

7. SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND STRENGTH  
OF ATTACHMENT

The previous chapters have documented the presence of claimants and their forebears in the area during recorded history. They have also described how people have ordered and organised their interaction with each other and the land and environment in which they live, at least during recorded history.

Here we will look at one aspect of relationships with land in the claim area - the ceremonial - and conclude with statements that demonstrate in another way the strength of attachment people have to the land and their concern for all aspects of it.

Land is always part of Aboriginal ceremonies:

Where land was concerned, man's relationship with it was not merely social, but socio-religious (Berndt 1970:1 and see also Stanner 1965).

The holding of and participating in ceremonies have always been part of the fulfilment of the spiritual responsibility of the traditional owners of the claim area.

Ceremonies - historical

Since initial contact with non-Aborigines ceremonial activities in and adjacent to the claim area have been noted. J.W.O. Bennett in 1864 and 1869 (see Kerr 1971:138) took a particular interest in them. Other observers (Foelsche 1881:4; Coppinger 1883:204 and Mrs. Dominic Daly 1887:71-2) refer to them in a general way, without specifying their purpose. "Increase" ceremonies are closely related to the land and these were known in the claim area though were not developed as was also the case among related people in the Daly River and Port Keats areas (Stanner 1966:31). The site of Wariny is "where people used to paint up and ask for fish and turtle" (claimant Roy Yarrowen on 20 December 1978, and confirmed

by A.P. Elkin in a personal communication to M. Brandl on 2 February 1979 and in 1950b:77). We visited this site twice with claimants, and on both occasions the senior person present chanted or sung or both and spoke to the being who is the rock (Maudie Bennentt and George Munggalu). Referring to the annual ceremony which used to be held here, Elkin says:

Little has been learnt about it, though the main actors are said to have been painted with the rainbow serpent design. It is said that the Government told the old men not to hold the ceremony any more, because natives from other parts working in Darwin blamed this ceremony, performed by the almost local natives, for any sickness or other ills which befell them (Elkin 1950b:77).

In addition to deliberate attempts to ban ceremonies disease and dislocation of people have taken their toll on the number of people available to carry on the ceremonial traditions.

Land features most prominently in ceremonies of initiation and death and, as it happens, the continuity of these is well-documented for the area\*. In these ceremonies, through songs and specific instructions, the uninitiated are taught. Among other things they learn to read the sacred heritage in the landscape and how they and their kin are linked to, and part of, it.

#### Initiation: male

The earliest reference to male initiations is that of Sidney Wellington Herbert who came to Darwin in 1870 for the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line. He said boys retired into the bush for several weeks to be made men (1873:24).

Wildey, too (1875:116), noted that "when the young men attain a certain age, the tribe assembles in some retired spot for a grand corroboree".

#### Non-circumcising groups

Foelsche (1881b:6) speaks of the few coastal tribes which did not practice circumcision. Youths between the age of twelve years and twenty-four had several stages to pass through (Foelsche ibid.,

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\* See also appendix one for examples.

and 1886:255). Wildey (1875:116) notes that the Larrakia and Wulna do not circumcise, as does Basedow (1906:10), Parkhouse (1895b:642) and Spencer (1914:153). R.M. Berndt (personal communication to M. Brandl says Dum-in-mirrie Island "marked the border of the circumcision spread".

#### Some ritual procedures

Foelsche (1885b:193) says the ceremonies generally took place about the middle of the year in the dry season, when the young men were secluded for a month. Every evening just before sundown they would go to an appointed place where a lot of dry grass had been collected. With painted faces they would move in single file and squat on the ground where older men were waiting to cover them with dry grass. Then women could come with food and retire. (This account parallels that given us at Nganggin plain by Maudie Bennett, Peggy Wilson and John Biyanamurrig during the research for this claim.)

Parkhouse (1895b:642) relates how boys at puberty were seized at dusk and borne away into the bush "to a place on the Adelaide River" and no boys between 14 and 19 years of age, he says, are to be seen in Port Darwin. He describes one Larrakia initiation he witnessed in 1890, including the "downcast mien" of initiates, called by Elkin much later (1955:151) a "Buddha-like pose", and the burning of grass around them (described to us recently by Maudie Bennett, Peggy Wilson and George Munggalu).

Crauford (1895:180-81) tells of a Larrakia youth undergoing initiation at Southport and mentions various behavioural restrictions on him. For example he was not permitted near water for a month, nor could he look at or be seen by women during his time of seclusion with other young men.

#### Mixing at ceremonies

In the Wagaidj ceremonies, however, circumcisions were carried out and invitations were sent to the Larrakia to hold joint

corroborees (Basedow 1906:11-12).

On one occasion Parkhouse (1895b:644) says about 200 Larrakia men, women and children travelled over a period of a month 125 miles to Burrundie station for a Wulwungga initiation ceremony, led by a Wulna headman, but performed by the Larrakia.

Basedow (ibid.:46) mentions that message sticks were used to invite Larrakia, Wagaidj and Brinken people to initiation ceremonies. Basedow (ibid.:10-17) gives quite detailed descriptions of both male and female initiation ceremonies, including the various stages, with both Larrakia and Wagaidj terms (and Djeraidj and Brinken). He includes words of various Larrakia and Wagaidj ceremonial songs, notably one of the frog, on which we were also able to gather information in 1979 from Topsy Secretary.

Initiation stages: Larrakia

Spencer (1914:153) reproduces an account of the initiation ceremonies given him by an old man.

He says that Larrakia initiations had two stages admitting a man to the status of beliya and malinya respectively. (Elkin 1955:150 has recorded a stage preliminary to these two, that of "nimgololo", which appears to be the Larrakia status term for a youth or boy generally, called "Jada" in Wadjiginy.) Our informants also told us of a final stage, called dariba in Larrakia. The opening of the beliya ceremony is called maguluri. The boys in the past were given into the custody of guardians and kept in the bush on a restricted diet. Basedow (1906:15; 1925:250) also notes that during the period between beliya and malinya status, initiates were forbidden certain foods. Both Spencer and Basedow describe certain secret-sacred ritual procedures, so they will not be described here. Stanner (1966:2) has some comments about the main ritual objects used by Aboriginal people of the north-western part of the Northern Territory, and these are part

of ritual activities in the claim area, too.

After a man's marriage and first child, he was advanced to malinya status (Spencer 1914:157) through ceremonies, but Spencer does not give many details of this although he does refer to the term lariba [sic.] for older initiated men (ibid.:153).

Ceremonies are to teach good behaviour

During the Larrakia initiation the boys were given lessons in good behaviour and tribal customs. Old men are responsible for calling the ceremonies which were said to be aimed at making youth into "good" people. This intention tallies with reasons for initiation procedures given to Elkin (1955:149-152) and to ourselves. George Munggalu, of dariba status\*, told us he could organise a Larrakia-style ceremony at any time to bring "those young men at Delissaville" to a sense of responsibility.

Secret aspects

Spencer reports (ibid.:155) that certain sounds during the ceremony were said to be the voice of a great old man who takes youths away to the mangroves, and women told us they believed this and men declare it today, although during initiation the boys are given a different explanation and sworn to secrecy.

Wagaidj initiation procedures and "mixing"

Spencer gives a separate account of Wagaidj initiation procedures, and says that these involved Larrakia people (ibid.:157). He says the Wagaidj procedures are shared by a group of tribes, which include the Warai, Djawony and "Nullakun" (Ngalakan). The first ceremony is called "Kundein", and a boy's male kin consult as to the appropriate time for his initiation. When this is decided he is seized and taken to another tribe, such as the Larrakia, for two to

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\* When George Munggalu was at the site of Wariny, on the Cox Peninsula, he addressed the large rock there as "Dariba" and referred to it as Dariba Wariny. Old Man Rock, near Casuarina Beach in Darwin, is also referred to as Dariba Nunggalinya.

three months. He is not permitted to go near women and his prospective brothers-in-law supervise him. Spencer names (*ibid.*: 158) various Larrakia camps where Wagaidj initiands were taken. These include two sites on the Cox Peninsula, at Two Fellow Creek and the lighthouse. He was given gifts at each place and returned to his own Wagaidj camp. Spencer describes how his Larrakia guardians sing and dance for him as he returns. He is then circumcised, and admitted to "muragull" status (*ibid.*:159) (called nguragul today). After marriage he advances to "Baquett" status (baguwadj). References to other ceremonial activities earlier this century are by Litchfield (1930:64-5), in newspapers and in government records (see appendix one).

#### Later ceremonies

Initiations in the claim area continued during the second World War and are mentioned in E.J. Murray's diary (see Murray 1942-3), for example on 14 February and 29 March 1942 (the latter for Tommy Barradjab, a claimant).

#### Elkin

The next descriptions of initiations in the claim area are by Elkin (1955), who worked at Delissaville for short periods in the late forties and early fifties. He says (*ibid.*:146) that the Wadjiginy (a subdivision of the Wagaidj) and the Larrakia combined for initiation ceremonies. He has examples of such ceremonies in the claim area.

In 1949 he was at Delisaville when a young initiate was being sung home night after night from "the grand tour" of visiting other tribes (Elkin 1949:154, and personal communication to M. Brandl), which was common practice, and still is, in many parts of Aboriginal Australia. He has an account (Elkin 1947-8:170) of a Pungupungu man, Micky Beluwini or Djawaidja, who was taken by his Wagaman-speaking guardian from West Arm (in Darwin Harbour) to Tipperary

station and back, when he was circumcised by a Djeraidj man, during a Wagaidj ceremony.

In the late 1940's Colin Simpson visited Delissaville and he published an account of a male initiation ceremony held there (1951:160-161).

Initiation in the claim area then was a regular occurrence (A.P. Elkin, personal communication to M. Brandl on 2 February, 1979), and his second example (1955:149-152) is a most interesting case of social control in action. The Iarrakia and Wagaidj elders selected two men to be advanced to higher degrees. They believed this would provide the discipline and knowledge to bring stability into their somewhat irregular behaviour (drinking and irresponsibility). Such a disciplinary step had not been taken for many years prior to 1951.

Elkin saw a second example in 1952 and describes the procedures in some detail. One was advanced to beliya from that of nimgololo status and the other, a somewhat older man, from nimgololo to malinya. The dances were composed and "owned" by the late Mosec, a Wagaidj man, related to many claimants (and uncle\* to Maudie Bennett, mother of the claimant Olga Singh. His widow is Betty Bilawug, one of our main assistants). The younger initiate, Roy Madbulg, still lives in the Darwin area, and from time to time at Delissaville. The singer for this ceremony was Tommy Barradjab (Elkin 1955:149) and the didgeridu player was Jacky Woodie. Both these men are still living at Belyuen (Delissaville). Others mentioned at that time (Elkin 1949:125) include Willy Singh, a ceremonial leader now dead, but father of several claimants. George Munggalu (Elkin 1947-8:200) now lives at Newcastle Waters but came to Belyuen to assist us with documenting the claim.

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\* See Figure 2.

Evidence of Mr. Holmes

A Limilngan man, Mr. Holmes, visited with us the old ceremonial site at Two Fellow Creek, Daramanggamaning and recalled the occasions when he and others from Wulna and Minidja (Limilngan) linguistic groups used to participate in initiation ceremonies there.\* Mr. Holmes told us that a man, Jacob Nayinggul's grandfather from the Oenpelli area, was taken on the grand tour from there to Cox Peninsula and was named after one of the sites he visited at that time, Maragad, which is near an old ceremonial ground at Belyuen. He also named two other Larrakia ceremonial sites east of Darwin, Bilurrgwa on Shoal Bay and Mayilmilma, near Bankey's Jungle, where people from all tribes in the area participated. Then the ceremonies shifted to Darwin, he said, and we presume he meant Gundal. This site became inaccessible after it became an Army barracks. Evidence given to the Interim Land Commission (Australia 1975b) by the late Victor Williams and others says initiation ceremonies were performed at Gundal or Point Emery in Darwin until the Army took over the area. Larrakia and Wagaidj also travelled west and south of the claim area to attend ceremonies. Ivory and Tapsell (1977:11) recorded Mungudj (south of the Finnis River) as an old and important ceremonial site for Larrakia, Kiuk and Wadjiginy initiates.

Mr. Holmes told us the following about "mixing" at ceremonies:

If you had put a tape on the ceremony ground at Oenpelli and you had taken another tape at Daramanggamaning, it would have been the same. They brought initiates on foot. They took maybe one year to get up to Delissaville where they would stay six months or so. They finished up their ceremonies there and they would bring them back again, right back and finish the business. Then he [i.e. initiates] would marry and start a family.

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\* Daramanggamaning is the site of Bill Harney's house (Harney 1958:186 and foreword). The lease to this land is now held by Jack Murray, former superintendent of Delissaville.



People also travelled from Delissaville to Oenpelli.

They would send "news" to the Oenpelli people and some men they called beliya and malinya would come out here and pick up young boys and take them back to relatives at Delissaville. Everyone went and followed them. Even this mob, my mob, they went there too. Like one big ceremony. Tommy Barradjab can tell you about it. He only came as far as Shoal Bay. This time they got a different ceremony now. They come from Roper, Maningrida.\*

We asked why the old ceremonies stopped. He said:

They turned young persons the other way around. Now you see it at Delissaville were they're turning the opposite way, too. Delissaville go to Port Keats and Port Keats comes to Delissaville. They're changing now they have new ideas.\*\*

He is referring to the expansion of the socio-cultural bloc that used to be between central Arnhem Land and the Port Keats area, but which has suffered the greatest fluctuations of population since contact.

#### Evidence of George Munggalu

George Munggalu on 20 January 1979 in an interview at Newcastle Waters, said there used to be Larrakia ceremonies at Two Fellow Creek in which Wagaidj participated. People in the past, he said, came from everywhere to Two Fellow Creek, for "men's business", presumably initiation rituals. The ceremonies were for "bad boys" he said (c.f. Elkin 1955:150) but women were not entirely excluded. The Larrakia, Wagaidj and Peron Island (Kiuk) people all shared ceremonies for a long time, longer than he could remember - "way back to grandfather". There were Larrakia ceremonies at

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\* Undoubtedly a reference to the introduction of the Gunabibi ritual (see Berndt & Berndt 1970) in the Oenpelli area.

\*\* Xavier Herbert, who lived in the Darwin area from about 1927 until the war, spoke (personal communication to M. Brandl) of the cultural "wedge" of people between the two big ritual cults on either side of the bitumen - the Gunabibi to the east and the Karwadi to the west. Both these cults are well-documented in anthropological literature. Unlike these which concern female creative beings, the main mytho-ritual heroes among people in the "wedge" were male. Much more could be said here about the ceremonial inter-connections of people in the claim area to their neighbours, but must await a more appropriate context.

Koolpinyah to which Wagaidj came. This is confirmed in the "Koolpinya Station Diaries", held by the Australian Archives in Darwin for 1912, 1913. Always the Larrakia and Wagaidj were "mixed-up" at ceremonies, he said.

George's own initiation took place in a Larrakia-style ceremony at Shoal Bay or Bilurrgwa, which people from many different language groups attended. It is worth noting here that Tonkinson (1978:9) says that in Aboriginal Australia:

the place of initiation may be regarded by a man as his "dreaming" . . . . One reason for this bond may be the widespread notion that physical initiation of this kind entails the symbolic death of the novice as a child, and rebirth after seclusion as an adult, a changed person with new responsibilities in the society.

George Munggalu certainly took on "new responsibilities" as a custodian of danggalaba clan land in the claim area.

The newspaper, Banji, which provides information on Larrakia people and activities since the early 1970's, reported in September 1972: "Now the Larrakias have stopped the Makulorie ceremony . . . they did not have the big Yarra Balumna Mura ceremony with the Wagaits . . . ." Yet the names of the Larrakia-style ceremonies have been remembered and initiated men are still living. (In this connection Jack Murray notes in his Delissaville diary on 18 April 1941, that Tommy Burrinjuck or Barradjab was circumcised on that day. See E.J. Murray 1942-3).

#### Evidence of other living people

Many visited the old site at Daramanggamaning with us during the claim research. Others, too old to come, could still give us information; for example, in an interview at Kalalak on 14 December 1978, Norman Harris or Barral, a Kiuk language Larrakia-initiated man, could name the Larrakia ceremony maguluri. He was reared, informants say, by the late Tommy Lyons or Imabulg, a Larrakia ceremonial leader, and father of the claimant Olga Singh. He also named a site connected with old ceremonies, the hill at Nanggilmag,

on Quail Island, or Duwun, "a business place", or "Sunday business" (also referred to as secret and sacred in Willey's 1964 account of the protests against the bombing of the island - on page 167).

Ceremonial grounds, circular in shape, are known as gwalwa. One Larrakia ceremony still known to informants was the gulida\*, or cheeky yam ceremony. As with the Melville and Bathurst Islanders' kulama (cheeky yam) ceremony, it was combined with initiation of young men. Mr. Holmes showed us an old gulida ground, a stone circle, near the Mary River which has been desecrated by a road which cuts it in half. King George, father of Prince of Wales, was named as a ritual leader for this ceremony.

Olga Singh named Banggalbandji on the Cox Peninsula as the site of old gulida ceremonies. This is near the dreaming site for the cheeky yam, also called wilar by Wadjiginy speakers. Maudie Bennett, near Banggalbandji, said:

They made young men at Gidjerigidjeri. [the willy wagtail dreaming place near Banggalbandji] ... must be in the olden times those men were there, you know old people, like Olga's father's grandfather. They had ceremonies there.

She went on to describe the processing of the cheeky yam before it could be eaten. Her description paralleled the Tiwi process during the kulama ceremony. Tommy Barradjab and Mr. Holmes can still sing gulida songs.

Bobby Secretary in an interview in January 1979 said there are no longer beliya ceremonies. "Cross them up and finished", he said, meaning, we conclude, that certain specific language elements in joint ceremonies\*\* have been submerged because initiation ceremonies still occur in the claim area. He also claims to have more knowledge about ceremonies that he wishes to keep to

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\* Delfin Cubillo, a resident of Darwin of Aboriginal descent, knows details of this ceremony.

\*\* Elkin (1950:77) recounts how a newly initiated land could not drink from a creek out bush in the claim area until his guardian performed a short ritual, at the same time using Larrakia language because the country was formerly Larrakia Territory, and the "dreamings" belonged to the mythology of that tribe.