

2 | How Yolŋu Songs Recount Deep Histories of International Trade across the Arafura Sea

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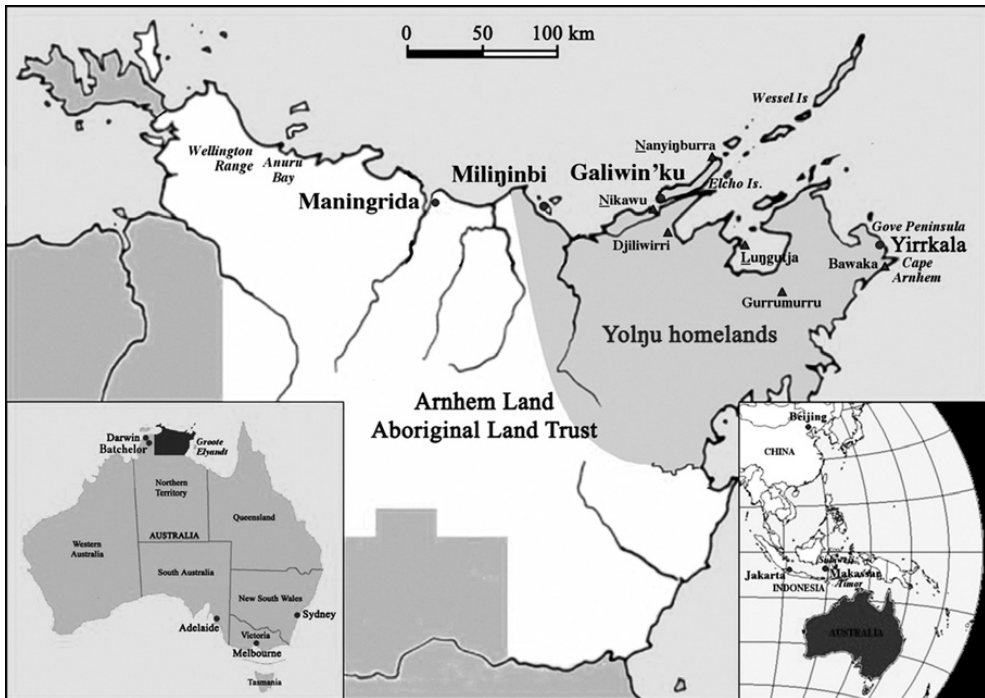
Introduction

In January 1988, a traditional Indonesian *perahu* (boat) called the *Hati Marege*' (Heart of Arnhem Land), landed on the beach at Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island.¹ She had just sailed an old route through the Arafura Sea, from the port city of Makassar on Sulawesi to Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory, for the first time in eighty-two years (Map 2.1). The *Hati Marege*' carried memories of times prior to 1907, when fleets of boats from Makassar sailed to Arnhem Land annually to trade for trepang, or sea cucumber, and other prized goods.

Elsewhere in Australia, January 1988 saw the widespread celebration of an entirely different maritime reenactment. This was the year that Australia officially celebrated its national bicentenary, which included a televised reenactment of the British First Fleet sailing into Sydney Harbour on Australia Day (26 January) amid strong Indigenous protests against that initial invasion. The Yolŋu community in Galiwin'ku, however, used its funding from the Australian Bicentenary Authority to celebrate a very different and under-represented aspect of Australian history.

By funding the construction and passage of the *Hati Marege*' to Arnhem Land in January 1988, they pointedly celebrated an entirely autonomous Yolŋu history of international relations that predated the British First Fleet's arrival in Sydney in 1788, as well as the advent of sustained Australian government representation to the Yolŋu communities of north-east Arnhem Land in the early 1920s. Upon their landing, the Yolŋu residents of Galiwin'ku greeted the crew of the *Hati Marege*' like long-lost family and jubilantly celebrated their arrival with a public ceremonial

* Readers are advised that Gumbula-Garawirtja sadly passed away on 20 September 2023. He and his family have given permission for his full name and images to remain in use for all professional purposes. With respect to Yolŋu law, however, his Yolŋu given name, Djangirrawuy, should not be spoken for one year following his death. For further details of his life and achievements, see A. Corn (2023), 'The First, but Not the Last: Brian Djangirrawuy Gumbula-Garawirtja,' <https://bit.ly/3Ug1CXG> (accessed 3 March 2024).



Map 2.1 Map of locations cited in this chapter.

performance on the beach of traditional Yolju songs and dances that were steeped in deep remembrances of their long-shared history.

In this chapter, we discuss how this legacy of exchange with Makassan and other seafaring peoples from beyond the Arafura Sea remains a profound influence upon many forms of Yolju music and culture to this day. After introducing Yolju ceremonial traditions, we explore how Yolju people elaborately integrate song, dance and design elements to recount exchanges with Makassan seafarers, the boats in which they sailed and the goods they carried. We also discuss how, since the mid-1980s, cultural remembrance of this autonomous history of Yolju exchanges with foreigners has continued to inspire new forms of Yolju cultural expression that overtly reach out across cultures.

Our approach to this chapter is informed by our long history of researching Yolju song in all its forms and working together to document and accessibly archive the tradition of Yolju public ceremonial song known as *manikay*.² Gumbula-Garawirtja's expertise, in particular, is also grounded in his extensive training and practice as a Yolju elder and ceremonial singer of the *manikay* tradition who maintains hereditary songs that recount Yolju contact

histories with Makassan and other seafarers.³ Gumbula-Garawirrtja's musical accomplishments also extend to his membership of the early Yolŋu popular band, Soft Sands, which was founded by his older brothers at Galiwin'ku in 1970. In 2005, we were both centrally involved in producing and performing during the tour to Australia of the Makassan music-and-dance ensemble, Takbing Siwaliya, for the Garma Festival and Darwin Festival.

Traditional Songs

For scores of millennia, the Yolŋu have sung of their deep and continuous connections to their homelands and the original *wañarr* (ancestors) who bestowed these homelands in perpetuity upon the Yolŋu clans. Yolŋu society is an expansive network of some sixty clans whose membership passes from father to child in each generation. Spanning north-east Arnhem Land are myriad homelands that were named, shaped and populated by the original *wañarr* for clans of their descent. Starting with the development of Milinjimbi (Milingimbi) in 1923, today these homelands accommodate seven Yolŋu towns and hundreds of smaller isolated outstations occupied by Yolŋu families.

Traditional Yolŋu songs of the *garma* (public) ceremonial genre are known as *manikay*. These are classically performed in long series of short song items that are grouped into sequentially ordered sequences of thematic subjects and, within these subjects, rhythmic modes. Expert *manikay* singers, such as Gumbula-Garawirrtja, are highly trained to make executive decisions about which discrete thematic song sequences should be selected for performance from within their complete hereditary repertoires to suit the specific needs of different ceremonial occasions. Each discrete song series in the *manikay* tradition is inalienably tied to a specific Yolŋu homeland.⁴

The instrumentation of *manikay* is most typically a small group of male singers, who sing in heterophony and accompany themselves with *bilma* (paired sticks). They are further accompanied by a male playing *yidaki* (didjeridu) and male and female dancers who perform antiphonal male vocal parts. The most recognisable aural marker of clan identity in a *manikay* series is the melodic contour repeated throughout. Each clan effectively has its own distinct *manikay* pitch set and melodic structure.⁵

Manikay series and all their elements are considered to be hereditary clan properties that, along with thematically bound dances and designs, were given to Yolŋu people, along with their clan homelands, by their original *wañarr*.⁶ People born with ancestral songs are therefore people with ancestral homelands. *Wañarr* remain eternally present and sentient

within the Yolŋu homelands, and the cherished Yolŋu ability to sing and dance in their traditions enables them to recognise and assist their living kin, while simultaneously repelling intruders.⁷

The *manikay* tradition is also maintained as a hereditary record of the ecological and social observations made by the original *waŋarr* as they founded the Yolŋu homelands. However, it is a living tradition that is also extensible. Some clan repertoires traditionally include *yuta manikay* (new song) items that emotively respond to recent life events and experience,⁸ while Yolŋu popular music since the 1980s, through bands such as Yothu Yindi, has been highly and deliberately derivative of the *manikay* tradition.⁹ The *manikay* tradition has therefore always been capable of recording and transmitting new understandings of the world, such as those brought via historical Makassan contact.

All Yolŋu clans are organised within two equal and interdependent constitutions of ancestral law called Yirritja and Dhuwa, as founded by two different sets of *waŋarr*. Sociopolitical balance between Dhuwa and Yirritja clans is maintained because they must always intermarry. This ensures that all Yolŋu children have both a Yirritja parent and a Dhuwa parent, to whom they are equally responsible.¹⁰ The influence of Makassan and associated contact histories is an iconic feature of ceremonial repertoires owned by Yirritja clans, including the Warramiri, Dhaŋwaŋu, Gumatj, Wangurri, Munyuku, Maḍarrpa, Maŋgalili and Gupapuyŋu clans.

Just as today's Yolŋu languages retain hundreds of loanwords from the Makasar, Bugis and Malay languages, such as *rrupiya* (money), *bandirra* (flag), *buthulu* (bottle), *lipalipa* (canoe), *dhamburru* (drum) and *baŋ'kulu* (axe),¹¹ the *manikay* series for the Dhaŋwaŋu homeland of Gurrumuru, for example, foregrounds songs with overtly Makassan subjects, including *yiki'* (knife), *ŋarali'* (tobacco), *manydjarrka* (cloth), *dhamburru* (drum), *djoliŋ* (flute), *dopulu* (playing cards), *ŋānitji* (arak), *barrundhu* (drunken fighting), *garrurru* (flag), *berratha* (rice) and *watjpalŋa* (rooster).¹² It has further been noted that the Yolŋu *manikay* tradition is inflected with traces of classical Arabic religious music.¹³

Flags are also prominent subjects in *manikay* series and are commonly made by Yolŋu clans for public display as important ceremonial items. Originally made from imported Makassan cloth, they remain important symbols of identity and ancestral authority in homelands for Yolŋu clans who maintain ceremonial records of Makassan contact histories. They were used by these clans to mark beaches on their homelands where Makassan vessels were welcome to land. Overall, their usage demarcated a well-established system of Yolŋu ports that regulated Makassan trade and access to appropriate landing, living and work sites (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Yirritja clan flag colours.

Clan	Colour	Port
Warramiri	Black	Dholtji Manunu
Dhaḷwaṅu	Red	Gurrumurudjiki
Gumatj	Yellow	Gamburringadjiki
Wangurri	Green	Minydharrŋura Wilirŋura
Munyuku	White	Yarrinyawuyŋu
Madarrpa and Maṅgalili	White over Blue	Baniyala Nikuniku Yilpara
Gupapuyŋu	Blue	Yalakun Djulkayalŋi Bāpa-djamban
Bāpayili (Sama whale hunters)	White over Black	Motatj

Flags remain so iconic in Yolŋu culture today that their various basic colours often influence the choices of matching costumes worn by associated clans for ceremonies and other official events. They can also be emblazoned with Makassan imagery, such as crossed swords and an anchor on the red Dhaḷwaṅu flag, and an anchor fastened with a cable on the yellow Gumatj flag.¹⁴ So steeped is this iconography in deep histories of Yolŋu contact with near, foreign neighbours that it also retains a distinct flag for the long-departed Bāpayili, the Sama whale hunters with whom the Yolŋu shared a sense of sacred ancestral affinity and who are remembered to have camped at Motatj in the Wessel Islands chain.¹⁵

Exchange Histories

Yolŋu song traditions are not an isolated phenomenon. Long exchange histories have influenced Yolŋu song series and their performance. We will explain this extensive exchange history before then examining how Yolŋu ceremonial traditions elaborately integrate song, dance and design elements to recount exchanges with Makassan seafarers.

The first detailed description of the annual voyages of Makassan *perahu* fleets to north Australia was provided by the historian Campbell Macknight.¹⁶ These fleets sailed from the port of Makassar in the Sultanate of Gowa on the northwest monsoon each December and returned on the southeast trade winds, with hulls full of trepang, pearl shell, beeswax and ironwood for trade into China each March to April. In return for rights to harvest these resources, Yolŋu people received a variety

of imported goods from the Makassan mariners, including rice, tamarinds, tobacco, alcohol, cloth, axes, knives and jewels.¹⁷

Macknight found that this industry had likely gained momentum between the 1750s and 1780s.¹⁸ He estimates that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, some thirty to sixty Makassan vessels sailed to the Northern Territory coast each year. Their combined crews of mostly Makasar and Bugis speakers numbered at least a thousand men annually.¹⁹

The impacts on Yolŋu culture of these sustained annual exchanges with Makassan seafarers were profound. The Yolŋu languages absorbed hundreds of loanwords from the Makasar and Bugis languages, and Yolŋu ceremonial songs, dances and designs integrated elaborate accounts of engagements with Makassan people and technologies.²⁰ Yolŋu communities retain enduring memories of Yolŋu individuals who voyaged into Southeast Asia as crew on Makassan vessels and, to this day, some families are known to have shared ancestry with Indonesian relatives in Sulawesi.²¹

Having been used in Chinese medicine and cooking since the seventeenth century, dried trepang was a particularly lucrative commodity coveted by buyers in Makassar and beyond.²² However, the South Australian government annexed the Northern Territory in 1863 and, in 1884, imposed new taxes and charges upon Makassan vessels entering Arnhem Land that contributed to a lull in this trade. Even steeper government tariffs were introduced in 1906. With trade crippled by this impost, one final vessel, the *Bunga Ejaya*, captained by Otching Daeng Rangka, sailed to Arnhem Land for the 1906/7 season, thereby ending a century-and-a-half of continuous international trade.²³

This sustained commercial trade with trepangers from Makassar was certainly not the only historical contact that Yolŋu people had with visiting Asian seafarers. Archaeological research has radiocarbon dated a pottery shard found on Groote Eylandt to 1107–1280.²⁴ Rock art of a *perahu* in Wellington Range has been dated to before 1664,²⁵ and human remains excavated at Anuru Bay were found to belong to a person of Southeast Asian origin who died before 1730.²⁶

These varied exchanges with different groups of visitors from across the Arafura Sea are also reflected in Yolŋu ceremonial repertoires of song, dance and design, and are traditionally considered by Yolŋu people to have unfolded through a sacred preordained continuum of foreign exchanges guided by the original Yolŋu ancestors. As recollected by the prolific Yolŋu leader David Burrumarra (1917–1994) of the Warramiri clan, the first foreign visitors were the whale-hunting Bāpayili, also known as the Wuymu and Gelurru. Though the antiquity of their visitation remains unknown, they were likely a seafaring

people of the Sama (Bajau) diaspora and were readily accepted by the Yolŋu for sharing a sacred ancestral affiliation with whales.²⁷

After a hiatus of unknown length came the Bayini period of Makassan contact, when golden-skinned visitors came to Arnhem Land under the ancestral law of Birrinydji, a man iconically associated with swords, and a beautiful golden-skinned woman called Bayini.²⁸ These visitors are remembered by Yolŋu for building boats, making pottery, growing rice, digging wells, looming cloth and dancing in ceremonies with Yolŋu. However, they kept their manufacturing secrets to themselves. Burrumarra recounts how they eventually left owing to conflict, which was followed by a long hiatus of many generations before later Makassan visitors would return to harvest trepang commercially after 1750.²⁹

Yolŋu traditionally perceive this continuum of foreign exchanges to be linked under the law of Allah or rather, Walitha'walitha, which is a Yolŋu derivation of the Islamic Shahada or testimony that begins, *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ* *Lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāh* (There is no deity but God).³⁰ In Yolŋu belief, however, Walitha'walitha is not a foreign deity, but rather an ancestral *mokuy* (ghost) who ordains and orders the existence, behaviours and accoutrements of foreigners. In Yolŋu tradition, he is associated with Wurramu funeral ceremonies in which there is choral singing of 'Wo, ga Allah' in reference to God and expressions of 'Serri makassi', as derived from 'Terima kasih' (thank you) in Malay.³¹

Renewed Exchanges

While the prominence of Makassan trade themes has never faded from Yolŋu ceremonial practice, continuous Yolŋu trade with visiting Makassan seafarers came to a definitive end when the *Bunga Ejaya*, captained by Otching Daeng Rangka, departed Arnhem Land in 1907. It would not be until the mid-1980s that interest in retracing and renewing this long-held historical exchange resurfaced. The renewed series of exchanges that ensued would spark broader awareness about this history in both Australia and Indonesia and offered themes that would surface in the new style of Yolŋu popular music emerging at the time.

The construction and voyage of the *Hati Marege*' to Arnhem Land as an Australian Bicentennial project in 1988, breaking an eighty-two-year hiatus in Makassan contact, was conceived and directed by Peter Spillet, a historian at the Northern Territory Museum. In 1986, Spillet had led an excursion of Aboriginal students from Batchelor College to Makassar,

where they found an abundance of familiar words and imagery that had been retained in everyday speech and cultural practices in Arnhem Land.

When the *Hati Marege* landed at Galiwin'ku in 1988, it was captained by Mansjur Muhayang, son of Mangnellai Daeng Maro, the last known Makassan traveller from 1907, who had been a child at the time and had died only in 1978.³² His family was known to have shared ancestors with Yolŋu relatives in Galiwin'ku and the enthusiastic reception of his vessel's arrival there in 1988 was immortalised by the early Yolŋu popular band, Soft Sands, in the song 'Land, Our Mother'.³³

The next excursion from Arnhem Land to Makassar was led by the acclaimed Yolŋu visual artist, John Bulunbulun (1946–2010), whose paintings had often depicted historical Makassan visitors and public ceremonial song subjects such as *lungurrma*, the northerly trade wind that carried their inbound vessels.³⁴ In 1992, he led a group of ten performers from the town of Maningrida to the Galigo Museum in Makassar where, over three nights, they presented a traditional Yolŋu diplomacy ceremony, known as the Marayarr Murrukundja. Its iconic centrepiece was the construction and decoration of a ceremonial exchange pole representing the mast and rigging of a Makassan *perahu*.³⁵

In 1996, Muhayang and his family returned to Galiwin'ku to collaborate with their Yolŋu relatives in the production of *Trepang: An Indigenous Opera*, which premiered in Makassar in 1997 to mark the 667th anniversary of the Sultanate of Gowa, before being shown in Darwin in 1999 and Melbourne in 2001.³⁶ Based on the shared family history of its performers, it told a story of love and separation over generations by the distance between Arnhem Land and Makassar.³⁷

Trepang was initially developed through a series of workshops with Muhayang and his family, involving elders in Galiwin'ku and their families. Over the course of an entire month in Galiwin'ku in 1996, exchanges of historical knowledge, discussions of Makassan loanwords, the design of stage props and creation of a sculpture of a Makassan *perahu* informed the development of a joint Yolŋu–Makassan performance of song, dance and drama. Significantly, songs and knowledge which had been carefully retained by Yolŋu people were reaffirmed. The following year, sixteen Yolŋu performers travelled to Makassar for a month to further develop a collaborative performance with a coherent narrative.

This process of rediscovery had also been informed since the early 1980s by an emerging genre of Indigenous popular song in Arnhem Land that frequently drew on traditional influences from *manikay* to celebrate historical Makassan exchanges. Alongside 'Land, Our Mother' by Soft Sands,

the Wirrinyga Band from Milinjinbi celebrated the landing of the *Hati Marege* in Galiwin'ku by composing 'My Sweet Takarrina'.³⁸ Its title references Takarrina as an exonym by which the Makassans of old knew Elcho Island. 'Lembana Manimani' by the Sunrize Band from Maningrida similarly evokes nostalgia for the Makassan fleets that departed at the end of each annual trepang season.³⁹ Meaning 'Farewell Maningrida', its title similarly references Manimani as an exonym for Maningrida.⁴⁰

'Macassan Crew' by Yothu Yindi directly quotes a Gumatj *manikay* item sung by the band's late Gumatj lead singer, Mandawuy Yunupinju (1956–2014), and identifies Gurrumulŋa as the captain of a visiting Makassan vessel.⁴¹ The song's repeated chorus of 'Ä-e-ya!', as drawn from Gumatj *manikay*, references the prayers to Allah of the visiting Makassan sailors of old. It also opens with a respectful homage to Yunupinju's mother's mother's clan, the Dhaŋwaŋu. Its sung quotation from Dhaŋwaŋu *manikay* of 'Yendharama Birrapirra' records the names of Makassan vessels whose crews once visited the Dhaŋwaŋu homeland of Gurrumuru.⁴²

Gurrumulŋa is referenced again by Yothu Yindi alumnus Gurrumul Yunupinju (1971–2017) in his song with the Saltwater Band, 'Gurrumul History'.⁴³ Its chorus references this to be a guiding pillar of his Gumatj and personal identity and uses a Gumatj *manikay* melody.⁴⁴

When the Makassan music-and-dance ensemble Takbing Siwaliya toured to Australia in 2005, Gumbula-Garawirtja performed alongside other Yolŋu leaders to welcome them to the Garma Festival at Guḷkuḷa in Arnhem Land. They sang and danced traditional *manikay* items that recounted how Yolŋu leaders had historically conducted *yurrukuyyirr* (trade negotiations) with Makassan visitors, and how they were farewelled each year as they sailed away against the fading light of *djāpana*, the coral-coloured hues of sunset.⁴⁵

Subsequently, at the Darwin Festival, Gumbula-Garawirtja led his family in a joint performance with Takbing Siwaliya of a Gupapuyŋu public *manikay* series of Makassan contact songs, dances and designs inherited through his own specific Birrkili lineage. The two parties sequenced their interactions to depict the commencement of annual trade at Yalakun, the designated port side of the main Birrkili Gupapuyŋu homeland, Luṅgutja. Upon entrance, the Yolŋu dancers planted the blue Gupapuyŋu flag on the stage to affirm this clan's ownership of Luṅgutja and its readiness to receive Makassan visitors. In keeping with their own music and dance traditions, Takbing Siwaliya assumed the role of a Makassan *perahu* for which they had made a flag of their own with red cloth, on which a large gold circle was painted. They sounded a gong as they raised their flag, signalling their

willingness to come ashore and trade. Deep and open sorrow was expressed by both parties when they parted company at the show's end.⁴⁶

Affirming Autonomy through Song

Yolŋu songs, both traditional and contemporary, continue to carry and mediate continuous understandings of Arnhem Land's important history of autonomous trade with Makassar. The steady supply of imported goods that Makassan traders brought to Arnhem Land following 1750 was recognised by Yolŋu to be highly lucrative. However, Yolŋu ceremonial records of these contacts also assert that Yolŋu clans should simultaneously retain autonomy from such foreign influences. While the old Yolŋu system of marking open ports with flags ensured that Makassan crews knew where they could safely land, Makassan vessels were not permitted to enter or drop anchor at most other places along the coast. Whenever Makassan crews trespassed or outwore their welcomes, they are typically remembered to have been fiercely expelled by the sentient *wañarr* (ancestors) who remain ever present in the Yolŋu homelands.⁴⁷

In various Birrkili Gupapuyŋu *manikay* series sung by Gumbula-Garawirrtja for his clan's coastal homelands, Makassan captains and their vessels are refused and repelled by a variety of *wañarr*. A *perahu* captained by Djowuma sailed into the calm glassy waters of Nikawu and passed the traditional dugout canoe of the female dog ancestor, Djuranydjura. He tried to convince Djuranydjura to let him settle there and, even though her canoe was sinking, she denied his request. Her sunken canoe, called Badawan, now remains there as a coral reef. Its outlined image is still used as a sand sculpture in which public Gupapuyŋu water purification ceremonies are performed following funerals.⁴⁸

When the Makassan captain called Bäpa-djambaŋ dropped anchor in the prohibited shallow waters of Lungutja, just east of its port side, his vessel was held there and wholly devoured by the terrible lightning and thunder of the water python ancestor, Mundukul. It too now remains there as a coral reef. All souls were lost except Wurrathithi, a foreign girl who had been imprisoned in the vessel's hold. She remains there as an eternal ancestral ghost watching over the coastal waters of Lungutja. The Gupapuyŋu *manikay* sequence for funeral ceremonies performed to this day recounts how she now tends to the recently deceased.⁴⁹

Manikay affirm the foundation of each clan's ancestral homelands. The main forest homeland of the Gupapuyŋu clan is Djiliwirri, where

Gupapuyŋu ceremonies record the unwelcome intrusion of the Makassan captain, Nuwa. Nuwa attempted to convince both Djuranydjura and the fierce honeybee ancestor, Niwuda, to build a town at Djiliwirri in return for matches, blankets and houses. Both refused him, and he was attacked by a swarm of bees, forcing him to leap into one of the boiling cauldrons of water commonly used by the Makassans to cook trepang.⁵⁰

This altercation remains the basis of the Gupapuyŋu *manikay* sequence for post-mortuary fire purification ceremonies and the ground sculpture on which they are performed. Nuwa's trespass into Djiliwirri would eventually inspire a popular song named for this homeland by Soft Sands. Drawing heavily on direct quotations and other materials from traditional Gupapuyŋu song, the song 'Djiliwirri' affirms the ownership of this homeland by the Gupapuyŋu under the ancestral law of Niwuda.⁵¹ It then recounts how Nuwa attempted to breach the centre of Djiliwirri by prising it open with a crowbar. Though unable to enter, the force of Djiliwirri's resistance was so fierce that sparks flew forth and ignited fires at a spring called Buŋu, where they remain embedded in the ground as termite mounds.⁵²

When Yolŋu people sing of such remembrances in either traditional or contemporary songs, they evoke enduring reminders of how their forbears made and enforced strategic choices about how they engaged with visiting Makassan seafarers, while simultaneously maintaining Yolŋu autonomy from foreign influence. In 'Djiliwirri', the right of its Gupapuyŋu owners to access this homeland is evidenced through mention of their ceremonial *ganiny*, an elongated double-ended wooden lance that was originally given to them for hunting forest honey by the *mokuy* ancestor, Murayana.⁵³ This is juxtaposed with the song's later mention of the metal *barrara* (crowbar) carried by Nuwa, which is an alien tool that provides no access whatsoever, only Djiliwirri's fierce resistance.

Balancing the potential benefit of trade with foreigners against suspicion of foreign motives is also a guiding theme of Yothu Yindi's earliest song, 'Djāpana: Sunset Dreaming'.⁵⁴ Drawing on *manikay* for the Gumatj homeland of Bawaka, it too references the sad fate of a beautiful Bayini woman, named Djotarra, who was imprisoned in the hold of Gurrumulŋa's vessel, *Mātjala*. As *Mātjala* sailed away into *djāpana*, the coral sunset, through Bawaka's shallow waters, it struck a rock and sank, drowning all aboard. Its wreckage now remains there as a rocky islet called Binhanhanjay.⁵⁵

The chorus of 'Djāpana: Sunset Dreaming' quotes a Gumatj *manikay* item on the subject of *djāpana* that mourns the tragedy of Djotarra's loss as the coral sunset fades across the horizon. Its second and third verses transpose attendant Yolŋu suspicions of foreign motives onto strained intercultural

relationships between different peoples in Australia in the present day, warning that Indigenous people should not be fooled by the ways of newer Australians.⁵⁶ Gurrumul Yunupinju's later popular song, 'Bayini', which he composed with Sarah Blasko, presents a more romanticised and optimistic treatment of this ancestral narrative to build new bridges between cultures.⁵⁷

Mätjala also returns in the title of a later popular song by Yothu Yindi that celebrates the matrilineal descent bond between the Gumatj clan and its *waku* (women's children) in the Rirratjinu clan.⁵⁸ It too directly quotes a Gumatj *manikay* item on this subject. The term *Mätjala* is now commonly used to identify all children of Gumatj women in reference to the splintered shards of driftwood that broke away from the hull of *Mätjala* when it sank.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown how Yolŋu music and culture retain profound influences from long contact histories with Makassan and other seafaring peoples who visited north-east Arnhem Land from beyond the Arafura Sea. This long history of contact has contributed immensely to forming traditional Yolŋu understandings of foreign exchanges that continue to inform Yolŋu engagements across cultures to this day.

Yolŋu ceremonial traditions retain many song, dance and design elements that recount historical exchanges with Makassan seafarers, the boats in which they sailed and the goods they carried. They have long incorporated recognisable themes and materials drawn from Yolŋu observations of their shared past with Makassans, while simultaneously asserting Yolŋu sovereignty over their homelands and their autonomy from foreign influences.

Since the 1980s, these ceremonial traditions and contact histories have further contributed to inspiring new forms of cultural expression, including innovations in Yolŋu popular music, that overtly reach out across cultures. The wide acceptance of Yolŋu popular music by Yolŋu people as a coherent extension of the *manikay* tradition is largely due to the latter's underlying extensibility. The *manikay* tradition has always been capable of recording and transmitting new understandings of the world such as those brought by historical Makassan trade.

Today, this dynamic spectrum of musical expressions celebrates an autonomous history of Yolŋu exchanges with foreigners that predate the 1788 onset of British occupation in Australia. They convey Yolŋu assertions of sovereignty and autonomy that are an intrinsic trait of how Yolŋu people understand and

negotiate the otherness of foreigners, and their contemporary engagements with them, as preordained by the original *wajarr*.

Notes

1. Spellings of Yolŋu words conform to the orthography for Yolŋu-matha now used among Yolŋu communities as established in R. David Zorc, *Yolŋu-matha Dictionary* (Batchelor College, 1986).
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