniques used to catch them are similar, so when a boat departs on a hunt, the hunters do not know which animal they will come across first. However there are a wide range of more specific names within the word miyapunu, reflecting the importance of these animals to the life of Yolngu people. The species identified by Western science are identified by specific Yolngu names, but there is further differentiation within species, and species are ascribed to moieties:

- **Dhalwatpu**- Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)- Dhuwa moiety. Wàlangu or burruga is a juvenile green, and gardaku dhalwatpu is a young male. Murrugu, wayapa, or marrpan Dhalwatpu are names for big green turtles. Greens were by far the most common turtles caught at Yîlpara, as they both feed and nest in the area.
- **Guwarrtji**- Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)- Yirritja moiety.
- **Muðuthu**- Olive Ridley Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)- Yirritja moiety.
- **Ngarrwa**- Flatback Turtle (*Chelonia depressa*)- Dhuwa moiety.
- **Garun**- Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)- Yirritja moiety.
- **Warrnumbili**- Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)- Dhuwa moiety.

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2 Information in this section provided by [Bakulangay Marawili], Djambawa Marawili, Wäka Mununggurr, Dhuka Marl Wirrpanda, Nuwandjali Marawili, Ngulpurr Marawili, or by direct observation
Dugongs (djununguyangu) are only one species, but Yolngu differentiate them by age. Yutuyutu is a young dugong, differentiated into gunmul, a boy, and wirtkurl, a girl dugong. This is further differentiated to dulnaywanangu which refers to a young but independent dugong that is feeding by itself but has not reproduced. Maytgurru is the word for a female that is reproducing. Djunungguyangu is the word for all dugongs, but more specifically refers to the adult animal. Dolphins are known as Yindjapana or Bukuyolngu, and are Dhuwa moiety. No dolphins were caught during the survey period.

3.3.2 Hunting

Hunting for miyapunu was undertaken almost exclusively by men and boys, and it was the activity that took Yilpara hunters out onto open water most often. Far more turtles were caught at Yilpara than dugongs, and so the section below describes the processes involved in a turtle hunt, then follows with a discussion of the variations for dugong hunting. The most common turtle caught at Yilpara was the green turtle, dhalwatpu. Loggerhead and leatherback turtles are rare at Yilpara, but the others besides green turtles are occasionally seen and captured. Dugongs are relatively common, but harder to catch, and so fewer were caught during the survey period.

There are three roles on a turtle hunting boat. The djambatj (harpooner) stands at the front, the goli’mi or dhudingu (captain) drives the boat, and often one person in the middle (napugangu) takes care of ropes and floats, and assists in getting the harpooned turtle on board. The word for harpooner, djambatj, literally means ‘skilled in hunting’ and can be used to describe a good hunter in other contexts. On a small 3 person dinghy this last person might sometimes be omitted, whilst on a larger 6 person boat there may be two or three people assisting the captain and harpooner.

Turtles feed on seagrass in muddy areas near estuaries, and also on seaweeds in rocky reef areas. Turtles feed mostly during the ebbing tide and are found more easily then, although they can be caught at any time. Fatter, better-conditioned turtles generally came from muddy seagrass areas, and smaller ones were found further out around the island rocky reefs. The boat cruised with the engine in idle over the seagrass beds or reefs that lay at a water depth of between 1 and 3 m. All 3 men in the boat searched the surrounding water for the shape of a turtle, and the harpooner stood on the front of the boat, holding the harpoon ready to strike. The harpoon consisted of a long wooden pole with a sharpened, detachable metal spike at the front end. This spike was fashioned from a large nail or other equivalently sized piece of scrap metal, using a file or a stone to sharpen the point. It was attached to a rope and float that marked the turtle’s position in the water after it had been struck. Sometimes turtles were identified when they surfaced to breathe, but mostly they were located underwater. Seeing the turtle underwater required great vision and experience, and even after 13 months, I was unable to either spot turtles underwater or follow the underwater movements of turtles already located. Once a turtle was sighted the boat sped closer. The turtle tried to evade and the chase began.

Chasing an evading turtle without pitching the harpooner overboard required great skill from the boat driver, for whilst the turtle usually could not outrun the boat, it could change direction much faster and more frequently. The harpooner stood on the prow and had only a rope tied to the prow to hold onto for balance, which was of little use in combatting sideways motion and no use at all if the boat slowed down, pitching him forwards. He had to simultaneously maintain his own balance whilst using a large 8-
10ft pole to hit a barely visible fast-moving target from an equally fast-moving and unstable platform. The strike had to be hard enough to drive the nail through the shell, and occasionally hunters leapt from the boat and struck in mid-air if the turtle was just out of range. For every strike, the harpooner had to judge how deep the turtle was and therefore how much the diffraction of the water was distorting its position. Sometimes a strike was impossible as the turtle evaded the boat and headed to deep water without coming within range. The chase was often extremely frenetic and it was usually less than 30 seconds before the turtle either escaped or was harpooned. Although 2 or 3 harpooners dominated turtle hunting at Yilpara, there were at least 9 regular residents who reported they had successfully acting as harpooners (Djambawa Marawili, Wāka Mununggurr, Bakulangay Marawili, Gumbaniya Marawili, Wulu Marawili, Napunnda Marawili, Batja Marawili, Malumin Marawili, Burrrak Marawili) and there was a large group of at least 15-20 skilled boat drivers. Observations indicated that most Yolngu males aged from teenagers upwards were able to follow the underwater movements of the turtle, and had some knowledge of how to manage the floats and ropes, even if they did not have the skill to drive the boat.

Managing these ropes and floats was important as once the initial strike was made, the rope and float must be cast out immediately. Usually the turtle took off fast after a strike and if the rope or float caught on a part of the boat as it fled, the nail was pulled out of the turtle shell, and the animal was lost. If the rope was clear, the animal was allowed to flee and the hunters organised themselves for a second strike, knowing they could relocate it. After a successful first strike, the harpooner put a new nail with a second rope and float onto the harpoon. This second strike ensured that the animal would not be lost if the first nail came out. Sometimes the initial strike was good enough that the float rope could be pulled on quite hard to bring the turtle to the surface. At other times the rope could only be held very gently and the hunters had to wait for the turtle to come to the surface to breathe before striking again. When the turtle surfaced, the harpooner drove the second nail in as hard as possible, and this second rope was then used to haul the animal alongside the boat.

Getting a turtle that can be over a metre in length and weigh over 100kg into the boat required muscle, timing, and technique. It was usually a job for 3 people, with ropes being secured around the front flippers and the animal brought up to and then over the edge by its front flippers. Turtles were still alive and often barely injured, as the nail only penetrated an inch or two in most cases. Once in the boat it could be left alone, and very often Yilpara hunters would try for and get two turtles in one hunt.

3.3.3 Dugong Hunting Variations

Dugongs are much faster and larger than turtles, can hear underwater extremely well, and do not have a hard shell, so there were some important variations in the hunting process for dugongs. The harpoon nail was not a single sharp point but instead had three prongs fastened together, all splayed slightly outwards. This is so that it both penetrated and then gripped the softer hide of the dugong. Nevertheless the rope could not be pulled on too hard, and so generally dugongs were hunted by continually pursuing the float after the initial strike until the animal was completely exhausted. The boat was brought alongside, the animal was tied with ropes, and one or more people gripped the tail and stood up, balancing whilst holding the animal upside down with its head under the water. The dugong was usually too exhausted to escape, and drowned. It was then tied alongside or behind the boat and towed back to shore. The speed and evasion skills of the dugong, the softness of its hide compared to turtle shell, the difficulties of chasing
a float for long periods, and the lower dugong numbers in the Yilpara area meant that only 6 dugongs were caught over the 13 months fieldwork. This compares with approximately 50 turtles. Dugongs were found only in the muddy, sheltered seagrass (gamaṭa) habitats, not in the rocky reef areas around the islands where turtles also feed on seaweeds and algae (djewul). Therefore, in a number of key reef hunting locations such as Woodah Island (Wangurrarrikpa), Round Hill Island (Gunyuru), and around the Yilpara homeland centre itself, Yolngu hunters knew that they were only likely to see turtles. Batpa is the generic name for habitats on which either animal can be found (ie reef and seagrass bed). Dugongs were present in lower numbers all year round, whereas turtles moved offshore during the breeding and egg-laying season. Turtle hunting activity diminished during this period.

One distinctive form of dugong hunting observed at Yilpara was night dugong hunting. This was done by boat on a moonless night, with the hunters chasing a float that had been harpooned into a dugong at twilight. The seawater of the Yilpara area phosphoresces when it is disturbed at night by the passage of the dugong and boat. During the hunt, the phosphorescence from the wake of both the dugong and boat were clearly evident from the shore over 100m away. Whilst not a common form of hunting with modern boats, it was one of the main ways of catching dugongs in canoes. The hunters would approach by stealth, as dugongs can hear very well but cannot see (they shut their eyes under water). In modern night hunting, the men only use the engine after the first strike, as the noise disturbs the dugongs. Night hunting remains a well-known method and was successful in catching a dugong on the second of the two nights it was attempted at Yilpara during the fieldwork.

Using aluminium dinghys and outboards to hunt is clearly a departure from hunting in a bark or dugout canoe. Hunting with a canoe was stealth hunting rather than pursuit hunting; as the canoe hunters would paddle quietly into a seagrass or reef area and wait for a turtle or dugong to surface, then try to stalk it until the harpooner had an opportunity to strike. This kind of hunting required great patience, stealth, and paddling endurance. Hunters in engine-powered boats can cover much greater distances more easily, but the harpooner still has a difficult task striking a fleeing turtle from a fast-moving boat that cannot approach by stealth. Mulawalnga Marawili reported on 13/07/01 that a group of men successfully hunted a turtle by stealth using an engineless aluminium dinghy directly offshore from Yilpara. They used this method because no engine was available.

### 3.3.4 Turtle Butchery

A standard procedure for butchering turtles was observed during fieldwork, and butchered animal was divided up into named parts which were shared out according to protocols about who should receive meat. This distribution is discussed in Chapter 4. The butchery process itself is described below, and the methodology is carefully followed at Yilpara with only a few minor variations. Observations of butchery at other

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3 Information supplied by [Bakulangay Marawili] and by direct observation of a night dugong hunt (16/05/01)
4 [Bakulangay Marawili], Djambawa Marawili
5 Information described in this section is derived from observations of many turtle butcheries, and discussions with key informants whilst they were occurring. These informants included Djambawa Marawili, [Bakulangay Marawili], Wiika Munungurr, Nuwandjali Marawili, Ngulpurr Marawili, and Dhuka Wirrpanda
Yolngu homeland centres showed some variations, but with many similar characteristics.

Turtles were removed from the boat and dragged up the beach by several men or a 4WD vehicle. They were stunned or killed by striking the head with an axe, and then turned over onto their backs by three or four people. Dry grass and twigs were placed around the head and on top of the undershell. These were lit and allowed to burn rapidly for a minute or two. This initial fire made butchery easier. After it has burned out, the turtle was turned so that its head faced inland, as butchering a turtle facing this way was believed to assist in maintaining good turtle populations. The key processes of the butchery were performed by a senior man with the requisite knowledge. He sat cross-legged at the head of the turtle, facing out to sea. He was usually assisted by at least one other person, and more often by several younger men, who performed additional cutting and hold body parts steady as they are cut through. These younger men watched and learnt the methodology whilst they assisted. Women were not normally directly involved in cutting the turtle, but they did perform related tasks such as washing intestines or taking meat away to be cooked.

The cuts of meat described below do not always relate directly to specific English terms for organs or muscles. The cuts conformed to a requirement to share the meat in particular ways. Where possible, a guide to the area being referred to is included in the description below.

The senior man cut around the turtle neck with a large knife, then began to twist the turtle’s neck around to break it. This often required the assistance of others as the head and neck was thick and heavy. When the neck had been broken, the head (mulkurr, liya, or mayarr) was cut away and removed. Next the butcher freed the oesophagus (bopu) from the surrounding tissue and began to pull out the thick intestines (ngukthan). These were up to 10cm in diameter and were filled with digested seagrass and seaweed. Depending on the condition of the animal, the intestines were also be covered by strands of yellow fat (malayukpa or djukurr). There were many meters of intestines which filled the upper part of the dorsal shell. Once the butcher had pulled the bulk of the intestine out, he cut it and gave the freed portion to one of his assistants, who dragged it down to the waters edge, slit it open, and began to wash it out. The first part of the intestine was called lirra, the middle part was marrmuru. The remainder was called burriyalyal.

Meanwhile other assistants had been collecting wood and building up a substantial fire. Rocks of 5-10cm diameter were thrown on the fire to heat up. A hole was dug in the sand and the turtle was stood up with its back end in the hole and sand supporting the sides to stop it falling over. When the rocks were sufficiently hot, assistants picked them up with a spear and dropped them into the cavity where the intestines were. Djilka, a particular kind of leaves, were stuffed in with the hot rocks. These add flavour to the meat.

The carcass was left upright for 10-20 minutes and during this period people often ate pieces of the intestine that had been washed out and cooked on the ashes of the fire. After about 20-30 minutes, the turtle was tipped onto its back once more and the next phase of the butchery began. The senior butcher sharpened a knife and began to cut through the tissue connected to the ventral shell (gumurr ngaraka). A younger assistant pulled up hard on the shell to expose the connecting tissue. After cutting the tissue at the front of the animal, the senior butcher and his assistants cut the ventral shell itself, following a line about 2-3cm in from the outer edge and curving around the flippers.
The front flippers are called galurr’ngu, and the back flippers are called ganybi. The back part of the animal, near the rear flippers on both sides, is called ngamon. Gumurr is the name of the central chest muscle area towards the neck exposed after the shell is removed. Bana is the muscle that lies above the back flippers on the overturned turtle, and is the same name as the fork of a tree, reflecting its orientation to the flippers.

Once the ventral shell was off, the meat and flipper muscles were exposed. The butchery proceeded more rapidly, with only the gall bladder (milkuminy) and urine bladder (dulng) discarded. In order, cuts of meat removed included dirridirri (the meat of the pectoral muscles), thanarr (flipper muscles) and bulngu (meat underneath the flipper joint). Names for internal organs include dhokul (heart), ngalthiri (liver), and burrwutj (lung). The large flipper muscles (thanarr) are cut out, and the hot rocks and leaves were exposed at the base of the upturned dorsal shell. It was at this point that unlaid turtle eggs (i’ku) were also exposed in pregnant females. The rocks and leaves were tossed away, and the ‘soup’ of blood and animal juices that collected at the bottom of the shell was salvaged and put in cups and boiling pots. Finally the sheet of green fat (ngamon or malamala) attached to the inside of the dorsal shell was scraped and cut away. These were up to 2cm thick, depending on the condition of the animal. Yolngu butchers generally judged the condition of a turtle by the thickness of this fat and the strands of yellow fat around the intestines. Both have more specific names but can be called by the generic name for fat, djukurr.

The various cuts of meat were collected on the ventral shell ready for cooking. The hot stones had merely seared the pieces closest to the intestinal cavity, and whilst the second stage of the butchery occurred, other assistants had built up a large fire and thrown the rocks back onto it. When this fire had burned down to very hot rocks, sand and ash, fresh djilka leaves were thrown onto the embers and the meat put on top of them. The cuts of meat were arranged roughly the way they are in the live animal, and then the big dorsal shell was placed on top of the meat and ashes. The gaps at the sides were sealed up with piles of sand to create a big turtle shell oven. The meat was then slow roasted in the oven for about an hour, after which time it was shared out.

Turtles were sometimes kept alive for a few days after being caught. However if a turtle had been out of the water for more than a day, the butchery process was altered. It proceeded normally until the ventral shell was cut off and the meat was cut out, but then each piece of meat was washed and the ‘soup’ of blood and meat juices collected in the upturned dorsal shell was discarded. These juices would give people a stomach ache if they were consumed. The meat was still be eaten, provided it was washed first. Wurung was a known sickness of flatback and hawksbill turtles. The meat is thick in the diseased areas and the wrong colour, with a green and black tinge. People avoid eating the meat of sick turtles.

### 3.3.5 Dugong Butchery

Dugong butcheries were simpler than turtle butchery as there was no precooking, and although the skin (barrwan) is 2-3cm thick, it was far easier to cut through than turtle shell. Smaller dugongs were favoured over larger ones, both because of the ease of hunting and the fact that the meat from larger ones is sometimes tough. Again there was a set procedure which produced set cuts of meat for distribution (Chapter 4). The ventral side (bulun) was cut first, allowing the intestines and other internal organs to be removed from the ribcage. The intestines were washed out and eaten in the same way as for turtles. Other organs can be eaten, although the lungs (burrwitj) and stomach were generally discarded. Once the ventral side was completely cut, the dugong was rolled
over and the meat from the dorsal side was removed. The head (mulkurr) was cut off and the meat was removed from it. An axe was used to break the ribcage (binda) into smaller pieces. When the animal had been completely cut up it was left in the sun for an hour or two to cure. Meat that has been dried in this way did not need to be cooked until the following day. The tail section of a dugong (gurrukalla or bila) will keep uncooked for up to 2 months if it is kept in the skin. It used to be carried around and used as an emergency food source. After being dried in the sun, the meat was placed on a cooking fire of ashes, hot rocks and sand similar to the turtle. A large piece of thick dugong skin was thrown over it and the edges sealed with sand to make a dugong skin oven. The skin became soft and edible when roasted, and used to be eaten once the meat was finished. The skin was not observed being eaten. The meat was cooked for at least 1 hour, and usually for longer. Dugong meat was highly prized, as it is layered by thin veins of pure white fat that add greatly to the richness and flavour. Dugong fat has the same generic name as turtle fat, djukurr.

3.4 Shark and Stingray hunting

Sharks and stingrays are grouped by Yolngu under the collective term maranydjalk. This grouping is mirrored by Western science, which groups them as the cartilaginous fishes (fish which have soft bone structures made of cartilage rather than calcified bones). The Yolngu term incorporates this similarity but also relates to the fact that the two types of animals are caught in the same manner and processed into food using the same complex process. Hunting for Maranydjalk was done by men armed with a spear (gara) and spear thrower (galpu). They walked along the shoreline or through shallow water (up to 1 metre) searching for either small sharks (mana) or small rays. Although rays were found in sandy areas, they were most often found hiding in the thin, dense strips of mangroves that grow along the shoreline in more sheltered areas. Sharks were found in the seawater in the 20-30m zone beyond these stands of mangroves, and also cruising the shallow, sandy areas in between the mangrove stands.

Spearers had to be careful when walking through the water. Stingrays are camouflaged and lie motionless on the bottom, and so it is easy to step on one by accident and receive a puncture wound from the poisonous spine. Maranydjalk season also coincides with the early and mid-stinger season, where the transparent, deadly jellyfish are in the water in much greater numbers. Hunters had to simultaneously look at the water 10m in front of them to locate prey, and at the water at their feet so that they did not step on something dangerous. There is also a risk of shark bite from the small (40-100cm) sharks found in these shallow areas. Sharks swim extremely fast and are dangerous when wounded by a glancing spear blow. Good vision and an accurate throwing arm were both very important for Maranydjalk hunting, particularly given that the water around the mangroves was often murky. Hunters avoided hunting in places where murky water made the bottom completely invisible.

Heavily camouflaged, motionless stingrays are only visible via the curve of the tail, a thin line in the sand. This tail was extremely difficult for me to see, even when the

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6 Djambawa Marawili, 21/06/01
7 The follow section contains information derived from my marine science training, participant observation and from numerous informants, including some younger people who regularly undertake this form of hunting. Key informants in this section were Wäka Mununggurr, Dhupilawuy Marika, Malumin Marawili, Djambawa Marawili, Mulawalnga Marawili, Wurrandan Marawili, and Wulukuwuluku Marawili
8 Dhupilawuy Marika
general location of the ray was pointed out. Rays generally rely on camouflage and so
did not try to evade capture unless directly disturbed, but care was taken when spearing
them as the poison spine on the tail can inflict a serious wound. A yellow striped beach
cockroach is one good bush medicine for stingray wounds. The back end is crushed up
and put into the spear wound. A further technique is to use hot sand or fresh leaves
heated over the fire and then placed on the wound. This was observed being used on
9/11/00. It is important to identify the type of ray before striking, because different rays
must be speared in different places. One ray (Gurritjipi) has a hard structure in the
region between and behind its eyes, and so must be speared off to one side if the spear is
to penetrate. Other rays are best speared behind the eyes.

Once speared, the shark or ray was stunned or killed immediately by hitting it hard with
the wooden spear thrower (galpu). The stingray barb (dimirr) was removed, either by
chopping the whole tail off with a knife, or by the spearer holding the tail with his teeth
and sliding his spear prong up under the barb, breaking it off. These stingray barbs were
sometimes collected for use as spear prongs for ceremonial spears. Stingrays were
carried by putting a finger in each of the two holes under the eye sockets. If the spearer
cought several rays, he would either leave them on the beach or hang them on a
mangrove tree to be picked up on the return journey. If there was no return journey, then
maranydjalk were threaded on a stray piece of fishing line or a stick and trailed behind
as the hunter walked along.

The most important thing about maranydjalk for hunters once they were speared was the
state of the animals’ liver (djukurr). Maranydjalk is ‘in season’ during the wet season
buildup and the rainy months that follow, as during this time the bulk of them have
whitish-pink livers which are considered fat and tasty. A number of flowering plants
were identified that signify that the livers of the maranydjalk are ready. These include
balwurr (the red flowering Kurrajong), waarrkarr (white sand lily), and a creeper,
wurluyumung. Even when these are in season, some maranydjalk (particularly larger
ones) have black livers. Black livers, or livers halfway between pink and black, are a
sign that the animal is not ‘fat’, and the flesh of these animals was tough and rubbery if
they were cooked. The flesh of pink-livered animals remained soft when cooked.
Historically, people only ate the flesh of black-livered animals if there was no
alternative food available, although livers halfway between pink and black can be
cooked and eaten separately.

To check the liver, Yolngu made an incision with a knife or sharp shell at the
appropriate place on the underside of the ray or on one side of the shark. Stingray livers
were also exposed without an implement by first searing the outside skin for a few
seconds on a fire, then pushing hard on the animal along the line of the head and tail.
When this pressure was applied in exactly the right orientation, the liver burst through
the skin and popped out, even though the rest of the stingray carcass was unaffected.
Smaller sharks and rays were more likely to have pink livers than larger ones, and the
closer it was to the dry season, the less likely it was that any ray or shark caught will
have a pink liver.

Maranydjalk with black livers were usually discarded, but, depending on the success of
the hunt, maranydjalk with livers that were halfway between pink and black were

\[9\] Dhupilawuy Marika
\[10\] Ngulpurr Marawili, Djambawa Marawili
\[11\] [Bakulangay Marawili]
sometimes kept. The liver itself from these animals was not used, but the flesh of such animals was sometimes mixed in with the flesh of those animals with pink livers. Maranydjalk were only ever prepared in one way. In the first stage, the livers were removed raw and the gall bladder (milkuminy) was taken off the liver. The rest of the guts were taken out and the rest of the animal was placed into a pot of water on the fire to be boiled. Where possible people used freshwater, but seawater was substituted when not enough freshwater was available. In the past the flesh was cooked by covering the carcass in the ashes, or by wrapping it in big flat leaves or bark and placing it in the ashes. Boiling was the favoured method during the observation period. After the flesh was boiled, the water was poured off and the pot and carcasses were taken down to the shallows. In the next stage, the skin was peeled off the flesh and the soft, cooked flesh was pushed off the cartilaginous bones and collected in the pot. The skin and cartilage were discarded. This was quite a long process if there were a number of smaller animals, and small stingrays in particular required a lot of processing for the amount of meat obtained. Freshwater (or saltwater) was then mixed into the broken up flesh to make a ‘slurry’ of water and small flesh pieces. The water was strained out of this slurry, either by pushing the mixture through a sieve or flyscreen, or by taking handfuls of it and squeezing the water out by hand. This mixture is called dara. In the final stage, the raw liver (which has a soft and buttery texture) was broken up and minced through the strained, cooked flesh. This mixture was then broken up and formed into small balls of flesh and liver for distribution. These are known as mala or mulkun.

When very large rays are speared, the liver is divided into sections. It has two lobes, and the central part where they join is called mangutji. One section of each lobe is called nganarr, the other is Rudurudu. Yolngu present when a large ray is speared will sometimes call out which part of the liver they want to be allocated to them. This type of sectioning was not observed during the fieldwork, as no large ray with an edible liver was caught.

Although the hunting was generally done by men, women knew how to prepare Maranydjalk. They occasionally caught sharks whilst line fishing, and took the opportunity to kill rays when they came across them whilst looking for bait in the mangroves. Maranydjalk were only observed being prepared in the manner described above.

3.5 Fish Spearing

Men and teenage boys speared other kinds of fish with their spears as well as Maranydjalk. Along the sandy, shallow areas in between the mangroves, there are often the v-shaped swirls which show the presence of schools of wākun (mullet, Valamugil buchanarii). Wākun cannot be caught by line, only speared, as they are detritus feeders. Barramundi and mud crabs were found in amongst the mangroves, and in the rockier areas Yambirrku (parrotfish) were speared. Other species caught on the line were

12 [Bakulangay Marawili]
13 Djambawa Marawili
14 Djambawa Marawili
15 Djambawa Marawili
16 Fish spearing is undertaken by all able-bodied men and boys. This section is derived from marine science training, direct observation, and information from informants, who were often younger men. Key informants for this section were Dhupilawuy Marika, Mulawalnga Marawili, Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Wurrandan Marawili, Bawanha Marawili, Djiwinbin 2 Marawili
speared opportunistically when they appeared. The spearers made the most of whatever crossed their path.

Unlike stingrays and crabs, it was rare that the spearer got close enough to fish and sharks to thrust the spear at close range. Instead the spearer usually threw his spear from well away from the target, making a successful strike much more difficult. Spear hunting was hard physical labour at times, involving long hot walks in the heat of the sun, enduring the wet season humidity and/or the glare off the water. The spearers had to be constantly alert, watching two or three areas of water at once, and they would lift the spear and spear thrower to the ready position many times in an hour, responding to possible sightings. When a genuine opportunity arose, the strike had to be a balance of timing, direction, and power, and numerous attempts by even skilled practitioners were unsuccessful. One of the most important things for the hunters to judge was the distortion caused by the water depth. The arm strength, vision, and judgement skills required for successful spear hunting required much practice from an early age. Boys as young as four five years old were observed throwing long sticks at targets on land, and slightly older boys used specially made small fish spears in the shallows.

Towards the end of the dry season, a large fish species, dhinimb (Spanish mackerel Scomberomorous commerson) was speared off the beaches near the Yilpara homeland centre.\(^\text{17}\) This fish was not observed being speared or caught throughout the year, and was much larger than those generally speared during the rest of the year. Spearing these fish required a powerful and accurate strike, as they are capable of taking off with the spear embedded in them if the strike hits them in a non-fatal place.

### 3.6 Night Fishing\(^\text{18}\)

A variant of spear fishing observed was night fishing. On moonless nights, wäkun (mullet), crabs, and some other fish species were speared in the shallows by torchlight. The torches were traditionally made of bark,\(^\text{19}\) but battery torches were used on the observed trips. The fish were attracted towards the light and were speared by thrusting rather than throwing. This was a highly effective means of fishing when there were mullet in the area, as hunters speared 10 or more 30cm fish in less than an hour. It is difficult to hunt in this manner except on dark, moonless nights, because when the moon is out the fish are able to see the silhouette of the hunter behind the torch. Once a fish was speared, the hunter killed it instantly by putting a finger in each gill slit and pulling the head upwards, breaking the spine of the fish. It was then threaded on a piece of line and trailed behind as the hunter continued hunting.

The major risk of this type of fishing is shark attack. Blood from the dead fish and the thrashing in the water of injured fish attracted the sharks, which were hard to see outside the single beam area of the torch. One way to minimise the risk of attack was for the hunters to drag the butt end of their spears through the sand as they entered the water, and again periodically during the hunt. The scraping noise was believed to deter the sharks, but even when this tactic was employed, hunters avoided going into the water deeper than mid-thigh level when spearing at night, and they generally did not walk far along the beach, as the mullet were in groups if they were present at all. Fish other than wakun and mud crabs (djinydjälma) were occasionally speared by night when they were

\(^{17}\) Information supplied by direct observation and Mowalan Marika, who speared the fish

\(^{18}\) Information from this section supplied by direct observation and by Mulawalnga Marawili, Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Wurrandan Marawili, Bawanha Marawili, and Ngulpurr Marawili

\(^{19}\) Ngulpurr Marawili
encountered, but the goal of night fishing was wäkuŋ. Line fishing can also be done successfully by night, but this was not observed during the course of the fieldwork.  

3.7 Maypal: Oysters and other Shellfish

Maypal is used as a generic word for shellfish, but also includes items such as crabs and other things that are ‘gathered’ rather than ‘hunted’. Relative to line fishing, spearing, and turtle and dugong hunting, the level of shellfish exploitation at Yilpara was relatively low during the fieldwork periods.

3.7.1 Oysters

The most regularly exploited shellfish resource was rock oysters. These are divided into two kinds. Oysters which grow on reef in rocky and sandy areas are called mekawu, and oysters which grow on reef in muddier areas are called ngiriwany. Oysters were usually collected by women, but many children and a number of men were observed gathering oysters. The collection method was the same for both types of oysters, although the areas they were found are different. The oysters are small (only 3-4cm across) and are exposed on the rocks at low tide. The women walked over the rocks and tapped at a particular place on the oyster shell with a piece of metal (usually a file or a small hammer). Striking the oyster at this point broke it open without leaving shell fragments embedded in the grey flesh underneath. This point is very hard to identify for an inexperienced person. The soft flesh was then picked out by hand and either eaten raw by the women as they worked, or put into a container to be shared with others later.

Whilst collecting oysters was hard work for the relatively small volume of food it returns, the food itself is very rich and the supply very consistent, as the amount of oysters obtained directly related to the amount of time spent collecting. Towards the end of a trip, the women sometimes broke off a chunk of rock containing a number of oysters and carried back to their camp. This chunk was thrown on the fire whole, and then the cooked oysters were dug out of it in the shade of the camp. Clearly this was not a strategy that was used for the whole load, as the weight of the rock and shell would have been a burden. Oyster gathering was often done whilst other Yolngu performed different hunting activities, such as line fishing, spearing, or turtle hunting. It provided a guaranteed food source if these other activities were unsuccessful. Oysters cannot be used as bait, as the flesh is too soft to stay on the line.

3.7.2 Shellfish from the Mangroves

Certain shellfish were found in the mangroves. Dhan’pala (Mud mussel, *Polymesoda erosa*) is a big, rounded bivalve with a powerful and at times salty flavour. Dhan’pala were collected whenever they were found in the mangrove mud as they are a popular food. The mangroves close around Yilpara did not contain many dhan’pala during the survey period, and this may have been either a natural phenomenon or due to the frequent visits of Yolngu looking for bait, or a combination of the two. During 2002, more dense concentrations of Dhan’pala were located at the more distant mangrove sites north of Yathikpa (Grindall Bay). These were visited frequently during the late dry season of 2002, when they were easily accessible by vehicle due to the poor wet season.

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20 Ngulpurr Marawili
21 Information on shellfish supplied by direct observation and by Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, [Mayawulu Wirrpanda], Bangawuy Wanambi, Muyipirri Marawili, Liyawagay Wirrpanda, Mulkun Wirrpanda, Giyama Wunungmurra and Minitja Marawili
The second shellfish occasionally collected from the mangroves was buyn’bu (lesser longbum, *Terebralia palustris*). It was mostly used for bait, but also sometimes eaten (for example on 23/09/01, 6/11/02). There are other shellfish in the mangroves, which were collected in the past but were not observed being used.

### 3.7.3 Other Shellfish

There are two particular beach/intertidal mud areas on the Yilpara peninsula where it was reported by numerous informants that other kinds of shellfish were collected until recently. These areas were Yathikpa in Grindall Bay and Lumatjpi/Dharupi in Myaloola Bay. Only one trip to each of these sites was witnessed during the fieldwork, and neither of these trips was successful. This was commented on as unusual, but was not totally unexpected. The absence of shellfish was attributed to a cyclone which wiped out the shell beds a few years ago. Shellfish that Yolngu would normally expect to get from these sites include some found commonly in the shell middens (such as warrapal, *Anadara granosa*). Knowledge of these types of shellfish was not explored to a great degree, although the archaeological research has clearly indicated that detailed knowledge of these shellfish is still held by adult women. The lack of shellfish gathering is surprising given some of the previous documentation of indigenous sea usage in north Australia. However Meehan also reported that a cyclone destroyed the shellfish beds at her field site late in her observation period.

The decrease in shellfish exploitation also relates to the impact of store foods. Shellfish gathering produces a reliable return but is hard, dirty, and sometimes wet work. Store bought foods now provide a stable base food supply, allowing women to concentrate on activities such as line fishing, which are less reliable than shellfish gathering but more pleasant, and can provide much higher returns on a good day. Improvements in fishing technology (nylon lines and steel barbed hooks) have also increased the chances of bringing in a good catch with a line, making it yet more attractive when compared to digging for shellfish. The reasons for the observed lack of shellfish gathering may be a combination of these types of factors, or may simply have been a chance circumstance during the period of fieldwork undertaken. If either of the two attempts to gather shellfish at the intertidal or subtidal beach sites had succeeded, this may have sparked a series of shellfish gathering trips in succeeding weeks. Significant knowledge of shellfish and the areas where they can be collected still exists amongst those observed gathering shellfish and providing information about them.

### 3.8 Freshwater Fishing

Freshwater fishing at Yilpara during the research was usually done at a large billabong called Mangatjipa, about 25km north of the homeland centre, or at a river site called Wayawu, a further 10km distant. Handline fishing was the predominant method used for billabong fishing, and several kinds of freshwater species were caught there.

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22 Mulkn Wirrpanda, Muluymuluy Wirrpanda
23 [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda], Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, Yalmakany Marawili, Gurundul 2 Marawili, Mulkn Wirrpanda
24 Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, Yalmakany Marawili
26 ibid. pg 162
27 Information for this section was derived from direct observation and from informants. Key informants were Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, Nuwandjali Marawili, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda], Mulkn Wirrpanda, Dhuranggal Wanambi, and Muypirri Marawili
28 On 16/10/02 Djiwinbin Marawili was observed using his spear to hunt for fish at Mangatjipa.
two generally eaten were baypinnga (saratoga, *Scleropages jardinii*) and balin (barramundi, *Lates calcarifer*), whilst others such as dhuñum (sleepy cod, *oxyeleotris lineolatus*) and matbuna (*Hephaestus fuliginosus*) were usually used for bait. Bait was also collected from saltwater mangroves near Yilpara before undertaking a fishing trip to Mangatjipa, in order to catch the first few fish, which were then subsequently used as bait for the remainder of the fishing trip. Other types of foods observed being gathered at Mangatjipa were freshwater mussels (djarrwit) and freshwater crayfish (dakawa). Care had to be taken when collecting these from the billabong shallows, as crocodiles inhabit the Mangatjipa billabong. Mangatjipa was the focus of fishing effort throughout the research reported here, but Dr Clarke and Mr. Faulkner reported that prior to my arrival the Wayawu billabong was the focus of the fishing effort. The switch had occurred after this first freshwater site had produced a number of low returns. Mangatjipa billabong produced spectacular fishing results during the first few visits in 2000, results which were not repeated when it became accessible again after the 2000-2001 wet season. Reasons for this are unclear, although it may relate to the very heavy wet season in early 2000. Nevertheless, returns from the billabong were consistent and freshwater fishing was an important component of hunting trips during the dry season, when the two sites were accessible by road.

3.9 Yams

Yam digging was generally done by mature women, whilst others were line fishing. Although there are ‘bush’ yams found near the freshwater billabong at Mangatjipa, yams were almost exclusively collected during fieldwork from the low, dense jungle behind the dunes on the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula. These yams (manmunga) are located by spotting a tiny strand of vine trailing down through the dense undergrowth from the branches above. At the base of this tiny strand grows the yam, which reached maximum observed lengths of 30-40cm. Seeing the yam vine is extremely difficult and digging is hard work. The diggers preferred to have 3-4 hours to dig for yams in order to obtain a reasonable amount. Yam digging is generally combined with fishing for Yambirrku, as both are found in the same area.

3.10 Mammals, Birds, and Reptiles

There was usually one shotgun at Yilpara during fieldwork, and occasionally other guns were present for a time. The main type of rifle hunting trip was for waterbirds, either at the billabong behind the homeland centre or more usually the large floodplain 15km north of the homeland centre. The favoured target was magpie geese (gurrarrmmarrtji), but other birds such as brolga (dangultji), jabiru, herons, and ducks (dirriny dirriny) were shot when the opportunity arose. The trips to the floodplain were frequent during the early and middle dry season, and this was by far the most common use of the gun. Kangaroos and wallabies (dum dum) were rarely made the object of a hunting trip, but were shot when the opportunity arose. Flying foxes (matjurr) arrived for a period during the dry season and were shot out of the trees by rifle or with rubber-thonged slingshots. These slingshots were also used by the teenage boys to hunt small birds.

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29 Information for this section derived from direct observation and informants. Key informants were Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, Mulkun Wirrpanda, Bangawuy Wanambi, Giyama Wunungmurra, Bulnyinda Wanambi
30 Information from direct observation and from informants. Key informants were Djambawa Marawili, Wäka Mununggurr, Dhuka Wirrpanda, Mulawalnga Marawili
31 Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Dhukpirri Marawili, Wurrandan Marawili
Large goannas (djarrka) were speared and eaten when they are located, but this was relatively rare. Freshwater tortoises (Minhala) approximately 20cm long are found in billabongs or dug under the mud during the wet season and could also be eaten, but again they were not commonly located. On 6/5/01 Djewinbin 2 Marawili attempted to kill a small crocodile (Baru) seen in the river mouth at Gurritjinya, but this attempt was unsuccessful. [Bakulangay] and Gumbaniya Marawili related stories of catching crocodiles from the breeding ground above the river delta, tying them up, and carrying them back to the camp to be eaten. This has not occurred in more recent times.

Wild pigs were rare on the Yilpara peninsula and only one was shot during the research period. It was not eaten as there were suspicions about the quality of the meat. Buffalo (gathapanga) are more common but were not hunted at Yilapra, partly because there was no rifle capable of killing one. Gawirrin Gumana reported that younger men at GanGan had successfully killed buffalo using axes and ropes. Both of these species are damaging the local landscape significantly and their numbers appear to be increasing. Cane toads also appeared in the area for the first time in 2001. These introduced species will cause a deterioration in land quality which is likely to further increase the dependence of Yilpara residents on marine resources.

### 3.11 Fruits and Berries

An extensive knowledge of nuts, berries, and fruits was demonstrated by some informants during the fieldwork. Most of these berries and fruits were not identified in formal botanical terms, but notes were taken about the names of different food items and their basic appearance. They did not form a major part of the diet during the fieldwork, with the exception of munduyutj when it is in season. However fruits and berries are exploited when they are found on trips or travel being undertaken for other reasons.

#### 3.11.1 Munduyutj

The Billy Goat plum, *Terminalia ferdinandia*. This is a green fruit that appeared on the tree at the onset of the wet season. It is a highly prized fruit and Yolngu usually stopped to pick them whenever they were observed. The flowers of this plant signify the onset of the parrotfish season. Examples of munduyutj gathering were observed on the following dates: 9/12/00, 12/12/00, 13/12/00, 16/12/00, and 8/11/01.

#### 3.11.2 Other Fruits and Berries

Considerable knowledge of other fruits and berries available was demonstrated during fieldwork. Many were not observed or formally identified, but their names were recorded. A basic list of these includes:

- **Wungapu/balurr- *Pouteria serica***. Black, olive shaped fruit found in coastal areas.
- **Gunga- *Pandanus spiralis***, pandanus nut
- **Borpurr- red berries**
- **Djillka- red nuts from this plant are edible**
- **Burrum burrum- white berry on vine**
- **Darangalk- seed pods which are yellow when ripe**

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32 Information from direct observation and informants. Key informants were Muluymuluy Wirrpanda, Mulawalnga Marawili, Dhupilawuy Marika, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda]
Murrjumun- green berries which grown brown when ripe  
Muta muta- brown, furred fruit  
Wundan- black fruit  
Damang- tiny red fruit which is black when ripe  
Wak’naning- black fruit  
Dangapa- small yellow fruit with bitter skin

Other names of fruits listed by informants but not observed include wanguru, balkpalk, murrngga, dilminyin, lidawarr, gumbu, larrani, and dalpi.

3.11.3 Bush Honey

Bush honey is found in hollow trees. There are particular areas, such as Rurrangalla and Mangatjipa, which are known to be good sites for locating bush honey and where searches for honey were observed (5/09/01, 23/10/01). Locating honey is a highly skilled occupation, as it is necessary to see bees flying into the small holes in hollow trees where the hive is located. These holes can be 15 meters or more off the ground. There are three types of honey:

1. Barngitj. This is found at the bottom of trees or in ant houses, and is found in bush coastal areas like Yarrinya. It does not yield as much as the other kinds of honey.
2. Gaamu, which is made by biting bees. This occurs at the top of trees in areas like Mangatjipa and Dharupi.
3. Yarrpany or Dhulkitjpuy- also found at the top of hollow trees.

3.12 Summary

The Yolngu residents of Yilpara demonstrated an extensive knowledge of marine resources, including a wide variety of fish, crabs, sharks, stingrays, turtles, dugongs, oysters and other shellfish. These resources were exploited frequently and to a greater degree than the available land resources. However land resources were still important, and include yams, freshwater fish, waterbirds, mammals, reptiles, fruits, and honey. All able-bodied Yilpara residents undertook some form of resource gathering regularly using the techniques outlined above. The following section describes some observations of how the resources they gathered were distributed.

Section 6: Non-Food Resources

4.1 Introduction

During fieldwork I observed the use of a wide array of non-food resources gathered from the surrounding country. A number of non-food resources were extremely important to the economic, social, and cultural life of the Yilpara community. Key non-food resources are described below.

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33 Information for this section derived from direct observations and informants. Key informants were Ngulpurr Marawili, Gambali #2 (Frank) Wunungmurra, Buyutja Murrunyina
4.2 Firewood

Firewood was the most important non-food resource collected by Blue Mud Bay people. There was no mains electricity or gas available, and so almost all cooking was done on open fires using wood from the surrounding country. Firewood collection occurred daily whilst out on hunting trips, and around the Yilpara community itself. Stringybark eucalypts were often collected, but a wide range of tree species were observed being used during the dry season.

4.2.1 Lanapu

In the wet season a specific resource was targeted. This was lanapu, a resinous cypress tree that burns when wet. It was generally collected on vehicle trips from areas along the road to Yilpara, the road to Yarrinya, and the road to Dharupi. Lanapu requires knowledge to cut safely, as the dead wood shatters easily and limbs can fall down when chopping upright dead trees. Yolngu were observed angling the blade of the axe when chopping and they did not chop too hard, in order to minimise the risk of falling limbs. Use of lanapu in the wet season was so common that it was not noted every time it was used, but searches for lanapu or lanapu usage were noted on the days listed below. The wood is actively saved for the wetter months, and so between July and late November, no recordings were made of lanapu usage. Where it was recorded, the person collecting the resource is also included:

Table 3: Observed Lanapu Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30/11/00</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-01-01</td>
<td>Not noted</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-04-01</td>
<td>Gawarratj Mununggurr, Muypirri Marawili</td>
<td>Yarrinya road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-04-01</td>
<td>Ngambulili Marawili</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-04-01</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td>Yilpara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-04-01</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td>Garrangarri track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-04-01</td>
<td>Muluymuluy Wirrpanda</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02-05-01</td>
<td>Muluymuluy Wirrpanda</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-07-01</td>
<td>Fieldnote: Country drying out, lanapu no longer specifically targeted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-07-01</td>
<td>Gawarratj Mununggurr</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-07-01</td>
<td>Muluymuluy Wirrpanda</td>
<td>Yarrinya road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Art and Craft

Blue Mud Bay residents used wood for a diverse array of purposes. They were important in ceremonial proceedings (discussed separately below), and in the production of various types of artworks for sale. Sale of art and craft was a critical facet of the economic life of the Yilpara community during the period of observation, and a key source of non-government income.

4.3.1 Larakitj: Hollow Logs

Hollow logs are cut from stringybark trees gadayka that have been eaten out by ants or termites. Yolngu artists can tell how hollow a tree is from the sound it makes when it is struck, and large hollow trees are the most favoured. A number of areas around Yilpara are favoured sites for locating hollow logs. These include Yathikpa, Dharupi, and
Garangarri, and hollow logs were collected from all of these sites during the observation period.

After being cut, the logs were returned to the community where they were stripped of bark, sanded smooth, and sawed at the edges where the axe had cut unevenly. Logs were then painted with clan designs. Hollow logs were cut, or seen in the process of production where cutting was not observed, on the following days: 31/10/00, 2/12/00/19/12/00, 31/01/01, 18/06/01, and 25/09/01.

4.3.2 Nuwayak: Barks

Bark paintings were produced from the bark of the stringybark tree Gadayka. Straight trees were favoured. The tree was chopped around the circumference at the bottom and top of the straight section, then sliced down the middle on one side. The axe was then used to gently lever the bark section away from the wood underneath. Bark can only be removed in this way during the wetter months, or from trees growing in wet areas. Barks were commonly collected from areas adjacent to roads, and were collected from a diverse array of sites across the Yilpara peninsula. Favoured sites include those for hollow logs (Yathikpa, Dharupi, Garrangali road). Barks were cut, or seen in production where cutting was not observed, on the following days: 26/12/00, 27/12/00, 28/01/01, 29/01/01, 17/04/01, 24/04/01, 4/06/01, 5/06/01, 17/06/01, 19/06/01, 13/08/02.

4.3.3 Yidaki: Didgeridu

Yidaki (didgeridus) were cut from younger hollow stringybark trees. They were stripped of bark, cleaned out, and painted before being used ceremonially or sold to the art centre at Yirrkala. Yidaki were cut, or seen in production where cutting was not observed, on the following days: 30/01/01, 24/04/01, and 14/05/01.

4.3.4 Hardwood and Softwood Carvings

Carvings of birds, fish, and other Ancestral creatures were also produced by Yolngu artists. These are often made from softwoods, but softwood carvings were not commonly observed at Yilpara. Two large ones were noted on 1/10/01, produced by Galuma Maymuru. A softwood log waiting to be carved was observed at the home of Gawirrin Gumana at GaGag on 19/11/01. Djambawa Marawili, a senior Blue Mud Bay leader, began carving hardwoods for sale to the art centre during the fieldwork, something that he stated he had not done before. Hardwoods were cut, or seen in production where cutting was not observed, on the following days: 17/04/01, 23/04/01, 28/05/01, 25/6/01

4.3.5 Jewellery

On 27/08/02 and again on 3/09/2002 Bulnyinda Wanambi was observed constructing necklaces from small marine snails gathered from Dhuwultuwul, a mangrove and beach site near Yilpara. They were boiled and the meat removed with a pin or fishhook, and strung on a light fishing line. These necklaces were sold to the arts centre at Yirrkala.

4.4 Resources for Ceremonial Activities

A number of resources were observed in use during ceremonial activities. Detailed observations of the ceremonial activities themselves formed part of the original report to
the Northern Land Council but have not been included here. This section discusses material resources used in ceremony. The yidaki, discussed in the previous section, played a vital role in all Yolngu ceremonies witnessed, and hollow logs were also observed in use in Yolngu ceremony.

4.4.1 Gapa: Clay

Clays, particularly red and white clays, were used extensively during ceremonies, and were put to some purpose at every ceremony witnessed. Clay was daubed on the bodies of ceremony participants, and on objects used in the ceremony, such as cars and houses. Clay is an important item for sharing and exchange, as it is only available at particular sites. One of these sites, called Bapuwili, is close to the GaGan homeland was visited on 17/11/2002. GaGan residents collected two large buckets of clay from there for ceremonial purposes. This had been a known site for collecting clay dating back to the ‘bush time’ prior to the mission period. Clay is also available on Woodah Island, at a place called Bambukurru. On 1/11/03, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda] reported the location and exploitation of this clay deposit at Bambukurru on Woodah Island when she only had one child (45+ years ago).

4.4.2 Ochre

Ochre is the basis of the paints used in Yolngu ceremony, and in the handicrafts described above. No observations were made of ochre gathering during the research, but it was witnessed being used extensively. Flat stones to grind ochre were sometimes collected when they were noticed in rocky areas on beaches. Djambawa Marawili collected one of these rocks on the beach on the Garraparra peninsula on 5/08/02. Such a rock was observed being used as part of a ceremony on 3/09/01.

4.4.3 Biłma: Clapsticks

Clapsticks (Biłma) were used in all the ceremonies witnessed. They are usually made from hardwoods such as maypiny and boyutj, sourced from the surrounding countryside. Observations of clapstick wood being cut, or clapsticks being made, occurred on the 6/09/01, 1/10/01, and 13/08/02.

4.4.4 Funeral Sheds

In the Yolngu funerals witnessed, a funeral shed was used to house the coffin whilst the ceremony was taking place. Saplings and small trees, often stringybark trees, were used to construct the frame of this shed. The materials used to create the walls and roof of the shed varied depending on the nature of the funeral. Funeral sheds observed at Yilpara were constructed of stringbark branches and leaves, and on one occasion, pieces of paperbark were used to line the inside. A funeral shed observed at Rurrangalla in November 2001 had walls and a roof constructed of paperbark.

4.4.5 Shades and Shelters

The Yolngu ceremonies witnessed lasted several days. Shades of similar construction to funeral sheds (but without walls) were constructed from local and store bought materials for many of these ceremonies. They were usually made of a sapling frame, with branches, paperbark, or tarpaulins for the roof. These were used throughout the ceremony as shade for the singers and for those watching the ceremony.
4.4.6 Other Ceremonial Resources

There were a number of other ceremonial resources that were observed being used during the fieldwork. Freshly shredded stringybark was used on a number of occasions, including 3/11/01 and 21/09/01. Branches and leaves of the djilka plant used to cook the turtle were also used in a smoking ceremony of purification at the end of each funeral.

Parrots and other bird feathers are used to create ceremonial armbands. Djambawa Marawili went hunting for parrots on 19/11/00 and 28/11/00 in order to obtain feathers for this purpose. Armbands made of feathers were observed in use at circumcision ceremonies at Gapuwiyak during February 2001 and at Yilpara during September 2001.

4.5 Medicines

Older Aboriginal people demonstrated a detailed knowledge of medicines and medical treatments that could be obtained from the surrounding countryside. No detailed studies of medical knowledge were undertaken, but some medicines were noted during the fieldwork period.

4.5.1 Stingrays, Stingers, Snakebites

On 9/11/00 a Yuthuwa Madarpa man, Mulawalnga Marawili, was stung by a stingray spine. The hunters with him immediately lit a small fire, and collected green djilka leaves. These were held over the fire and then placed hot over the wound. Later Mulawalnga held his hand directly over a hot fire. Stingray poisons are based on a protein, which denatures when heat is applied,\(^\text{34}\) and such a heat treatment can also be used by Yolngu on stinger stings.\(^\text{35}\) A yellow striped cockroach beetle found on the beaches was also identified as being good medicine for stingray wounds.\(^\text{36}\) The back end is crushed up and put in the sting. This cockroach is also used to treat snake bites.

4.5.2 Colds and Influenza

On 3/11/02, Muluymuluy Wirrpanda collected the leaves of a particular gum tree called walan. The leaves were boiled to make a medicine to treat her grandchild, who was ill with influenza. [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda] reported that a flu medicine can be made by putting green ants in boiling water and drinking it.

On 17/08/02 a number of women from Yilpara made a journey to collect bush medicine. This medicine was to treat [Bakulangay Marawili], who was suffering from bronchial problems caused by advanced lung cancer. They gathered a fruit from a tree growing on the coastal dunes that they called burrukpili. This fruit was boiled and the water given to the dying man.

4.5.3 Other Medicines

On 29/10/02, and again on 1/11/02, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda] described a white flowered plant that has leaves which are used as a bandage for serious wounds. The leaf

\(^{34}\) Allen, G. Marine Fishes of Tropical Australia and Southeast Asia, Museum of Western Australia, 1999
\(^{35}\) Ngulpurr Marawili
\(^{36}\) Wäka Mununggurr
is cooked, the outer skin is taken off, and it is then placed on the wound. She used this type of bandage during the bush era on serious spear wounds sustained by her father. A red and black seed found around Yilpara is used to treat minor eye infections.  

### 4.6 Spear and Harpoon Materials

#### 4.6.1 Spear and Harpoon Shafts

Spear shafts are made from the straight trunks of light saplings and softwoods growing on the coast. The shafts have remained unchanged since the pre-mission period and were observed being collected on several occasions at a number of locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13/11/00</td>
<td>Dhupilawuy Marika</td>
<td>Dharupi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/08/01</td>
<td>Gawarrajt Mununggurr</td>
<td>Yarrinya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/01</td>
<td>Mulumuluy Marawili</td>
<td>Lumatjpi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/09/01</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td>Dharupi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/08/02</td>
<td>Wäka Mununggurr,</td>
<td>Dipiwuy, near Garraparra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/08/02</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
<td>Wangurrarrikpa (Woodah I.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/10/02</td>
<td>Dhupilawuy Marika,</td>
<td>Yilpara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nuwandjali Marawili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/11/02</td>
<td>Wäka Mununggurr,</td>
<td>Dharupi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nuwandjali Marawili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harpoon shafts were cut from young stringybark trees. Unlike spear shafts, harpoons are selected from heavier eucalypt hardwood, as they need some weight and strength to be able to strike through the shell. The cutting and/or preparation of new harpoons was observed on the 14/01/01 and 20/01/01.

#### 4.6.2 Spear Barbs and Blades

Several types of spear barbs were identified as being used traditionally. One barb used the spines of large stingrays. These are still used ceremonially, and were observed being collected on 11/12/00, and 19/12/00 by Dhupilawuy Marika and Ngambulili Marawili for ceremonial spears. A second kind of barb is carved from the hardwood maypiny. A third type used stone called guyarra, a type of stone that comes from Matarrawatj, an inland site in the southern part of Blue Mud Bay. These stones were used for axes as well. Fish spear prongs were made of a hardwood called dhurritji. They were carved and tied together with a bush rope made from vines. In the mission period, people used to make shovel spear heads by hammering flat the curved metal at the top of drums found on the beach. Modern spears were observed being made from metal in the same shapes. Fish spears are made using spikes sharpened from the metal used to reinforce concrete, and ceremonial shovel spear blades are made from scrap sheet metal.

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37 Ngulpurr Marawili  
38 Djambawa Marawili  
39 Nuwandjali Marawili, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda]  
40 Malumin Marawili  
41 Malumin Marawili  
42 Gumbaniya Marawili, Malumin Marawili
4.6.3 Spearhead Fixing Techniques

As well as being the source of spearpoints, hardwoods such as maypiny or boyutj were also the source of the glue that was used to fix spearheads in the past. The root (galayngu) was dug up, heated on the fire, and then the sap was collected and used as a fixative. A red flowered plant, Balwurr, has a vine which was used to tie the spearhead in place. Spear makers observed at Yilpara used modern putty and copper electrical wiring to fix spearheads in place using the same technique (glue reinforced with coiled wire strapping).

4.6.4 Spear Throwers

Spear throwers (galpus) were used extensively by hunters at Yilpara. They increased the power and accuracy of the throw, and were also used to stun injured animals. They were constructed of local hardwoods, and sometimes carved and painted for ceremonies. Galpus were extensively used in dancing.

4.7 Boomerangs

No observations of boomerangs being used as a hunting tool were made during fieldwork. A number of senior men own boomerangs, or sets of boomerangs, that are used for ceremonial purposes. No observations were made of such boomerangs being constructed.

4.8 Ropes, lines and vines

Modern ropes and fishing lines were used for both harpoons and fishing lines. Knowledge of the types of bush vines used previously still exists. On 11/1/02, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda] recalled seeing her husband Wakuthi Marawili making a fishing line from bush vines in her youth. [Bakulangay Marawili] stated on 16/01/01 that turtle hunting ropes can be made from vines from the big tree at Garrangarri.

4.9 Cooking Materials

A number of natural products were used in cooking and eating. Djilka, the leaves used in the turtle cooking process, have already been discussed. Stones were also an integral part of the observed cooking processes for turtles. They were often reused as turtles were predominantly cut in particular locations (such as Yathikpa) and the stones were left in the firepit.

Stones were also be used to cook fish. A stone platform was built and used to slow roast a Yambirrku next to the fire on 12/02/01. On another occasion (17/05/01), a bed of shells was made and the fire built on top. Fish and crabs were cooked on the heated shells and ash when the fire had burned down.

Leaves and fronds were used for several purposes. Fronds from the Mauraki (casuarina) tree which grows at the high tide mark were used as ‘plates’ to rest cooked fish on when eating on the beach. Big broad leaves are also used for cooking, particularly for cooking damper on hot coals without a frying pan. Two plants often used in this way are called

43 Nuwandjali Marawili, [Mayawuluk Wirrpanda]
warrparr and walarit. Dugong skins and turtle shells are both used to create sealed ovens over the firepit in the cooking process for those animals. Inland, paperbark is used to construct similarly structured ovens for cooking freshwater fish. Such paperbark ovens were observed in use on most trips to Mangatjipa and Wayawu.

4.10 Hunting and Camping Shelters

Rough shades were sometimes constructed whilst engaged in hunting activities, particularly in locations where people camped overnight in the dry season. Table 1 shows where such shades were observed.

Table 1: Hunting Shelters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Constructed By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25/05/01</td>
<td>Duluwuy</td>
<td>Wanyipi Marika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/07/02</td>
<td>Ngandharkpuy</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/08/02</td>
<td>Gulalingba (Cool Yal You Ma Island), off Woodah Island</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accommodation at the community was predominantly in houses and tents. At ceremony times, some additional shelters were constructed from sapling frames and tarpaulins to house the temporary residents. No notes were taken about the construction of shelters whilst out camping.

4.11 Antbed

Mosquitoes are extremely prevalent during the wet season at Yilpara. They can be warded off by the smoke from burning antbed material. On two occasions (17/12/00, and 18/12/00), antbeds at Yarrinya were broken up and the material extracted was taken back to Yilpara for this purpose.

Section 5: Resource Use at Other Communities

5.1 Introduction

Much of the data about Yilpara presented here is relevant to the activities of Yolngu in the wider Blue Mud Bay area (Map 2A). Some direct observations from other homeland centres were made whilst on broad-scale site mapping trips during September and October 2001, and during visits in November 2002. These homeland centres were not systematically surveyed for resource use, but it is possible to make some comments about the nature of resource use in these communities on the basis of both observed and reported evidence.

5.2 Djarrakpi

A smaller homeland centre of four houses on the easternmost peninsula in the north of Blue Mud Bay. This is the home of the Manggalili clan, and was permanently occupied

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44 Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Wurrandan Marawili
during fieldwork by a senior member of that clan (Baluka Maymuru) and his immediate family. Other clan members and relatives visited regularly. The Djarrakpi population is extremely dependent on the coast and sea for obtaining food, and in fact is more dependent on the sea than the Yilpara community. Djarrakpi has no shop supplying store food, fewer waterbirds, and no permanent freshwater fishing hole equivalent to the Mangatjipa billabong in the vicinity. The thin, narrow peninsula the homeland centre is on also provides less land area for hunting animals like kangaroos and emus, although these animals are still exploited.

In contrast to the land, the marine and coastal resources near Djarrakpi are rich and varied, including sharks and rays, turtles, turtle eggs, catfish, barramundi, crabs, parrotfish, and various kinds of shellfish. In 2001 Baluka Maymuru had a boat with a small motor, used for offshore fishing and turtle hunting. He also owned a 4WD vehicle during the observation period. Djarrakpi residents undertook some form of hunting on all four days the researchers spent in the community.

5.3 Barraratjpi

A homeland centre of approximately 5 houses, approximately 10km up the road from Djarrakpi. Barraratjpi is also a Manggalili clan homeland centre, although it is on Marrakulu land. There were Gurrumurru Dhalwangu people living there when the researcher briefly visited in 2001. During this period, Wulanybuma Wunungmurra located a nesting turtle on a beach, which he dragged back to near the community in order to butcher it.

5.4 Wandawuy

Wandawuy was not visited during the fieldwork, but there were a significant number of visitors to Yilpara from this homeland centre, as there are marriage links between the two. It is home to members of the Gupa Djapu clan, and Wandawuy residents have access to the beach via a walking track, which comes out near Marrpanbuy. They hunt stingray, shark and fish along the coastline there. There is no boat at Wandawuy, nor is there vehicle access to the beach.

5.5 Rurrangalla

An inland homeland of approximately 5 houses, visited briefly numerous times during the fieldwork. It is the home of the Munyuku clan, whose territory includes the southern part of the Yilpara peninsula and associated reefs (Yarrinya). Rurrangalla residents often hunt and fish inland, although tyre tracks from Rurrangalla vehicles were identified several times on the hunting tracks around Yilpara and on the Yarrinya peninsula. On 21/01/01, Rurrangalla residents travelled down to Yilpara/Yathikpa to share in the proceeds of a turtle hunt during the wet season. They also regularly visited Yilpara to buy goods from the store.

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45 Baluka Maymuru
46 Gumbaniya Marawili, Nuwandjali Marawili
47 Menga Mununggurr
5.6 GanGan

A large inland homeland centre on a river, home of members of the Gumana and Wunungmurra (Gurrumurru) Dhaḻwangu clan. There are usually vehicles at GanGan and the beach and peninsula on the western side of Grindall Bay can be accessed from the homeland centre by a vehicle track. This track can be cut off during the late wet season, but GanGan residents estimate that they go down to the coast once a week when it is possible to do so. Oysters and fish are the main focus for saltwater hunting efforts. A number of coastal hunting and fishing sites accessed by GanGan residents were visited during fieldwork. Gawirrin Gumana stated that at one time he owned a boat that was kept on the beach near Garraparra, but it was stolen.

5.7 Dhurupitji

A homeland centre close to GanGan, and also on a river. Home of members of the Dhudi Djapu clan, a number of whom spent significant parts of the research period living at Yilpara. Dhurupitji residents have access to the same coastal areas as the residents of GanGan, and regularly visit the coast of Grindall Bay.

5.8 Bälma

A small homeland centre of approximately five houses lying inland in central Blue Mud Bay. The main household is based around a middle-aged Wunungmurra Dhaḻwangu clan man, Bandipandi, and his immediate family. He has a 5 person boat and motor which is kept on the Blue Mud Bay coast east of the homeland centre. He regularly uses the boat for turtle and dugong hunting, for transport, and for monitoring the activities of the professional crabbers working in the area. Bälma residents visited Yilpara by boat on 21/01/01.

48 Wuyal Wirrpanda, Dhukaḻ Wirrpanda, Galuma Maymuru
49 Bandipandi Wunungmurra
Section 6: Further Observations of Activities on Land and Sea Country

6.1 Introduction

This section contains observations of additional activities undertaken by Blue Mud Bay residents in the surrounding countryside, noted as being of interest under the terms of reference of this report. It includes observations of boat travel and boat visitors, of the burning of country, of the closure of country because of deaths and funerals, of interactions with non-Yolngu outsiders, and of the visitation and maintenance of sites of significance.

6.2 Yolngu Visitors: Boat Travel to and from Yilpara

Yolngu visitors to Yilpara came by car, aeroplane, boat, and occasionally on foot. Car and aeroplane arrivals were at times very frequent, and on a busy day as many as ten or more planes landed at the Yilpara airstrip. Arrivals by plane and car were therefore not noted on a regular basis. Arrivals by boat were less frequent, but still common. Observed boat arrivals or departures were from people travelling to and from Yilpara, Djarrakpi, Barraratjpi, Bälma, Bickerton Island, Groote Island, and Numbulwar.

Boat visits, like car and aeroplane visits, often involved the exchange of food and other resources with related kin. Turtles and turtle meat was one common form of exchange, and these exchanges were part of the wider distribution system, discussed in Chapter 4. List 3 shows boats that were observed arriving at or departing from fieldwork during the course of the research. It does not included boat trips made by boats that permanently reside at Yilpara, nor is it a complete list, as some arrivals and departures were not observed or noted. It represents a minimum for such activity. List 4 shows movement for ceremonies, the bulk of which was by plane and vehicle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Boat</th>
<th>Arriving from</th>
<th>Travelling to</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Known Passengers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18/11/2000</td>
<td>Blue 200hp speedboat</td>
<td>Groote island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/11/2000</td>
<td>Smaller outboard boat</td>
<td>Groote island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/12/2000</td>
<td>Blue 200hp speedboat</td>
<td>Groote island</td>
<td></td>
<td>small turtle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/12/2000</td>
<td>Small red boat</td>
<td>Groote island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/01/2001</td>
<td>Bandipandi's boat</td>
<td>Balaor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bandipandi, his wives and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/05/2001</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Bickerton/Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit. Brought a small turtle from Ningari</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/07/2001</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Bickerton/Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/07/2001</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Bickerton/Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/07/2002</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Bickerton/Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/08/2001</td>
<td>Blue 200hp speedboat</td>
<td>Groote island</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nexusrawuy Marawili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/08/2001</td>
<td>Blue 200hp speedboat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Juwinbin and Nexusrawuy Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/08/2001</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pick up turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/08/2001</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>bring turtle eggs and large turtle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/09/2001</td>
<td>Yilpara community boat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>take 2 cans of petrol to Baluka Maymuru</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/09/2001</td>
<td>Yilpara community boat</td>
<td>Djarrakpi/Barrarapiti</td>
<td>People to Djarrakpi, Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/09/2001</td>
<td>Yilpara community boat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring turtle from Barrarapiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/10/2001</td>
<td>Smaller tinny</td>
<td>Bickernto/Groote Island</td>
<td></td>
<td>Take Gumbaniya Gumbaniya Marawili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/07/2002</td>
<td>Bararapiti boat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Bararapiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>shopping Alec, Lawrence from Bickerton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/07/2002</td>
<td>Yilpara boat</td>
<td>Groote/Bickerton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/07/2002</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Groote/Bickerton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barney and his family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/08/2002</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Groote/Bickerton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/08/2002</td>
<td>Baluka's boat</td>
<td>Djarrakpi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/08/2002</td>
<td>Bararapiti boat</td>
<td>Yilpara to Yilpara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/08/2002</td>
<td>Bickerton boat</td>
<td>Groote/Bickerton</td>
<td>Yarrinya peninsula</td>
<td>Bickerton islanders dug turtle nest at Yarrinya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/11/2002</td>
<td>Community Boat</td>
<td>Yilpara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ceremony Nuwandjali Marawili, Waka Mununggurr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/11/2002</td>
<td>Community Boat</td>
<td>Yilpara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Return Nuwandjali Marawili, Waka Mununggurr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List 4: Observations of Ceremonial Events and Travel

21/10/00- Djambawa Marawili went to a funeral at Yirrkala
16/11/00- Funeral at Gan Gan taking place
28/11/00- Funeral at Gan Gan ended
22/12/00- Final day of funeral at Yirrkala, attended by many Yilpara residents
01/02/01- Gapuwiyak circumcision ceremony commenced
07/02/01- Gapuwiyak circumcision ended
02/03/01- Madarrpa involvement in Gapuwiyak funeral commenced
09/03/01- Gapuwiyak funeral ended
27/03/01- Ngulpurr Marawili and family flew to Garrthalala for funeral
31/03/01- Nuwandjali and Yeniwuy Marawili left for a funeral at the Roper River. 01/04/01- Mulawalnga, Wulu, Munuminya Marawili travel to Roper river
15/04/01- Mulwalnga returned from Roper River.
15/04/01- Nuwandjali, Wulu, Munuminya stayed at Roper for circumcision ceremony
18/04/01- [Bakulangay Marawili] and his family left for a funeral at Yirrkala
02/05/01- Note that two funerals are due to begin soon at Yirrkala
07/06/01- Djawila, Wulu, Munuminya Marawili at Yirrkala for funeral
28/06/01- Many men still away at Yirrkala funerals
13/07/01- Many Yilpara men at Yirrkala for subsequent Gumatj man’s funeral
17/07/01- Yilpara residents at funerals on Groote Island and at Yirrkala.
31/07/01- Yilpara residents attend funeral at Bawaka
09/08/01- Funeral at Yilpara for Yimakany Marawili’s baby
10/08/01- Waka Mununggurr goes to Wandawuy for the concreting of a grave
13/08/01- Yimakany’s baby’s funeral ends
01/09/01- Funeral at Yilpara for Groote Island man underway
03/09/01- Groote Island man’s funeral ends
05/09/01- Short ceremony to announce a new death to Yilpara women
18/09/01- Circumcision at Yilpara begins
21/09/01- Circumcision at Yilpara ends
23/09/01- Marrakulu funeral at Barraratjpi occurring
26/09/01- Country begins to be closed in preparation for a funeral at Rurrangalla
27/09/01- [Bakulangay Marawili] goes to the funeral at Barraratjpi
01/10/01- Djpau funeral commences at Yirrkala
09/10/01- Funeral at Numbulwar
19/10/01- Funeral at Rurrangalla ends
09/11/01- Funeral begins at Wandawuy (G and others attend)
10/11/01- Observation period ends

21/06/02- Observation begins.Yilpara residents involved in Nhulunbuy funeral
21/06/02- Madarrpa woman dies at Groote Island
23/06/02- [Garindjira Marawili] dies.
24/06/02- [Garindjira]’s body put onto plane
25/06/02- Funeral at Doyndji underway
30/06/02- Putting flags up for [Garindjira]’s funeral
02/07/02- Men leave for Groote Island funeral
10/07/02- Funeral at Numbulwar underway
14/07/02- Ongoing preparations for Garindjira’s funeral
29/07/02- Garindjira’s funeral ends
07/08/02- [Miliripin Mununggurr] dies
6.3 Fires and the Burning of Country

The burning of country took place for a number of interrelated purposes (for example; ease and safety of hunting, good forest management, or the lifting of funeral restrictions). This summary of observations first describes those undertaken as part of regular daily activities, not related to the lifting of ritual prohibitions. Burning of the bush as part of daily activity was an extremely common event, and was not always noted, so the dates below represent a minimum of activity. The name of the person lighting the fire is included where it was noted.

Table 6: Burning of Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26/10/00</td>
<td>Duluwuy, Yarrinya road</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/10/00</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>Muluymulu Wirrpanda and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/11/00</td>
<td>Nganagawuy road</td>
<td>Malumin Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11/00</td>
<td>Balana/Ngandharkpuy road</td>
<td>Malumin Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/03/01</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
<td>Guypungura Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/06/01</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>Narrulwuy Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/06/01</td>
<td>Yarrinya road, Dhuwultuwul, Ngari</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/07/01</td>
<td>Yilpara road</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/07/01</td>
<td>Road to big balkpak tree</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/08/01</td>
<td>Multiple fires observed</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/09/01</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/09/01</td>
<td>Bulku/Guninyguniny</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/09/01</td>
<td>Garrangarri track, Dilmitji track</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/10/01</td>
<td>Yarrinya</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/08/02</td>
<td>Dipiwuy, Garraparra</td>
<td>Wäka Mununggurr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/09/02</td>
<td>Gunyuru</td>
<td>Djambawa Marawili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/02</td>
<td>Yilpara road burning</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/09/02</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3.1 Fires and Funeral Prohibitions

On 27/08/02, Nuwandjali Marawili was observed burning the Lumatjpi area to open it following the funeral of [Miliripin Mununggurr], Gumbaniya Marawili’s wife. Three other observations were made of country that had been very recently burned after a funeral: Yarrinya (19/10/01), on the Yilpara road (26/08/02), and at Mangatjipa (30/09/02).
6.4 The Closure of Country and Ceremonial Prohibitions

Areas of country were closed off following the death of a person closely connected to that country. Notes were taken of closed areas of country, or of particular bans related to funerals, on the days in Table 2 below. The duration of these bans varied according the person involved and the prevailing circumstances, but most bans for entering particular areas lasted more than one week, and sometimes much longer in the case of the death of an important person.

Table 2: Closure of Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Prohibition/Area</th>
<th>Reason for Prohibition or Closure of Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23/09/2001</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/2001</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/2001</td>
<td>Yarrinya</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/2001</td>
<td>Wayawu</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/2001</td>
<td>Dharupi, Yilpara</td>
<td>Only places open for hunting during funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/10/2001</td>
<td>Yarrinya</td>
<td>Burned after being closed off for funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/10/2001</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>Burned area after being closed off for funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/10/2001</td>
<td>Yilpara</td>
<td>Boys newly initiated into secret parts of a funeral ceremony caught fish which women could not eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/11/2001</td>
<td>Yarrinya</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/11/2001</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/11/2001</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/11/2001</td>
<td>Wayawu</td>
<td>[Dula Ngurrwuthun]'s funeral at Rurrangalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/07/2002</td>
<td>Mangatjipa</td>
<td>[Garindjirra Marawili]'s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/07/2002</td>
<td>Birany Birany</td>
<td>[Garindjirra Marawili]'s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/07/2002</td>
<td>Rurrangalla</td>
<td>[Garindjirra Marawili]'s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/08/2002</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>[Miliripin Mununggurr]'s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/08/2002</td>
<td>Ditjpalwuy</td>
<td>[Miliripin Mununggurr]'s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/09/2002</td>
<td>Dugong, parrotfish ban</td>
<td>[Bakulangay Marawili]'s funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/09/2002</td>
<td>Yilpara road closed</td>
<td>[Bakulangay Marawili]'s funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/09/2002</td>
<td>Yilpara road closed</td>
<td>[Bakulangay Marawili]'s funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/10/2002</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>[Bakulangay Marawili]'s funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/10/2002</td>
<td>Dhalwangu areas</td>
<td>[Bakulangay Marawili]'s funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/11/2002</td>
<td>Yathikpa</td>
<td>Closed to women because of [Bakulangay Marawili]'s death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.5 Non-Yolngu Presence and Use of Country

Yilpara residents demonstrated a consistent response to the presence of non-Yolngu people in Blue Mud Bay. This response was that these people were expected to obtain permission from the relevant owners of land or sea country before their arrival, if at all possible, or as soon as they arrived in the area, if it was not. Non-Yolngu presence on land and sea country included crabbers and their employees, barramundi boats, visits by the police, customs officials, telecommunications contractors, and the army.

The following observations were made of responses towards non-Yolngu present in Blue Mud Bay during the fieldwork.
On 01/09/2001, Wäka Mununggurr was leading a turtle hunt south of Yathikpa in Grindall Bay. He saw an unknown boat in the distance, and immediately diverted from the hunt to investigate it. It was a large barramundi boat, the Wakea. Wäka spoke to a crewman on the boat, and asked him a series of questions: Where have you come from? Where have you been fishing? When did you get here? When are you leaving? Have you caught many fish? Do you know Peter Manning (a local barramundi fisherman)? Do you know Bun (the crabber operating under an NLC agreement at Yilpara)? He received brief answers to these questions, and the conversation was tense. After leaving the barramundi boat, he stated that he had wanted to ask them to leave, but he was aware that he was not allowed to do so under European law. He later engaged me in discussion about setting up a ranger program. He wished to know whether this would enable the Yolngu of Blue Mud Bay to have a permit system for boats like the Wakea and/or give them the power to ask such unwanted visitors to leave the bay.

On 1/11/00, the police drove from Nhulunbuy to Yilpara and drove through and around the community. The community leader, Djambawa Marawili was upset that they had not notified him that they were coming, and immediately went to speak with them. He made this point to them strongly before engaging in further conversation.

On 14/09/01 two recreational fishermen were observed at Djarrakpi. They claimed to have verbal permission from Yikaki Maymuru, one of the senior owners of Djarrakpi country, who resides in Nhulunbuy. They left on 16/09/01. Baluka Maymuru, the senior traditional owner resident at Djarrakpi, later stated to me that he had told them that they could not camp at Djarrakpi, as he had not received a phone call from Yikaki about them. He stated that he sent them away. During their visit, the senior resident at Barraratjpi was Wali Wunungmurra, who is not an owner of the country at Barraratjpi. He encountered them with the researcher present. He did not ask them to leave, but requested that a Northern Land Council employee also present ask them to do so. This employee had no power to do so. Wali then stated that he intended to report the two fishermen when he went back to town.

On 24/09/01 Wanyipi Marika stated that he had seen a barramundi fishing boat in Grindall Bay (Yathikpa) and he did not want it there. He asked me about a permit system through the Northern Land Council as a way of regulating access for these boats. He did not approach the boat on this occasion. On 03/11/02 at Bulanguwuy, Mulawalnga Marawili pointed out two barramundi boats moving out of Myaloola bay. He stated that they were stealing barramundi.

6.5.1 Non-Yolngu visitors to Duluwuy Crabbers Camp

There is a base for professional crabbing operations at Duluwuy in Grindall Bay. This base operates under a formal agreement between the crabbers and the Yolngu of Blue Mud Bay. The Yolngu expressed concern on a number of occasions about visitors to the base or new employees of the crabbers who had not notified the Yolngu of their arrival. On 26/10/00 Djambawa Marawili stated his concern about this issue whilst at the crabbers camp. On 14/11/00, a non-Yolngu man and woman were removed from the crabbers camp at the request of Djambawa Marawili. They had arrived unannounced and unrequested a few days previously looking for work, but were sacked soon after by the crabber for poor performance. Djambawa Marawili’s concern was that they be removed from his country safely. On 29/11/00, concern about unannounced visitors was raised during a meeting with the crabbers. On 28/07/02 Dhukan Wirrpanda stated that 3
unknown non-Yolngu had been camping at the crabbers camp, drinking and smoking marijuana. He and another Yolngu man, Wanyipi Marika, had been camping in the area with their families at the time and wanted to leave when the unknown men began bothering them. Dhukał stated that he thought that Wanyipi had called the police on his return to Yilpara.

6.5.2 Responsibilities to Non-Yolngu Visitors

Yolngu believe they have a responsibility to look after legitimate non-Yolngu visitors on their country. On 10/02/01, a heavy storm hit Yilpara and it was known there were no crabbers present at the crabbers camp. The following day a number of Yilpara men were sent to assess the damage to the camp. The site was partially cleaned up, and a boat that had broken off its trailer and become buried in the sand was dug out and winched back onto the trailer. Crabbers regularly travel to Yilpara to use the telephone, and to obtain freshwater, which is not available at their camp. Crabbers have also been rescued by Yolngu hunters from disabled or burning boats on several occasions.

6.6 Visitation and Maintenance of Sacred Sites

There are a number of sites in the Yilpara area which are important Ancestral areas and/or related to good hunting and the management of country. The sites below were visited during fieldwork.

6.6.1 Ngulmi Ngulmi

Ngulmi Ngulmi is a ‘spirit woman’ close to Ngarri, on the beach south of Yilpara. There is a pile of coral representing Ngulmi Ngulmi at this site. Hunters offered a lit cigarette, or a small amount of food to Ngulmi Ngulmi to ensure a good hunt. They then call out the names of the animals they hope to catch, often prefaced by a cry ‘Brrrr!’ Hunters were observed making an offering to Ngulmi Ngulmi on 12/11/00 and 17/12/00. The cry ‘Brrrr!’ followed by the names of desired animals is used regularly in hunting, particularly turtle hunting. It was noted being used on 25/11/00 and 28/01/01.

8.6.2 Lulumu

Lulumu is a word that refers to a type of stingray, and to an Ancestral stingray site close to Yilpara. The area was extensively used for stingray hunting, gathering mud crabs, shellfish, and bait, and for parrotfish fishing. One part of this area is in the shape of a stingray, and eyeholes have been gouged in the sand where they would appear on the animal. When heading out to fish and hunt in the area, Yolngu hunters sometimes took a handful of sand out of the eyehole and cast it away, calling the names of the animals they wished to catch, and the places they wished to go. This was performed by Malumin Marawili on 11/11/00. On the way home successful hunters might perform similar actions to give thanks. [Bakulangay Marawili] stated on 3/12/00 that in the past fishers would take some sand from the eyeholes with them in a shell and cast it from the boat into the water to ensure a good catch.

50 Djambawa Marawili, Bandipandi Wunungmurra
51 Malumin Marawili
6.6.3 Yilpara- Yingapungapu

Yilpara itself is built adjacent to an important Ancestral site, that of the Yingapungapu burial ground. In the past there have been a number of restrictions placed on hunting in this area because of the burial ground. [Bakulangay Marawili] stated on 3/12/00 that a bay near Yilpara was called Gandang. Prior to the establishment of the homeland centre, the stingray and shark from that place were sacred, and could only be eaten by the old men (although they could be caught by the younger men, who subsequently would have to wash their hands before eating anything). This rule still existed when the Yithuwa Madarpa first returned to Yilpara to settle, and [Bakulangay] himself caught stingray there that he was unable to eat. Only Wakuthi Marawili and another old man had been allowed to eat it. Birrikijji Gumana, Gawirrin’s father and Wakuthi’s classificatory father, was still alive at this point, and he was the most senior custodian of Yilpara, Yathikpa, Yarrinya, and Garraparra. Before he died at GanGan, Birrikijji instructed the senior men to smoke out the Yilpara area so everyone could eat stingray from there. [Bakulangay] repeated this story on 26/06/01.

The Yingapungapu burial ground and sand sculpture lies in the dunes behind Yilpara and was a place where bones of fish and other animals were placed after they had been eaten.\(^{52}\) Bones are no longer placed there (partly based on medical and health advice), but it is still regularly maintained and used frequently in ceremonies.\(^{53}\) The sculpture was fully cleared and rebuilt on 5/09/01, prior to an important ceremony. A number of people are buried in the Yingapungapu, including Djungi Wirrpanda, the father of Manman and Dhukal Wirrpanda.\(^{54}\) The related Yingapungapu areas at Garaparra and Djarrakpi were not visited during the fieldwork.

6.6.4 Yathikpa

Yathikpa is a coastal site associated with the Ancestral crocodile, a key Yithuwa Madarpa ancestor. Yathikpa is an important hunting area, and is visited frequently for turtle hunting, oyster gathering, and fishing for catfish, barramundi and queenfish. Prior to a recent cyclone destroying the shell beds, it was also an important site for gathering shellfish in the intertidal mud and sand.\(^{55}\)

Yathikpa contains physical manifestations of Ancestral activities, including depressions in the sand where a sacred harpoon was buried, and the balkpalk tree under which they sat. Djambawa Marawili visited the site and explained these features on 03/06/01. On 24/07/02, he showed this site to some senior Wunungmurra Dhajwangu men (including Ngutjapy Wunungmurra) who had not visited it previously.

6.6.5 Garrangali

Garrangali is an extremely important Ancestral area and crocodile breeding ground. It was visited twice during fieldwork, on 20/10/02 and 8/11/02. Both of these trips were to show the site to young people and demonstrate its significance to them. The first was led by Djambawa Marawili, the second by Wäka Mununggurr. Both trips were fully observed.

\(^{52}\) Djambawa Marawili
\(^{53}\) Djambawa Marawili, Wäka Mununggurr
\(^{54}\) Djambawa Marawili
\(^{55}\) Muluymuluy Marawili, Yalmakany Marawili
Garrangali is a highly unusual place and difficult to access. It is a stretch of jungle in the centre of a floodplain which is either grass or bare earth. In a relatively small area in the midst of this often barren and saline plain, freshwater bubbling up from beneath the ground supports dense jungle foliage and a moist habitat suitable for crocodiles to lay their eggs. The earth is extremely soft and spongy, made largely of decaying organic matter. Evidence of old eggs and of crocodile movements was observed on both trips to the site.

On a trip to Garrangali on 20/10/02, Djambawa Marawili resisted killing a brolga in a Dhuwa area very close to Garrangali, on the basis that the bird was at its Ancestral site. Crocodiles at Garrangali were not observed being targeted for food, but a small crocodile was observed being targeted unsuccessfully for food by Djuwunbin Marawili at Gurritjinya on the Yarrinya peninsula on 6/05/01.

6.7 Skills Transfer and the Continuity of Knowledge

Numerous observations were made of the transfer of knowledge and skills from senior people to younger people. Such transfers were an integral part of daily life, particularly in terms of hunting skills and transmitting the associated knowledge of the country. Knowledge transfer was also clearly evident during ceremonies, a significant number of which took place during the observation period. Below are some specific examples of the transmission of knowledge and/or skills.

6.7.1 Hunting

Several turtle hunts were made in which younger or less experienced hunters were able to act in more senior roles. On 9/10/2002, Djambawa Marawili made a deliberate attempt to take some younger men out to show them how to turtle hunt more effectively. They had been given access to the community boat the previous day in order to improve their skills, but had been unsuccessful. The younger men Djambawa took with him included Dhupilawuy Marika, Ngambulili Marawili, Ditjpal Marawili, and Bandarr Wirrpanda.

On 5/12/02, Waka Munungurr made a similar turtle hunting trip for a similar educational purpose. On board were younger men who had fewer opportunities to go on the boats: Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Djulkapuy Marawili, Dukpiri Marawili, and Walirra Mununggurr. Dukpiri, the youngest member of the party, was given the chance to drive the boat on this trip, and was clearly inexperienced. On 1/09/01, Waka made a similar trip with Bawanha Marawili and Walirra Mununggurr, in which Bawanha was given the opportunity to drive the boat, something he was not observed doing previously.

On 17/05/01, a school excursion was undertaken to the important hunting site of Yathikpa. A group of teenagers were accompanied by a non-indigenous schoolteacher and a senior teacher’s aide from the community, Minitja Marawili. They were given the opportunity to fish and hunt at Yathikpa, and to cook what they had successfully captured.

56 Including Wulukuwuluku Marawili, Gonariny 2 Mununggurr, Wurrandan Marawili, Dukpiri Marawili, and Gurritjpal Marawil
6.7.2 Knowledge of Country

Two visits were made to the highly important site of Garangali during the observation period. The site had not been visited by Yilpara residents for approximately ten years. On that previous occasion, Djambawa Marawili and others took schoolchildren on a formal school excursion, documenting the trip with photographs and a subsequent school publication. On 20/10/02, Djambawa Marawili returned to the site with a group of teenage boys, younger men, and his youngest daughter. He walked with them through the site and explained its significance, allowing me to photograph the visit. On the 8/11/02, Waka Mununggurr took a larger group on a school excursion, explaining the significance of the site to the younger people. This trip was also observed.

6.7.3 Ceremonies

Each ceremony contained significant elements of instruction and guidance for younger people. Ceremonies were critical sites of learning, and were places where the authority and knowledge were explicitly expressed. Below are some observed examples of teaching and the transmission of knowledge.

On 6/02/01, Gumbaniya and Bawanha Marawili worked together to produce a chest painting for one of the boys going through a circumcision ceremony. Gumbaniya is a senior elder and drew the outline of the painting and indicated how it was to be filled. He then carefully supervised Bawanha as the younger man produced the painting, occasionally commenting or advising Bawanha on how to proceed to the next stage.

On 25/06/02, Yilpirr Wanambi and Gawarratj Mununggurr were required to dance the dance of Baru, the sacred crocodile, at a cleansing ceremony. Both men struggled to complete the dance. Napuwarri Marawili, a slightly older man and an experienced and talented dancer, joined the two men midway through the dance. He danced with them, advising them with words and gestures about how they could improve their performance.

On this same day, another dance was performed as part of the ceremonial proceedings. This dance was about Djirikitj (the bush quail or dove), and the version of the dance performed was clearly not familiar to some of the younger men, who performed it hesitantly. The leaders of that ceremony called for a second performance, and some more experienced dancers joined the group. The second performance was considerably stronger and more confident.

58 [Bakulangay Marawili], Nuwandjali Marawili, Menga Mununggurr