Ghostly Voices: some Observations on Song-Creation, Ceremony and Being in NW Australia

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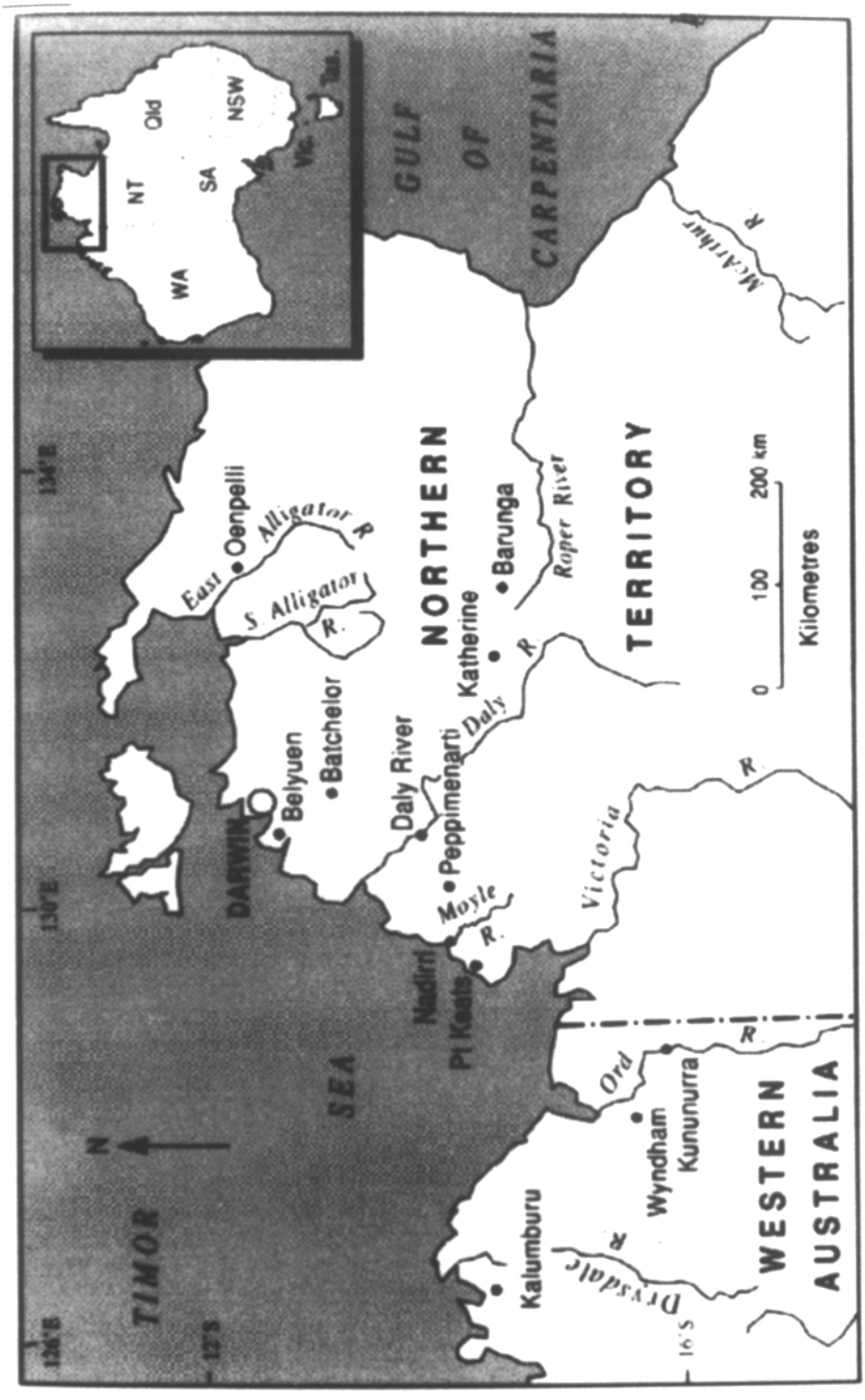
ABSTRACT

Wangga songs are given to songmen by ghosts in dreams. By singing these songs in ceremony songmen at Belyuen gain power over the ghosts of the recently dead and thereby conduct them away from human society. This paper argues that it is the replication not only of the melodies, rhythms and words of the ghost-given songs, but also the voice of the song-giving ghost itself that gives the singer his power. While the accumulation of spiritual power through the replication of the actions of the world-creating ancestors has been widely discussed in the literature, dreamt song has been less closely examined. It is suggested that dreamt songs such as *wangga* play a role in facilitating adaptation to new patterns of residency and are thus a significant element in contemporary Aboriginal life.

Wangga is a genre of didjeridu-accompanied song centred on the Daly region in the north west of the Northern Territory. The main centres of performance within or close to this region are the communities of Port Keats, Peppimenarti, Daly River and Belyuen and their associated outstations. This paper will focus on ceremonial and performance practices at Belyuen.

Although located a significant distance to the north of the Daly River (see Map 1), the principal language-affiliations of most people resident at Belyuen fall within the Daly language group. It is the more northerly Daly tribes – the Wadjiginy, Emmiyangal, Mendheyangal and Marri Ammu – who at various times over the past century or so migrated to the Belyuen area and settled there. Historical records show that these four groups have, over at least the past six decades, provided the *wangga* songmen[1] whose song creation and singing lie at the heart of the two principal public ceremonies at Belyuen: mortuary ceremonies (*kapuk*) and circumcision ceremonies.

This paper focuses on the role of *wangga* in one of these ceremonies, *kapuk*,[2] that is, the ceremony held in order to conduct the spirit of a deceased person away from human society and return it to the country from which it emerged at the time of conception.[3] *Wangga* songs are given to songmen in dream[4] by ghosts,[5] an order of being that embodies aspects of both the human world and the Dreaming. Certain aspects of the songs and dances index both human existence and the existential realm of ghosts. When performed in ceremony, the ambiguous nature of *wangga* songs and dances with regard to whether they are of the human or ghostly realms is a key element in the production of a liminal ritual space wherein the spirit of the deceased can fully absorb its ghostly nature and let go attachment to the world of living humans. The expression 'ghostly voices' in the title of this paper thus refers both to the voices of ghosts as they sing to a sleeping songman within his dreams, and to the voices of living songmen as they reproduce in ceremony what the ghosts taught them in dream.



Map 1: Map showing places discussed in this paper

I will first consider the processes by which singers receive songs from ghosts. This reveals something of how singers conceive of song creation and the place that song-giving spirits occupy within their universe. Next I will focus on the elements of song – namely the texts and the voice of the singer – that most clearly index both ghostly and human existence, and which in ceremony contribute to the blurring of the distinction between humans and ghosts that lies at the heart of the ceremonies' efficacy. I will then examine in more detail the nature of *kapuk* ceremonies and the role of *wangga* in facilitating the transforming of a person's spirit (*maruy*) from human to ghost. My analysis rests primarily on the songs of three singers, all of whom are now deceased: Alan Maralung (Barunga), Tommy Barrtjap Barandjak (Belyuen) and Bobby Lambudju Lane.

PROCESSES BY WHICH SINGERS RECEIVE SONGS FROM GHOSTS

Wangga do not occur only in the Daly region, but have spread to a number of other communities, in particular to Barunga (formerly Bamyili) and communities in the Kimberley region. During the late 1980s I collected a number of accounts of song creation from the singer Alan Maralung at Barunga.[6] In one of these he describes in detail how he received a specific *wangga* song about a spirit light (Minmin Light) in a dream from the spirit of a deceased songman called Balandjirri. Maralung's story narrates how the ghost, Balandjirri, accompanied by a small bird-spirit called Bunggridj Bunggridj came to him and woke him (within the dream) and sang him a song.

> I call the song 'Minmin Light' because Balandjirri got up and went to it. I was watching him. When that light appeared, he followed it. It was dangerous. He got the song from there. Then he came to me. And Bunggridj Bunggridj was there too. Next minute, Balandjirri showed me the corroboree. He gave me this Minmin Light song and and I learnt to sing it.
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> ***
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> "Boy," he said, "are you asleep? I'm coming up. Bunggridj Bunggridj and I are coming". Both of them came up. "Get up! Come here! We're going to sing for you." Then he said to me, "Boy, you listen. Don't be frightened. Come here".
> I said, "I can see you".
> "Well", he said, "we've got to show you this song, 'Minmin Light'".
> I said, "You come out here and sing to me".
> I got that song, yeah. And that Bunggridj Bunggridj, he sang it too. They were together then. Balandjirri sang that song for me so that I would know it ... He sang it once only and that was it.
>
> ***
>
> Then he went back. "Bye-bye" he said. "Don't you lose it. You keep this one. I sang this *wangga* for you." He spoke kindly like that.
> Well I said, "*wuhra* [all right]". Yeah, that's what I said.
> "OK, don't lose it," he said. "You've got to remember it properly, this good song. This 'Minmin Light' of yours."
> He went back and I continued to sing after he'd left. After he'd left, I sang it myself then.[7]

This story is typical of accounts of song creation that I have received from other *wangga* singers. Bobby Lambudju Lane, a singer from Belyuen, for example, likened the experience

of learning a song from a ghost to watching a movie of Frank Sinatra or Bing Crosby and learning the song from them.[8] Like Maralung, Bobby Lane emphasised that after the ghost had gone back he continued to rehearse the song, eventually 'setting' it by singing it in ceremony.

A number of specific narrative elements are commonly encountered both in this and other accounts of *wangga* song dreaming:

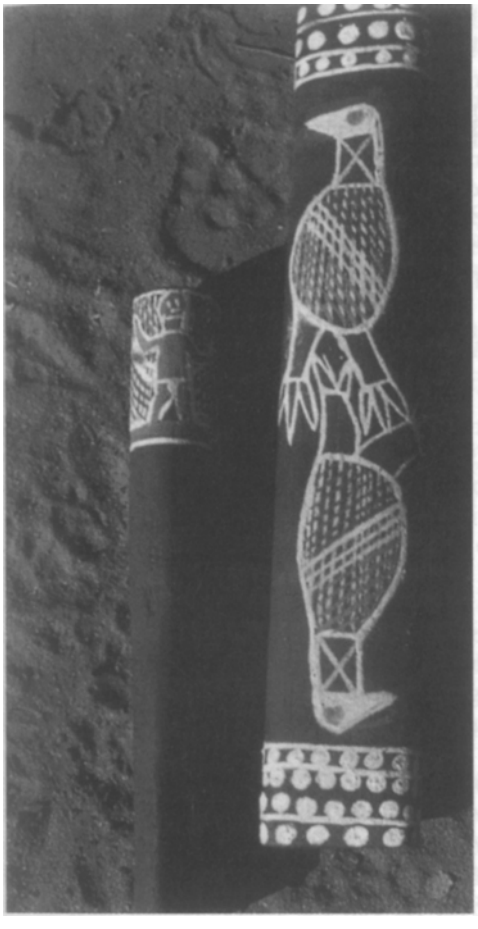

Figure 1: Painting of Balandjirri and Bunggridj Bunggridj on a pair of clapsticks. Painting by Peter Manaberu. Photograph by Allan Marett.

- The ghost announces his arrival, telling the singer he has a song to teach him.
- The ghost then performs the song for the singer.
- The ghost asks the singer to sing the song back to him — this element does not occur in the Maralung story.
- The ghost tells the singer he is 'going back', and exhorts the singer not to lose the song.
- The singer continues to rehearse the song after the ghost has gone back.

In Maralung's account, two spirit beings, the ghost Balandjirri and the bird-spirit Bunggridj Bunggridj, are involved in the communication of the song to the singer. Both these spirits are represented on a pair of clapsticks painted by Peter Manaberu (Figure 1). The relationship between the two spirit beings was, in Maralung's telling, somewhat mysterious and I was not able to fully clarify the matter before his death in 1990. Reflection upon song dreaming practices in neighbouring regions can, however, shed some light on the matter.

The involvement of both ghosts and birds in the transmission of songs to humans occurs most conspicuously in Keogh's account of the receipt of Bulu, a series of *nurlu* songs by the Nyigina (western Kimberley) singer George Dyunggayan. In this account both the ghost (*balangan*) of the singer's father, and a group of conception spirits (*ray*) in the form of birds, play a role in the process of song dreaming.[9]

> Bulu refers to a ... group of seventeen songs owned by the late George Dyunggayan, a Nyigina speaker who lived at Dyarrmanggunan in the late 1920s. ... The early songs and dances described a journey which Dyunggayan's spirit undertook with that of his ... deceased father [named Bulu] and a group of *ray* [conception spirits] in his father's country. ... Bulu and Dyunggayan had not travelled far when they saw ... what Dyunggayan thought to be a flock of snipes flying straight towards them. As they came closer, however, they saw that they were *ray*. (Keogh 1989: 4)

More recently, research that Linda Barwick and I have undertaken in the north and eastern Kimberleys has revealed that the creation of other publicly-owned song-genres of the Kimberley such as *junba* and *balga* also typically involve both ghosts and conception spirits in the form of birds. While *nurlu*, the genre described by Keogh, is confined to the western Kimberley, these other genres are found as far east as Victoria River Downs, the very area in which Maralung did much of his ceremonial singing as a young man. It seems likely that the model that Maralung used to describe the process of song creation was one that he had learned about in this area, and that the bird, Bunggridj Bunggridj, was indeed a conception spirit.

This view is further supported by the fact that at Belyuen the ghosts who give *wangga* to songmen in dreams are regarded as being **inherently** conception spirits (that is, they are seen as one of several transformations that conception spirits go through in the course of their existence cycle (see further below)). Whereas in the western Kimberleys, and in all probability Barunga, ghosts and conception spirits (conceived of as birds) have separate roles in the creation of new songs, at Belyuen the song-giving spirit is simultaneously ghost and conception spirit (though here conception spirits are not conceived of as birds).

WAYS IN WHICH THE TEXTS OF *WANGGA* SONGS REFERENCE BOTH GHOSTLY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE.

The texts of Maralung's songs comprise almost entirely vocables — that is, words with no meaning in normal language. None of the words of the Minmin Light song given to him by Balandjirri and Bunggridj Bunggridj, for example, has any meaning in either of the Aboriginal languages — Ngalkbon and Jawoyn — habitually spoken by Maralung.

By contrast, the songs of Tommy Barrtjap Barandjak and Bobby Lambudju Lane — two Wadjiginy *wangga* songmen (*medjakkarr*) from Belyuen — contain large portions of text in normal human language.[10] In addition to text in Batjamalh, however, some unintelligible text is always present. The relationship between unintelligible and everyday language in these songs has been explained to me as follows: ghosts (*wunymalang*) sing in ghost-language, which singers can understand; the singers 'turn over' or 'twist over' some of the ghost-language into human language but leave some text in ghost-language, which is heard as unintelligible vocables.

Unlike Alan Maralung and Bobby Lane, Tommy Barandjak was disinclined to talk about song creation. Nonetheless, it is he, perhaps more than any other singer, who, through the texts of his songs, has given us a direct picture of song creation. One of Tommy Barandjak's songs that has a high proportion of text 'turned over' into everyday Batjamalh language has the following text. In this *wangga* song, the ghost instructs the singer.

Yagarra ngabindjang ngami (Yagarra![11] I'm singing.)
Yagarra yine ngave-menung (Yagarra! What have I come to do?)
Ngappindjang ngappuring-djø nøng (I'm going to sing and then go back.)
Yagarra nyebindjang nyamu (Yagarra! You sing.)

Yagarra dawarra wagatj-maka ngabindjang ngami ni (Yagarra! I was sitting on the open beach and singing 'ni'.)
Yagarra nyebindjang nyamu (Yagarra! You sing.)

Who does 'I' refer to in this song? While one response might be that it is Barandjak himself, the correspondence between the words of Barandjak's song and those of the ghost in Maralung's story suggests that the text may also be read as a set of instructions sung by the ghost to the dreaming singer. Notice how closely the words of the song approximate the

events in Maralung's story. Barandjak's ghost sings: 'I'm singing. What have I come to do? I'm going to sing and then go back. You sing.' Maralung's ghost says: 'We're going to sing for you ... we've got to show you this song, 'Minmin Light'. ... Bye-bye. Don't you lose it. You keep this one. I sang this *wangga* for you.' That is, the announcement of the ghost's intention to sing, the handing over of the song to the songman, his announcement of his return to the spirit world, all of which is **spoken** in Maralung's account, appear **sung** in the form of a more pithy but no less explicit text in Barandjak's song.

Confirmation that the texts of songs such as these indeed represent the words of song-giving ghosts came from the other Belyuen singer I worked closely with, namely, Bobby Lambudju Lane. He told me explicitly that the following *wangga* song text records the instructions that his song-giving ghost sang to him in dream

> **Bangany nyebindjang nyamu-ngarrka: yamara** (Sing the song for me: dance.)
> **Bangany nyebindjang nyamu-ngarrka: yamara** (Sing the song for me: dance.)
> **yamara nyedjang-ngarrka banganyung: yamara** (Stand up and dance for me and for the sake of the song: dance.)
> **Bangany nyebindjang nyamu** (Sing the song)

Immediately after I had recorded this song, Bobby Lane and I had the following conversation:

> Lane: This spirit tells me to repeat that song — what I been singing now. I got to repeat that song every now and then when I sing it.
> Marett: What sort of words, song words for that?
> Lane: It says 'sing me a song' and that's what it is ... I just keep on repeating, that same word.
> Marett: And what is it in Batjamalh?
> Lane: *Bangany nyebindjang nyamu*

Other *wangga* singers have subsequently confirmed that Barandjak's song indeed contains the words of a song-giving ghost.

The fact that it is the ghost that is the agent in this and other song texts, does not, however, negate the agency of the singer. That is, the text does not just reference the ghostly realm, it also references the world of the living singer. When Barandjak sings *'ngabindjang ngami'* (I'm singing) the 'I' refers not just to the ghost, but also to Barandjak himself. Both meanings hang in the air. I will argue below that it is precisely this ambiguity about the identity of the subject that underpins the role that *wangga* songs play in conducting ghosts away from human society and into the proper realm of ghosts. The ambiguity in status of the *wunymalang* of the deceased with regard to its being 'of-the-living' or 'of-the dead' is directly reflected in the song text's ambiguity over whether 'I' refers to the living singer or the song-giving ghost.

GHOSTLY VOICES

The ambiguity as to who is singing revealed in song texts is also inherent in the voice of the singer. At Belyuen, one of the most important things that an apprentice songman learns from his teacher is to imitate the teacher's voice. Song genealogies going back a number of generations reveal that talented boys either learn from their father or go to live in the camp of a good singer who is often a close relative. Tommy Barandjak, for example, was adopted by Jimmy Bandak, his father's brother, so that Bandak could teach him to sing. So closely did Barandjak's voice resemble that of his uncle Bandak that people at Belyuen were unable

to distinguish which of the two was singing on an early recording.[12] They said that this was because the two singers 'had the same voice'.

In order to understand the full implications of this for ceremonial usage, we need to understand that in many cases the ghost that gives singers songs is the ghost of their former teacher. Bobby Lane, for example, told me that he received songs from his cross-cousin Mun.gi (by whom he was brought up) and from his father's brother, Aguk Malbak, not only while they were alive, but also after their deaths, when they appeared as song-teaching ghosts in his dreams (Marett, Barwick and Ford in press).

When people hear a *wangga* singer singing in ceremony therefore, it is unclear just whose voice is being heard. Is it the living singer or the ghost? Tommy Barandjak or the ghost of Jimmy Bandak? Bobby Lane or the ghost of Mun.gi? The fact that the voice, like the texts of the songs, references the worlds both of the song-giving ghost and of the living singer further contributes to the creation of a liminal space where fundamental transformations of being can be enacted.

MARUY, WUNYMALANG AND *KAPUK*

Conception Dreamings — the 'spirit babies' that emerge from the country around Belyuen and enter human mothers at conception — are called *maruy*.[13] One's shadow is also *maruy*, and *maruy* also refers to the aspect of a person's being that coincides with its physical manifestation in the world. It is the *maruy* aspect for example that is captured on film. Bobby Lane's description of song-giving spirits as being 'like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra' singing in a film are therefore particularly apt. Recordings, like ghosts, are also *maruy* and in recent years have come to play a significant role in song transmission.[14]

Typically a person's *maruy* emerges from a conception site (also called *maruy*), and enters the mother either directly or indirectly to be born as a human. Povinelli gives the following picture of conception beliefs:

> At Belyuen *maroi* are said to "catch" people hunting, camping, and traveling through the countryside ... As people go along, a *maroi* hears them or smells their sweat, then manifests itself as food. Sometimes men are said to catch the food and give it to their wives; other times women are said to come upon the *maroi*, hidden in the food, themselves. Either way a women unintentionally eats the *maroi*. It then creates a child, in the process marking the fetus with a birth anomaly, such as a cleft lip for a snake or thick hair on the back for the seaweed caught on the shell of a sea turtle. (1993: 140)

At Belyuen, *maruy* are not in general linked with any specific totemic Dreaming site, but emerge from fairly broadly defined stretches of country, to which they eventually return after death.[15] When the human dies, the *maruy* ceases to be a human and becomes a ghost — a *wunymalang*. This *wunymalang* first takes up residence in the place where it lived when alive, inhabiting habitually used or loved objects — household utensils, woven baskets, clothes etc. Relatives of the deceased collect these objects and put them aside for a period of time varying in length from a year to three years. They must now begin to prepare for the ceremony (*kapuk*) that will eventually drive the *wunymalang* ghost from the stored objects by burning them — hence the Aboriginal-English name for the ceremony: 'burnim rag'. The spirit of a person who has died must be removed from the community (where it may do people harm) to a place in the surrounding country where it becomes part of a landscape that is conceived of as sentient — able to hear human voices, smell human presences, respond to human footprints (Povinelli 1993). Such ceremonies are thus an essential element in the existence cycle of the *maruy*, an aspect of being that emerges from the land at conception and passes

through a number of different states, or orders of being, prior to re-absorption into the land.

Wunymalang who have been properly conducted away from human society through ceremonial performance live in the bush around Belyuen, in the country where people continue to hunt and forage for food. They have the capacity to 'come out' from the country when they sense the presence of relatives (whom they look after) or strangers (from whom they will protect relatives). They will also appear to people in their dreams and can be called up by ritual calling (*malh*) or singing. They are said to manifest as a blue or green light and as a cool breeze. *Wunymalang* who have not been properly conducted away, however, are regarded as dangerous and may cause harm to living humans. They can be called up by inappropriate behaviour[16] and have the capacity to steal away a person's *maruy*.

THE EFFICACY OF *WANGGA* IN *KAPUK* CEREMONIES

Kapuk ceremonies then are performed primarily in order to separate the ghost of a deceased person from human society. By far the most violent and coercive ritual act is that of burning the 'rags' in which the ghost has taken refuge. Mimesis too, as Taussig (1993) has noted and as is frequently the case in Aboriginal ritual (see below), gives power over the spirit world. To the extent therefore that the singing and dancing of *wangga* embodies ghostliness, it too can be seen as part of the coercive process. The coercive elements implicit in the act of burning of the rags, and the power gained over the spirit of the deceased through mimesis, must be balanced by gestures of reassurance, and it is the provision of this reassurance that I see as the primary function of *wangga* in *kapuk* ceremonies.

In addition to their function in driving out the spirit of the deceased, people talk of *kapuk* ceremonies being performed in order to make both the ghost and the people left behind happy. The ceremony can only be regarded as having been truly efficacious if the ghost of the deceased is **reconciled** to its new status and no longer clings to the world of the living. The reassurances that reconcile the ghost to its fate are to be found in the ontologically ambiguous aspects of *wangga*. Song texts and voice (and ultimately the ghost-given musical structures — melodic contours, stick-beating patterns, didjeridu patterns) reference both the ghostly and human worlds and draw attention to the fact that they are not entirely separate – that they overlap in certain ways. The movements of the dancers too are ambiguous. They reference the ghostly world through the performance of actions typical of ghosts such as limping, walking with the hands behind the back, standing in 'number-four-leg' (see Figure 2): but none of these is exclusively a ghostly activity. They are all human activities as well.

Figure 2: Henry Djarug performing 'number 4 leg' pose associated with ghosts (*wunymalang*) during *wangga* dancing at the Belyuen waterhole. Photograph by Allan Marett.

Part of the purpose in drawing

together the human and ghostly realms and emphasing their commonalities through the deployment of this full set of textual, vocal and choreographic ambiguities, is the reassurance it provides of an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. At the moment that the spirit of the deceased is being forced to accept its new status and leave the world of humans, attention is simultaneously drawn to what humans and ghosts continue to have in common. In future, a properly placated ghost will take on the role of guardian to its living relatives and will retain the ability to interact with them through dream and other types of encounter.

DISCUSSION

The literature concerning the transformative power of song and dance in Aboriginal ceremony has, up to now, focused primarily on ceremonies that involve the re-enactment of the creative acts of the totemic ancestors in the Dreaming. I will cite three examples here. By contrast, comparatively little discussion has occurred of the processes by which dreamt songs like *wangga* are efficacious in ceremony.

Von Sturmer, writing of certain dances of the Kugu-nganhcharra people of northern Queensland, points to ways in which the drawing together of different orders of being gives humans power over the supernatural:

> [I]n these performances the ontological/existential distance between spirit being and person (performer) is short, indeed obliterated ... In *wanam* (and related ceremonies), valued performances are those in which the dancer is possessed, uncontrolled, in a frenzy; and, when the valued moment happens, the participants feel that they are in the presence of the travelling heroes themselves. It is they who have been summoned into their presence ... The great dancers are seen as their reincarnation, quite explicitly so. (1987: 72)

Secondly, Ellis, writing more specifically about songs, discusses how in Central Australia correct reproduction in ceremony of the totemic songs sung by supernatural beings at moments of creation confers the supernatural power of the ancestors on the performers.

> There is evidence that for many Australian groups song is believed to enable performers to draw on supernatural powers left within the soil in ancient times by sacred ancestral people. It is only by the correct presentation, simultaneously, of all the technical features of the song, that this power becomes accessible to performers. (1980: 723)

That it is the re-enactment of the actions of the totemic ancestors that confers their power on contemporary people is made clear by Ellis by reference to the work of Strehlow.

> Strehlow [1971: 244] states that Aranda performers with whom he worked ascribed the composition of their traditional music to the totemic ancestors, the supernatural personages who were omnipresent. These performers maintained that through the presentation of these ceremonies the powers originally possessed by the sacred ancestors were temporarily conferred on the performers. (Ellis 1984: 150)

Writing about East Arnhem Land, Tamisari further suggests ways in which song and dance confer spiritual power on performers:

> ... big dances performed either by individuals or a group are characterised by more

> complete mimetic actions in which the ancestral body is revealed in its shape, action and movement ... I have suggested ... that the sacredness of such dances derives not only from the coming together of the elaborate music form and the chanting of ancestral names, but also from the fact that the whole body of the ancestral being in its shape, action and movement is visually embodied in the choreographic patterns ... It is in these 'big' dances that the men are referred to as 'ancestral beings' (*wangarrwangarr*) and by embodying their power, claim knowledge of the countries with which these cosmogonic events are associated. (Tamisari in press).

Although dreamt songs like *wangga* were not handed down by the ancestors in the Dreaming, the processes that underlie their efficacy in ceremony do not appear to differ fundamentally from those for the totemic ancestral songs discussed in the examples above. In the performance of *wangga* at Belyuen, as in the performance of totemic dances and songs discussed by von Sturmer, Ellis and Tamisari, it is the drawing together of two orders of being through mimetic singing and dancing that lies at the heart of their power to transform.[17]

Although this paper has focused on the spiritual power released through an enactment of the intimacy between the human and spirit realm, this is not the only form of intimacy, or indeed the only form of power present in the ceremonial performance of *wangga*. There is also an enactment of intimacy between people and the country from which they emerge — whether this be from patrilineally inherited Dreaming sites, or (as is the case at Belyuen) from the places where local conception Dreamings have been encountered. Perhaps the attention that has been paid in the literature to the articulation of relationships between people and country through the singing of cosmogonic ancestral songs has obscured the fact that in many circumstances, dreamt songs may also enact these relationships. While full discussion of this matter lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth recalling Wild's discussion of ways in which the dreaming of *purlapa* songs facilitated the Warlpiri's establishment of new relationships with the country around Lajamanu following their relocation there in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Wild 1987). The dreaming of new songs (*purlapa*) in order to create and express new relationships between the Warlpiri and their new place of residence, and the concomitant decline of songs associated with ceremonies for their now distant totemic Dreaming sites, may reflect a process that is more widespread in Australia than is generally acknowledged. In the aftermath of the displacements suffered by Aboriginal societies in the course of European settlement, the phenomenon of song dreaming has arguably become one of the principal mechanisms by which displaced social groups adapt to changing patterns of residence. Although most of the groups now living at Belyuen have done so for many generations they do not claim to have been there forever. Povinelli notes that they 'are often described as an Aboriginal group ... in the process of land succession' (Povinelli 1993: 134). It is therefore likely that the centrality of dreamt song in their ritual life is directly related to the history of their relatively recent settlement at Belyuen.

In order to understand the role that dreamt songs such as *purlapa* and *wangga* play in relating people to country, it is essential to understand the significance that songs and their associated dance have within local cosmologies, and how these inform ceremonial action. This paper, in which I have attempted to show how *wangga* function ceremonially within a cosmology that unites the people of Belyuen with the country in which they have lived for generations, is a first step to this end. Further study of the phenomenon of dreamt songs in a number of different contexts will cast significant light on the role of song in articulating and mediating contemporary Aboriginal peoples' relationships to country in the aftermath of European colonisation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was written during a period of research leave provided by the Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (RIHSS) of the University of Sydney. I would like to thank the RIHSS and the following people who have read and offered helpful comments on this paper at various stages in its preparation: Linda Barwick, Francesca Merlan, Michele Morgan, Steve Muecke, Debbie Rose, Nicholas Routley, Alan Rumsey and John von Sturmer. Lys Ford, with whom I have worked on Batjamalh song texts for a number of years, has provided invaluable linguistic expertise.

NOTES

1 These include the Wadjiginy songmen Jimmy Bandak, Tommy Barandjak, Kenny Barandjak and Bobby Lane, the Emmiyangal songmen Bengguny Wanggigi, Robert Man.guna and Nym Mun.gi, the Mendheyangal songman Jimmy Muluk and the Marri Ammu songmen Billy Mandji and Colin Warambu Ferguson.

2 *'ka+puk'*, literally 'he/she washes', refers to the purification of participants by washing that occurs towards the end of the ceremony. Elkin (Elkin and Jones 1958: 147) refers to this as a ' "bogey" or purification' ceremony.

3 The ceremonial practices and associated beliefs at Belyuen focus strongly on local conception Dreamings; in this regard they differ in a number of significant ways from those at Port Keats and other centres of *wangga* further south. The nature and significance of these differences will be discussed in more detail in my forthcoming book on *wangga*.

4 'Dreamt songs', which are contemporary creations by individual singers/composers, may be distinguished from 'totemic songs', which are believed to have been sung by the totemic ancestors in the Dreaming, and therefore to have existed for all time. That such a distinction is by no means absolute has been shown by Wild and Dussart in their respective studies of the dreamt genres *purlapa* and *yawulyu*, both of which can, under certain circumstances, become totemic songs (see further Wild 1987, Dussart 1988). Keogh has also written in some detail on the receipt in dreams of *nurlu* songs in the western Kimberley, Richard Moyle has discussed song dreaming among the Alyawarra and Kukatja, Mackinlay has discussed Yanyuwa women's song dreaming at Borroloola, and more recently Barwick has discussed the receipt of *yawulyu* songs by Waramungu women living at Tennant Creek (Keogh 1989, 1991; Moyle 1986, 1997; Mackinlay 1998; Barwick 1999, 2000).

5 By 'ghosts' I mean the spirits of the dead, that is, that order of being known in Daly languages variously as *wunymalang, ngutj, awu-nguwatj,* and in Murrinhpatha as *kardu-wurl*. Like the *manparrpa* song-giving spirits discussed by Wild for the Warlpiri, these 'occupy the interstices between contemporary reality and the *jukurrpa* [Dreaming]' (Wild 1987: 109).

6 For a recording of Maralung's songs, including the one discussed here, see Marett (1993).

7 This account was given to me on 13 July 1986 and is recorded on fieldtape Marett 1988: 15. The version of the story published here is translated from the mixture of Ngalkbon, Jawoyn and northern Australian Kriol in which it was originally spoken and streamlines the narrative for ease of comprehension, omitting some redundant or elliptical material.

8 A recording of Lane's songs will shortly be published by the Aboriginal Studies Press (see Marett, Barwick and Ford in press).

9 *'Balangan'* (ghost) and *'ray'* (conception spirit) are Nyigina cognates for the respective Batjamalh terms *'wunymalang'* and *'maruyi* used at Belyuen.

10 The language in this case is Batjamalh, one of several languages spoken at Belyuen. The elicitation and translation of all the texts examined here has been carried out in collaboration with Lysbeth Ford who has recently completed both a grammar and dictionary of Batjamalh (Ford 1990 and 1997). In the present paper all indigenous terms given with reference to Belyuen will, unless stated otherwise, be in Batjamalh.

11 *'Yagarra'* is an ejaculation expressing strong emotion.

12 In the 1950s, Elkin recorded both Bandak and Barandjak, but did not identify the individual singers in the documentation to his recordings.

13 While in some Daly languages — particularly those spoken at Port Keats — there are separate words for baby spirit and conception Dreaming, in Batjamalh and Emmi, the two most widely spoken Daly languages at Belyuen, the word for baby spirit and conception Dreaming is the same (*maruy* in Batjamalh; *mirr* in Emmi). It is possible that the Belyuen practice is the older one and that the use of different words for the two orders of being in southern Daly languages results from influence from languages to the south.

14 *Wangga* are nowadays also learnt by listening to tapes, particularly in the Kimberleys. Barwick (1999) discusses the significance of the ghost-like nature of recordings with regard to the transmission of Mungamunga songs (also a dreamt genre) at Tennant Creek.

15 It is also believed that *wunymalang* ghosts go to Badjalarr (North Peron Island), an island of the dead to the northwest of the Daly River mouth. A number of Bobby Lambudju's Lane's *wangga* refer to Badjalarr (see further Marett, Barwick and Ford, in press).

16 For example, Wadjiginy and Kiyuk people cannot speak the word '*Badjalarr*'(North Peron Island) at night for fear that it will call the *wunmalang* ghosts back from the island of the dead to the land of the living.

17 I am grateful to an anonymous reader for the observation that while the intimacy produced by the shared language of song and movement gives power over spirits, 'the end of the song/ceremony consititutes the appropriate moment for suspension of the intimacy between the human and spirit realms — a suspension which may be resumed, when necessary, in other ceremonial contexts'.

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