

7B



**Rusty Moreen, Wagaidj ceremonial leader, singing during male initiation ceremony at Belyuen, June 1979.**

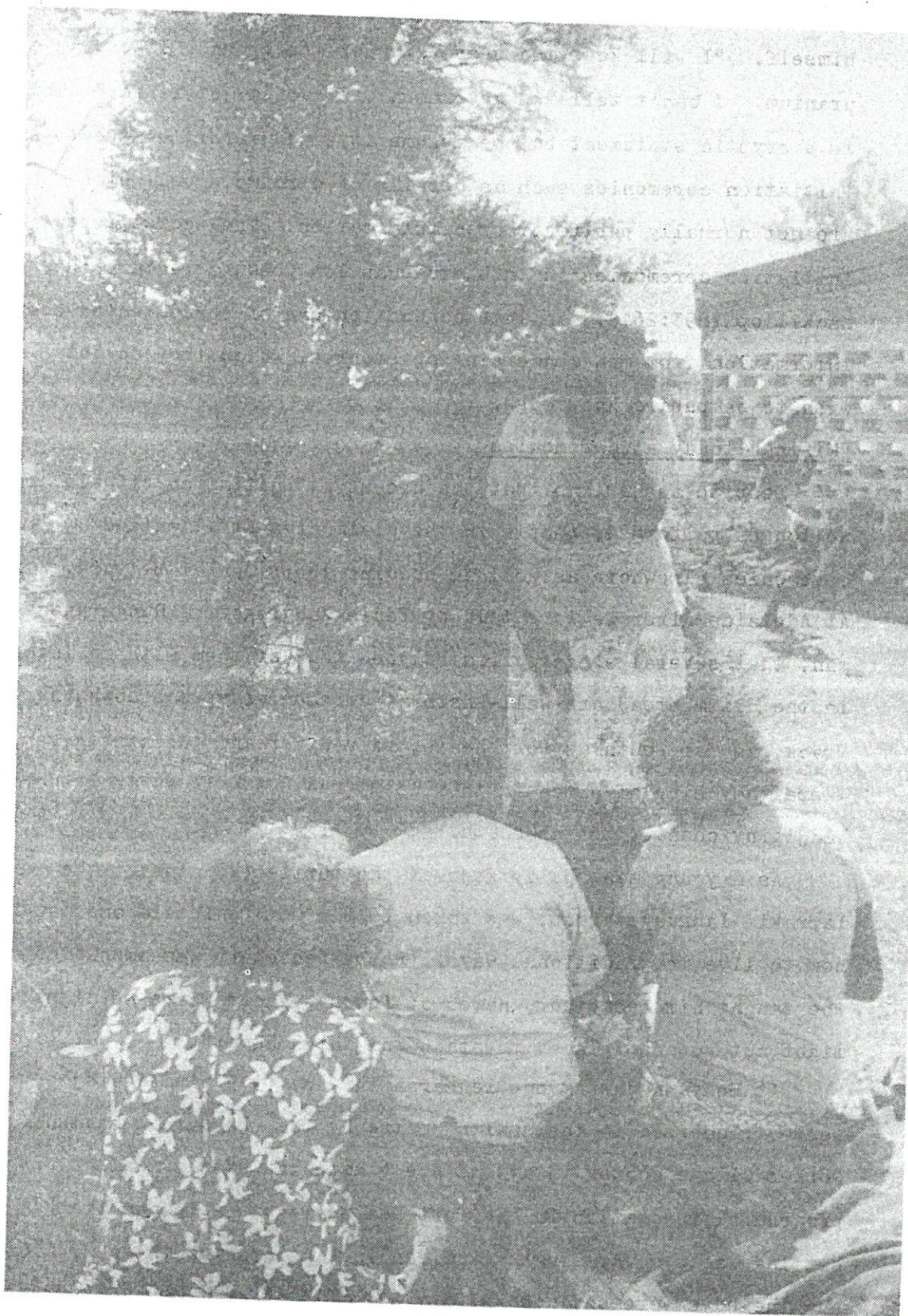
himself. "I will keep the secrets under the ground, like uranium. I can't tell the government. I won't let it go." This is a cryptic statement but we assume it could refer to aspects of initiation ceremonies such as details of circumcision, which are not normally public or open information. The secret aspect of initiation ceremonies in this area has long been a feature (see MacKillop 1893:261). In this connection one of us collected some information from men concerning ceremonies, which they do not wish to be public knowledge.

"Mixing" today at ceremonies

Despite assertions that the old-style initiation rituals are no longer performed, people in the claim area still attend ceremonies elsewhere as well as holding their own at Belyuen. At Adelaide River we were told by Eddie Macgregor, a Gungaragany man, that several singers from Belyuen (all of them with an interest in the claim area) are well-known at ceremonies up and down the Track, as far south as Port Keats, Daly River and Adelaide River, where they sing of sites in the claim area, as well as from their Wadjiginy country to the south.

As a young man, Wally Fejo of the turtle (?) clan of the Larrakia language group, was taken to the Cox Peninsula and taught how to live in traditional ways. Bobby Secretary was among the men who taught him behaviour, names of foods, places where he might and might not go and "places to stand and think about".

At Belyuen during our research in June 1979 six Wagaidj boys were circumcised in the Health Centre by the Aboriginal health worker with a doctor in attendance (there has been a similar procedural innovation in the Port Keats area). Although the setting was modern, singing and dancing accompanied the operation, and the boys were secluded before and after the ceremony. During this time they were ritually bathed at Belyuen waterhole and at



***Mother of male initiand at the time of her son's circumcision during ceremonies in and outside Belyuen Health Centre, June 1979. Note female comforters and John Binyanamurrig at rear dancing near the didgeridu player and singers, Bobby Lane and Tommy Barradjab.***

Imalug. Harry Singh told us "Belyuen gives us the boys, and so we take them there to be washed". (This ceremony was video-taped by a Northern Territory Department of Education teacher last year.)

Relatives of the boys (classificatory fathers, and mother's brothers in particular) came from as far away as Port Keats and Nardirri for the ceremony. Mothers and other female kin sang, danced and wept throughout the day's ceremony. The singers included Tommy Barradjab, whom Elkin recorded in 1952 at a ceremony.

#### Initiation: female

The Larrakia and Wagaidj people also have female initiation ceremonies. The first reference to this in the literature is by Crauford (1895:181). Basedow (1906:13-15) recorded the terms "Mánniugu" from the Larrakia and "Nitkurrum" from the Wagaidj (and this second term is used most commonly today by our informants).\* (See also Harney 1942-43 and Ewers 1947.) In Basedow's account ritual washing and smoking were features and, as with the youths, the girls' diet was restricted. Basedow says (*ibid.*:15) that females went through a second initiation ceremony, "about which very little is known".

#### Contemporary accounts

Many of the claimants passed through the first ceremony and their statements are borne out by references in the records of the former Native Welfare Branch (Murray 1942-3; Harney 1941-3). For example, that of Topsy Secretary took place on 11 July 1943, and Josephine Rankin's is noted about the same time (Harney 1941-3).

Two of the claimants, Topsy Secretary and Peggy Wilson, gave us descriptions of their ceremonies. Topsy's took place at Katherine during the war, she said, and Ruby Gulug, whom she calls

---

\* Topsy Secretary and George Munggalu know and use the Larrakia term.

"sister", and Bobby Lane's mother, participated. So did Dolly Garinyee, a Larrakia woman and Maudie, the mother of Maudie Bennett.

The ceremony for Peggy Wilson took place at Koolpinyah after the end of the Second World War. It was organised for her by her Larrakia-speaking stepmother, the late Dolly Garinyee, and by her stepfather George Munggalu, who was married to Dolly at that time. Maudie Bennett's mother, whom Peggy called ngawany or "father's sister" was also present and these two older women were the "bosses". (Maudie's mother and the mother of another claimant, Bobby Lane, both Wadjiginy women now dead, were frequently said to us to be leaders of women's ceremonies.) Maudie Bennett still knows the ritual procedure. In October 1979 a ceremony was held at Belyuen and Gunggul in the claim area for a twelve year old girl, Roseanne Gordon. The leaders were Maudie Bennett, Agnes Lippo and Alice Djarug. The ceremony also involved what our informants call "training" for eight other young girls who will have final ceremonies later. Some twenty-five women from the Belyuen community and several language groups participated, including one from Rose River.

#### Women's sites

In the claim area is a site particularly associated with women's ceremonies. Other sites are close to the claim area, at Ianiyuk or Berry Springs, a rainbow dreaming place, elsewhere on the Elizabeth River\*, and on the Finnis River.

#### Other aspects

Many early accounts refer to the absence of the first or second, or both, joints of the right or left index finger of

---

\* At the minyang durlg ("sweetheart dreaming"), a love magic site.

women, but the removal does not appear to have been part of female initiation. Similarly, body cicatrices and the perforated nasal septum, still observable on older residents in the claim area, appear unconnected with female initiation, although Spencer says a betrothed girl was cut on the back at the same time as her promised husband was circumcised (1914:159).

#### Death

As noted in chapter six burial sites of relatives are one way living people in the claim area relate to land there and mortuary rituals are relevant in this respect.

#### Historical

When the Larrakia Aboriginal "Orunga" was speared by Wulna tribesmen and died in Dr. Millner's camp at Fort Point in 1870, his father and brother wrapped the body in grass and paperbark and removed it (Northern Territory 1870:41). Wildey (1875:117) relates how he saw the body of a Larrakia man wrapped in paperbark, smoked and placed in the branches of a tree eight or so feet from the ground where it was left during the wet season. A fire was then built beneath it and the bones collected. Foelsche (1881b:5-6) gives quite a detailed description of burial customs and ceremonies for the Port Darwin people, and later (1885b:195) before eventual burial. Wildey (1875:116) has a similar account and he says that the body is taken "not exactly to the family vault, but ... each family has a sort of feudal tenure to a locality of the country claimed by the tribe ...". Mackillop (1893:259) speaks of the Wagaidj burying or burning their dead, or placing them in trees until only the bones remain. Foelsche (1885b:195) says these bones are later buried. Parkhouse (1895b:643) has an account of behaviour following a death among the Larrakia and refers to a Larrakia burying place not far from the then Darwin cemetery. (This could be the same one pointed out to us by Margaret Rivers during our

fieldwork.)

#### Basedow

Basedow (1906:6-7) also has an account of funeral ceremonies of the Larrakia and Wagaidj, who by 1906 no longer practised tree burial, although others further away from towns continued to do so in the north-west of the Northern Territory. Basedow (ibid.) tells how nuts of the cycas media are collected and processed, then eaten following a death.\* He also notes the erection of a pole nearby to mark a burial site, and the use of grass in its decoration.

#### Spencer and Elkin

Spencer (1914:250) gives more details concerning tree burial. In 1946 Elkin (1955:147) saw a mortuary rite at Delissaville for a deceased woman and again in 1953 he recorded a purification rite at Bagot, following the destruction of a deceased person's belongings (ibid.). At this same time he recorded a short lustration ceremony performed by some Gunwinygu people for the deceased Wagaidj and for themselves, of course, in connection with that death.

#### Today

Residents in the claim area still hold ceremonies when a death occurs, although the disposal is usually by burial only nowadays in the local cemetery.\*\* In recent years one of these ceremonies was reported in the local Darwin newspaper (N.T. News, dated 29 December 1973, and 13 May 1974). That these people still feel strongly about traditional mourning rites is illustrated by

---

\* This ritual procedure was recalled by Maudie Bennett during our field research, although she had never seen it.

\*\* We were told that one claimant Roy Bigfoot or Burrburr once conducted a tree burial and the details of how this is done are still known by Roy Yarrowen and Margaret Rivers.

another news report (ibid., dated 11 April 1974) in which members of the Gwalwa Daraniki\* group (to which many claimants belong) declare their intention to bury their dead in their own land according to tribal customs. This reaction was caused by a number of deceased people being removed and buried by government officers, often without informing relatives.

While we were mapping the claim area a young boy died. His mother was Kiuk and his father was descended from an Alligator Rivers group. The boy's funeral, held at Belyuen, was attended by people from Melville and Bathurst islands, Port Keats, Adelaide River, Beatrice Hill, Humpty Doo and Darwin. Later another (possibly two) ceremonies will be held, we were told, when the boy's belongings will be burnt and his home smoked. These procedures are called "warming" and Gabug, or "washing". (During the mapping for the claim we accompanied most of the Delissaville population to Nardirri, near Port Keats, to attend the "warming" ceremony for a Wagaidj man who had died there). The "warming" is a type of smoking procedure used to purify the deceased person's house. Gabug involves burning the deceased's belongings and washing the mourners.

When Johnny Fejo died in November 1979 we were told by anxious relatives at Kalalak where he had lived that a "warming" ceremony would be held soon, because it was too dangerous for the welfare of the survivors to have his "shade" wandering around.

As with other Aboriginal groups, the death of any but the very young and the very old still needs to be explained by causes other than natural ones. (An early reference to this is in Mackillop 1893:260). When tree burials were common, some bones from a deceased person were kept in a dilly bag by native doctors for

---

\* Gwalwa Daraniki means "our land" in the Larrakia language.

inquest purposes, we were told by Roy Yarrowen.

Cicatrices on the bodies of men and women seem to have been connected at least in the past with body markings inflicted as a sign of grief (Foelsche 1885b:194; Crauford 1895:181; Ramsay Smith 1906-7:52-6).

Survivors following a death avoid the name of the dead (an early reference to this is Parkhouse 1895b:643), and vacate the vicinity of the site of death (an early reference for this is in Basedow 1906:7).

#### In conclusion

This chapter has documented the persistence of traditional owners in fulfilling their spiritual responsibility to land in the claim area in the matter of ceremonies. By recruiting men and women from other language groups and clans over the years, and by putting them through initiation ceremonies, traditional owners and their ancestors have endeavoured to ensure the continuity of their traditions and the exercise of responsibility to land.

Bobby Secretary put it this way:

Well, the old people passed away. Only George Munggalu and Norman Harris alive. George went through a Larrakia ceremony and has responsibility now. Old men passed away. George Munggalu, John Biyanamurrug take over, not me. My cousins are over there, Olga and Prince. For Dum-in-mirrie Roy Bigfoot and Margaret Rivers are boss.

Although the traditional owners permit others to exercise their spiritual responsibility, they have not relinquished it.

Bobby said:

Don't let them bust up that waterhole at Belyuen. Don't let them bust up that milkwood tree. We had "business" there, my father and I. Nobody is to touch that place. If anybody puts a bulldozer in there, I will go mad. I will go silly. Dum-in-mirrie Island, Quail, the milkwood tree at Belyuen and the rest, don't give them away. If that Government gets tough, tell me.

Today people like Roy Yarrowen exercise the ceremonial responsibility. He said to us:



Peggy Wilson and Olga Singh cooking maruudi (crab) at Buwambi, on the west coast of the Cox Peninsula.

Access to many sites is dependent on transport but, despite this, most people leave Belyuen at weekends. Lorna Tennant has kept a record over the period of the claim preparation of how many people go out at weekends and their destination.

All people at Belyuen and visiting kin have a right to forage over the land owned by the danggalaba clan. They exercise this right on behalf of that clan. It entails for them a duty to care for the land and its resources.

We will turn now to illustrations of how this right and responsibility is exercised by people in the claim area.

#### Knowledge of resources in the claim area

We will begin by taking two examples from our time in the field. At Dum-in-mirrie the following people listed some of the foods gathered on or near the island:

Prince of Wales  
John Singh  
Roy Yarrowen  
Brian Henda  
Margaret Rivers  
Nipper Rankin  
Josephine Rankin  
Bobby Secretary  
Michael Lippo  
Bobby Lane

There is fresh water on all the islands of the chain bounding Port Patterson to the west. In the sea are stingray (igedj, djumbun, buldja and iridjberam), turtle (inggarany), shovel-nose shark (buya), oysters of two sizes (windir and winmadjam), dugong (mamerandjarmul), and fish of many sorts. In the tidal area are crab (maruidj and others) mangrove worms (warrgu and madjadjilg), cockles (igwarr) and other shellfish of many kinds (miba, barru, djimar, malayiri, djangibar, wing, waldjirr and djabarr).

In the bush are yams of different types (bidjngalamba, wunmalaidj, wilar, dulgad, magiman, gawany and others), bulbous roots (like yeluwin) as well as small animals. Turtle and seagull eggs can also be found in addition to nuts and fruits in season,

have said that people no longer like to go hunting there, as too many European Australians go there now. This is a reference not only to weekend fishing boats in the area, but also to tourist excursions by air and by sea.

Roy Yarrown has had for some time an outstation at Daliribarg with the approval of the danggalaba clan. With some impatience about the uncertainty of the status of land on the Cox Peninsula, he and John Singh among others have applied for special purpose leases on the Peninsula in an attempt to set aside some land for the use of their family and kin and the main reason behind these moves is to ensure some access to hunting, fishing and foraging areas.

Belyuen residents have built roads throughout the years on the Peninsula, as their ancestors built paths, to give them access to favourite sites. Most recently they have constructed roads to Buwambi and Bagamanadjing to enable people to camp and hunt there. These usually follow ancient footpads. They continue to vacate the township every weekend for hunting, fishing and gathering activities. Lorna Tennant and her brothers, while living in Darwin for employment and education purposes, not only helped to make roads on the Peninsula, but visited it for foraging purposes as often as circumstances permitted.

Lorna told us about her family's efforts at making roads: "People in the early days used to travel on foot and in canoes by land or sea, so really we had to thank my mother, grandmother, auntie and some of the old people that knew the land properly, even though we walked this land as children ... ."

People are accompanied on their trips by their extended families, including young children who are growing up with a very active acquaintance with the territory and its resources. On the weekend of 23-24 June 1979 we visited Bagamanadjing. Some twenty people were at this one site, fishing, crabbing and foraging.

centre there. Yet records in the Australian Archives in Darwin (E.J. Murray 1942-3) make frequent references during the war years to people living at several places on the Cox Peninsula and the islands, among them Milig, Binbinya, Two Fellow Creek (Daramanggamaning), West Point (Bemininy), Bidbinbiyirrg, Madbil, Talc Head (Madjalaba), Micah Beach, Rankin Point, Gabarl (on Indian Island). One family or another has always been living away from the settlement, on the islands or on the peninsula.

Long-term residents of the area are Roy Burrburr and his two wives, Nellie and Gudang (adoptive mother and actual aunt to May Singh, now dead, Margaret Rivers, Kitty Moffat and Rose Cubillo).<sup>\*</sup> Roy Burrburr and his family have always lived away from established townships. It is said that Gudang, a very old woman, has never been to Darwin, less than 100 miles from the places where she has always lived - Dum-in-mirrie Island and Balgal, near the Peron islands. Tommy Lyons gave Burrburr and his family permission to live on Dum-in-mirrie and asked him to look after it. Among the claimants, apart from George Munggalu and Burrburr's nephew, Roy Yarrowen, Burrburr and his family are the most familiar with the geography and traditional knowledge of the area to the west of the Cox Peninsula.

Huts were built on Dum-in-mirrie Island by Margaret Rivers and Roy Burrburr, who still occupies them when in residence. Other claimants who have lived on the islands are Peggy Wilson, Lorna Tennant and her brothers and their families. Some Belyuen residents like John Singh, Michael Lippo, Bobby Lane and their families go to the islands whenever they can. People come in dinghies and can walk at low tide along the chain of islands. "We sometimes get sick of eating white man's food and we come here to get bush food and saltwater food" was affirmed at a meeting on Dum-in-mirrie on 19 December 1978. Margaret Rivers and others

---

<sup>\*</sup> See Figure 3.



Balgai, Roy Burubur's outstation settlement near the Perron islands. Roy's household spends part of each year here, and the remaining time on Dum-in-milrite Island in the claim area. Roy has also lived in a beach settlement with his family near Daramongamaning, on the north coast of the Cox Peninsula (see Appendix 1, 1961).

to Heather's lease of Dum-in-mirrie Island in 1907. Aborigines there are next mentioned by Mitchelmore in 1928 (to the North Australian Commission, letter dated 16 November, 1928). Margaret Rivers, Kitty Moffat and Rose Cubillo in their many years in the area (they were toddlers when encountered by Beckett at Channel Point in 1916) remember Aboriginal people as always using the islands for hunting, fishing and food gathering. Their mother's sister and their own now dead sister May, mother of Lorna Tennant and the Singh men, lived on Dum-in-mirrie for many years while Mitchelmore occupied it and later. In fact Mitchelmore is said to have reared May and arranged her marriage with Willie Singh, son of Fred Singh, who also lived on the island. Harry Singh, her sister's son, at a meeting at Belyuen on 7 December 1975, said that all the islands in the area are traditional hunting, crabbing and turtling places.

Margaret Rivers told us how as a family "we used to travel from the mouth of the Daly to the Peron islands right up to Darwin. We had no boats those days. We used to have one canoe, put the kids and swags in the canoe, walk most of the way and camp all the way till we got to Duwun. Some stayed at Dum-in-mirrie and some went to Darwin to get food and visit and travel back again".

Tommy Lyons, or Imabulg, dariba of the danggalaba clan, also lived for a time on Dum-in-mirrie and Indian islands (Maudie Bennett, 16 December 1978).

After the war Margaret Rivers, Kitty Moffat and May Singh took their children for schooling in Darwin, but Margaret Rivers then secured an occupation licence to ensure her access to the islands as prohibitions on Aboriginal movements in the area were increasing.

In recent years a non-Aboriginal Australian, Mr. Max Baumber, has also had an occupation licence on Dum-in-mirrie Island.

Since the establishment of Delissaville Settlement, now Belyuen, the Aboriginal population of the claim area has tended to