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Music for dreaming: Aboriginal lullabies in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola, Northern Territory

The lullaby is a type of song sung the world over to calm a crying child and gently lull babies into the arms of sleep. Amongst the Yanyuwa Aboriginal community in the remote town of Borroloola in the Northern Territory of Australia, lullaby songs are broadly referred to by the generic term kurdakurdamanthawu and the content of lullabies is drawn from both restricted and unrestricted forms of Yanyuwa performance. As I have suggested elsewhere (Mackinlay 2000:73), the terms “restricted” and “unrestricted” “delineate who can access the knowledge and information contained within performance”. The term “restricted” refers to those performances which limit the participants and their access to the meaning of the ritual textual elements and associated information on the basis of gender, age and/or kinship affiliation. In contrast, the term “unrestricted” denotes performance that does not place limitations on who may participate and who may access the knowledge contained within the performance. In this article I provide an ethnographic introduction to restricted and unrestricted Yanyuwa lullabies through examination of performance practice, themes and textual content of both forms of Aboriginal singing.

The geographic, social and musical setting

The group of Aboriginal people who call themselves Yanyuwa live in the township of Borroloola in the Northern Territory of Australia. Borroloola is situated approximately 970km south east of Darwin and 80km inland from the Gulf of Carpentaria (Figure 1). Prior to contact with Europeans, four different major linguistic groups traditionally inhabited this area – Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Marra and Gudanji (Figure 2). Garrwa and Yanyuwa speakers are more frequently encountered than Gudanji and Marra in the Borroloola region, Garrwa more so than Yanyuwa, and my current research focuses on the
Figure 1  Borroloola is situated approximately 970km south-east of Darwin, Northern Territory

Figure 2  Major linguistic groups of the Borroloola area (in bold)
performance practice of Yanyuwa people. Yanyuwa culture is primarily sea-based
and the people traditionally identify themselves as island or salt-water people,
often using the colourful phrase li-anthawirriyarr, or “people whose spirit
belongs to the sea”, as a marker of their spiritual and social identity.

Yanyuwa music is primarily vocal with beating accompaniment, the latter
consisting usually of paired boomerang clapsticks, clapping sticks and
hand/body slapping. Singing is unison in style, with an organizational song
leader and group. Performance of Yanyuwa song comprises short passages of
uninterrupted singing, each about thirty seconds to two minutes in duration. In
performance, repetition of syllabic song text and rhythmic pattern is presented
over a largely descending melodic shape. Hence, Yanyuwa song performance is
linked strongly to aspects of Central Australian song performance in such areas
as the syllabic setting of text, the concept of isorhythm and general principles of
text line presentation. The melodic structure and pitch element of Yanyuwa
song, however, is more closely aligned with the clan song genre of North
Central and North Eastern Arnhem Land, particularly with respect to the use of
scale structures built upon discrete numbers of scale steps and marked by the
use of variable tuning.¹

In Yanyuwa conceptual thought about music, ngalki is a term sometimes
translated as “skin” which means the “essence” that marks individual identity.
For example, the scent of a flower or the taste of food is the ngalki of that
phenomenon. Yanyuwa people will also use the term ngalki to refer to a
person’s “skin” or identity within the kinship system. As noted by Kirton and
Timothy (1977:320), the Yanyuwa refer to their subsection affiliation by the
term “skin”. They write:

If a Yanyuwa meets a fellow Aborigine from the Northern Territory (or
certain areas further afield) who does not understand his Yanyuwa
language but to whom he wishes to relate, his question in English will
be “What is your skin?” And from the answer, the two will be able to
identify the equivalent social groups to which they belong, establish
kin relationship, and be ready to communicate to kinsmen.

Broadly speaking, this concept presents the Yanyuwa way of making sense
of the complex relationship between the people who make music, the process of
music-making and the sound which is music. In terms of musical structure, the
ngalki of a particular song is often translated into English by Yanyuwa people
as the melody. However, from my discussions with Yanyuwa performers, my
own experience in performance of Yanyuwa song and analysis of Yanyuwa
song structure, the concept of ngalki incorporates much more than melody.
Ngalhki includes the type of beating accompaniment used, the particular types of
rhythmic patterns attached to song text, the way in which these are fitted on to a
specific melodic shape and the way all three components are combined during
the act of musical performance. Ngalhki also incorporates specific body designs

¹ See Mackinlay (1998) for detailed analysis of Yanyuwa song structure; works by Moyle
(1974), Stubington (1978) and Knopoff (1997) for discussion of Arnhem Land song structure;
and recent studies by Ellis and Will (1994, 1996) of Central Australian song structure.
and dance movements which comprise a song performance. The concept of ngalki extends to the identity of the performers involved in performance, their place within the Yanyuwa kinship system and their sense of ownership of that song. Thus it is the correct interlocking of all performance elements which gives each Yanyuwa song style its unique identity or ngalki. Further, it is through the act of performance that the embedded power within genres is given meaning, accessed and utilized by performers.

The musical and cultural significance of the term ngalki is emphasized in the doubling of the noun stem in the phrase ngalkingalki which refers to one’s voice. The term ngalkingundayarra means to give a song to somebody by literally giving one’s essence. Further, in relation to Yanyuwa song performance, the noun stem ngalki is used to describe a good or bad performance. The phrase yabingalki or yurlurrngalki literally means “good or straight tune” while a bad performance may be termed jirda ngalki literally “bitter tune”, or paraphrased as “tuneless”. When all musical elements are combined correctly in performance and performers are seen to be really enjoying the singing, the Yanyuwa phrase janda-ngalkiwiunjayi may be used, literally translating as “she is swallowing the essence of the song”.2

Literature review

Sometimes referred to within the literature as cradle song, the lullaby is defined by folklorist Theresa Brakeley (1950:653) “as a type of song sung by mothers and nurses the world over to coax their babies to sleep”. The rendition of these songs is often associated with charms, as the power and magic inherent in the combination of melodic movement and rhythmic patterning influence the behaviour of the song recipient. Similarly, Ikegami (1986:103) describes the association of magic to lullaby singing in Japan and suggests that the performer of the text believes that they have control over the actions of the song recipient in much the same way as a magician chants a charm and commands a change in behaviour. Elsewhere in the literature on lullaby performance, Farber’s (1990) examination of Babylonian and Assyrian lullabies draws strong parallels between a charm used to quiet a crying baby and the religious origins of Babylonian magic but resists the idea that lullabies in this context are manipulative. Giudice’s (1988:270) study of Italian lullaby and Ebeogu’s work on Igbo performance of Nigeria (1991:99) consider the function of lullaby singing. They suggest that while the primary purpose of the lullaby is to put children to sleep, in many cultures the performance of lullabies serves other secondary functions such as the enculturation of the infant in musical as well as conceptual terms.

In the context of lullaby performance children are the recipients rather than the performers and thus lullaby songs are not intended to be sung by children

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2 I am greatly indebted to anthropologist and linguist John Bradley for the Yanyuwa translations and linguistic advice provided on those Yanyuwa terms and phrases included in this article. See discussion in the section “Notes on song text transcriptions and translations”, below.
but rather to be sung to and for the child by an adult. Further, the performance of lullabies is generally considered to be the domain of women and performance of lullabies may provide the infant with one of the first points of contact with significant female relatives. In this way performance of lullabies can serve as an outlet for emotional expression by the performer. Macfie (1990:196) suggests that Turkish lullabies often express the feelings of the mother and Manasseh (1991:4) mentions that performance of lullabies amongst women of the Iraqi Jewish tradition serves the dual purpose of soothing a child and the singer’s own ailing spirit by providing her with an opportunity to air emotion. Masuyama (1989:144–5) observes that in Japan lullabies might better be defined as an occasion for nannies to “[s]ay the socially unsayable” in order for them to release their feelings of desire and discontent. In this sense, lullaby texts may reflect social and musical themes of interest to mothers and adult listeners. While the literature emphasizes the involvement of women in lullaby performance, there are occasions however when Yanyuwa men are required to and do perform lullaby songs to children. Because a men’s lullaby style is unusual from a cross-cultural perspective, I will elaborate on this aspect of Yanyuwa lullaby performance practice further below.

Within the available ethnographic literature on Aboriginal Australian performance, little or no documentation exists on the genre of lullabies. R. Moyle (1997) briefly refers to performance of lullaby songs in his ethnography of musical life amongst the Kukatja of Central Australia; however, Kartomi’s (1984) study of Aboriginal lullabies amongst the Pitjantjatjara in Central Australia, the Bundjalung in northern New South Wales and Kaiatilt in north-west Queensland on the Gulf of Carpentaria represents the most extensive survey thus far. She suggests that despite “[t]he lack of Aboriginal terms for lullaby, songs to lull children are recognised as a clear song category by singers” in these regions. Kartomi writes that “[t]he Pitjantjaras, for example, do talk in English about singing ‘to put my baby to sleep’ (tjitjingkunta kunkunari ‘you child go to sleep’); but they indulge, like people of most cultures, in very little explicit theorising about, and categorisation of their music” (1984:59–60). As will be shown, the Yanyuwa example suggests that while young children do not possess the knowledge to sing lullaby songs, performers in this region categorize this genre of singing in a way which makes strong connections between social and spiritual concepts.

**Forms of Yanyuwa lullaby singing: restricted and unrestricted**

I first heard Yanyuwa lullabies performed while visiting Darwin in May 1995 as part of my doctoral research. The end of the wet season had not yet
brought the much-desired "knock 'em down rains" and the fan was switched to full strength in the small flat as I sat with two senior Yanyuwa women, Eileen Manankurmarra McDinny and Jemima Wuwarlu Miller, trying to keep ourselves cool. After performing a large number of Yanyuwa public women’s songs, Eileen began to sing songs which she described as lullabies, that is, songs "for putting baby to sleep" (personal communication). These were performed largely for the purpose of recording: there were no babies or children present on this occasion. However, Eileen continued to sing and it soon became apparent that Yanyuwa lullaby songs appear to be of two different forms, falling into either a restricted or unrestricted category. As suggested above, generally, each lullaby style comes under the generic Yanyuwa term kurdakurdamanthawu, which means lulling to sleep.

Since that time I have been to Borroloola many times and have heard lullaby songs sung to babies and young children for many different reasons on several occasions. The task of singing lullabies is largely handed over to experienced and mature singers. These women and men are known throughout the community for their ability to sing as well as the extensive knowledge they hold of Yanyuwa law. In the context of Aboriginal Australia, a knowledgeable person is one who has an extensive understanding of tradition. In relation to Yanyuwa culture, Bradley (1997:26) explains:

For the Yanyuwa, the content of their tradition is very broad. Firstly, it comprises laws, objects, songs and ways of acting which were first revealed by the Spirit Ancestors. Secondly, it is the interpretations on this revealed knowledge, the myths, legends, historical narratives, ethical and metaphysical teachings, rituals, practices and observances which amount to a whole way of life.

As mentioned by Bradley, an integral part of understanding Yanyuwa tradition for both insiders and outsiders is possessing knowledge about song. Song is embedded with knowledge and thus inherently powerful. Further, a Yanyuwa person who has extensive song knowledge takes on a status that is based on this understanding of Yanyuwa tradition. In the context of Yanyuwa performance, this achieved status is associated with certain rights and responsibilities that in turn may endow that person with power.4

Generally speaking, lullabies are sung to babies and young children by older relatives (for example mothers, grandmothers and sometimes fathers or grandfathers) until they reach puberty. For young boys this maturation is marked formally at age 9 or 10 their participation in the circumcision initiation ceremonies which will make them men, termed a-Marndiwa in Yanyuwa. When boys become men, their knowledge and performance of Yanyuwa lullabies is strongly linked to the roles they play in ceremony, a point to which I will return. After puberty the involvement of young girls with babies and young children continues and grows as they themselves become mothers or they are given the

4 See Lee (1993:5ff.) for a detailed theoretical discussion of authority, status and power as applied to performance.
responsibility to care for younger siblings, cousins and/or relations. As a result, young girls receive greater exposure than young boys to this form of singing on a day-to-day basis as they move into adulthood. Lullaby performance settings are wide and varied and depend in part upon the type of lullaby being sung. For example, I have heard unrestricted lullabies sung to babies and young children who may be sick, misbehaving or needing comforting in a range of public social settings including when travelling back in car from a long day fishing or while sitting quietly around a camp at night. Performance of restricted lullabies occurs in public settings which may be either social (when a woman has exhausted her lullaby repertoire and needs a more powerful form of singing to send a child to sleep) or ritual (for example, in association with a-Marndiwa ceremonial performance).

Notes on song text transcriptions and translations

The song text transcriptions and translations used in this paper were provided by anthropologist and linguist John Bradley and are the spoken song texts of each song verse. As the song texts appear in this paper, each line of song text represents a meaningful string of words which, when performed, repeats cyclically underneath an established melodic shape. Linguists are well aware of the problems that can occur in transcription of song texts. Merlan (1987:166), for instance, details the problems associated with accurate transcription of song words, stating that often there is a discrepancy between that which is “said” to be the song text and that which is actually “sung”. Bradley (personal communication) has explained to me that the song texts below are presented according to his own linguistic understanding of Yanyuwa phrasing and poetry. Bradley derived the Yanyuwa song texts and the English

5 Bradley came to translate these song texts as part of his linguistic research with Yanyuwa people. His main interest in doing this was to compare the use of language in song with everyday Yanyuwa speech. Bradley’s reputation as a reliable and accurate translator of the song texts included here was confirmed by Yanyuwa people. First, during my time at Borroloola, people often commented about the depth of Bradley’s experience and knowledge of Yanyuwa country, culture and language and hence established him as an authority on Yanyuwa language and speech. Second, I was able to cross-check the accuracy of Bradley’s translations against performers’ explanations of each song from my own recordings of lullaby performance.

6 For further information about Yanyuwa song structure refer to Mackinlay 1998.

7 Stubington (1978:206) discusses of problems associated with differences between spoken song text and sung song texts in Arnhem Land performance. She writes that spoken versions were obtained in interview situations by playing back a previously recorded song item, followed by fitting the written notation of the spoken song text to the sung song text. According to Stubington, possible reasons for discrepancies between the two versions include unclear enunciation by singers, more than one singer performing, swapping of word order in performance and musical exigencies such as the omission of final consonants.
free translations of these song texts by sitting down with Yanyuwa people as they performed them and discussing the words contained with each song. Bradley states that in transcription and translation of Yanyuwa song texts his main concern lies in trying to overcome the problem of “cultural translation”, that is, the transference of meaning between two very different frameworks of reference, in this case Yanyuwa and English. Bradley acknowledges that it is impractical to achieve isomorphism between different languages just as it is equally impossible to translate one culture into another without losing specificity. Bradley also recognizes that it is always possible for Yanyuwa language to express multiple nuances and in reference to the process of translation, he wonders at times whether he has “caught them all”.

**Karrayngjala: restricted lullabies**

As in other indigenous Australian societies, Yanyuwa culture includes epics which present the actions and events surrounding the spirit ancestors on their journeys across the country during the creative period known as Yijan or the Dreaming. In addition to mythological accounts and stories, the Yanyuwa possess a wide body of songs termed kujika or “big history” songs which recount the exploits of their Dreaming ancestors. The term kujika may be defined as “song cycle”, “Dreaming path” or “song cycles sung during ceremonial performance” (Bradley 1992:167). Kujika were composed by the ancestor beings as they travelled across the land and are often referred to by Yanyuwa people as kurdukurdu or restricted songs. Mussolini Harvey, a senior Yanyuwa man, explains:

> White people ask us all the time, what is Dreaming? This is a hard question because Dreaming is a really big thing for Aboriginal people. In our language, in Yanyuwa, we call the Dreaming Yijan. The Dreamings made our Law or narntu-Yuwa. This Law is the way we live, our rules. This Law is our ceremonies, our songs, our stories; all of these things come from the Dreaming ... The Law was made by the Dreamings many, many years ago and given to our ancestors and they gave it to us ... The Dreamings were the first to dance our ceremonies and sing our songs. Some of these songs are dangerous, they are secret and sacred, women and children are not allowed to see them. Others are not secret, everyone can look at them, but they are still sacred ... The Dreamings named all of the country and the sea as they travelled, they named everything that they saw. The Dreamings gave us our songs. These songs are sacred and we call them kujika. These songs tell the story of the Dreaming as they travelled over the country, everything the Dreaming did is in the songs ... These songs are like maps, they tell us about the country, they are maps which we carry in our heads.

(in Bradley 1988:xi)
Harvey mentions the association of *kujika* with knowledge that is secret and/or sacred and suggests that such information is not always accessible by all members of the community. Thus, performance of *kujika* may be restricted by age, gender and/or kinship affiliation.

The term *karrayngiala* is used to refer to a specific series of songs that are said to have the power to send children to sleep and whose origins are said by Yanyuwa to have come from the spiritual world of the Dreamings. *Karrayngiala* are said by Yanyuwa people to derive from *wabarrangu ambuliyalu* “a long time ago before living people” and although not classified by Yanyuwa as *kujika*, because the origins of *karrayngiala* are attributed back to this spiritual realm, *karrayngiala* do fall within the Yanyuwa boundaries of restricted performance. Further, *karrayngiala* are considered to be powerful and specifically for children. Bradley reports (personal communication) that the song texts of this form of Yanyuwa lullaby are not completely translatable and their language, often archaic speech or “old bugger words” is said to be that of the Dreamings. Interestingly, although the *karrayngiala* songs are not given any semi-moiety classification or Dreaming association, the origin of these songs is firmly linked back to the ancestral realm through the phenomena of spirit children or *ardirri* who are located across the country and said to impregnate women. Annie Karrakayn Isaac (personal communication), a senior Yanyuwa woman, explains:

*Yijan kalz-kanzhaninya winarrkzl nzlngka nya-alunga li-arduburri ardirri barra.*

(The Dreaming carried the [lullaby songs] freely, maybe they were for their own children, the spirit children.)

*Karrayngiala* are performed by Yanyuwa women only in public social settings and the song texts of these Yanyuwa lullabies illustrate well the spiritual connection of these lullabies to the Dreamings and more specifically, the function of these songs to influence the behaviour of the child beyond sending them to sleep. In many instances, the song texts of *karrayngiala* refer to making the child grow up to be strong and healthy.

Song text 18 (overleaf) can be sung to either young boys or girls to give them strength:

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8 The lullaby song texts which appear in this paper were performed by Annie Karrakayn Isaac, Jemima Wuwarlu Miller and Dinah Marrangawi Norman and recorded by me in Brisbane, Queensland while they were visiting me in March 2000. In past field trips to Borroloola and Darwin I had heard women singing lullaby songs on several different occasions. I had been able to record some lullaby songs in Darwin in May 1995 with Eileen Manankurrmara McDinny and her sister Jemima Wuwarlu Miller. After discussing the 1995 recording with Annie, Jemima and Dinah in March 2000, we decided that we would undertake another recording of lullaby songs to complement those I had already documented. The March 2000 recording included performance of lullabies already recorded as well as some I had not yet documented.
Song text 1

**Yanyuwa spoken song text** | **English translation**
---|---
Blngkama | You there in my lap
Jarralanda | specific term associated with power songs
Wangkama | I am showing you how to be
Jarralanda | specific term associated with power songs

As indicated, the term jarralanda has no meaning as such and is directly associated with songs that are said to contain power. By reciting or singing these words properly, the song, in this case, a lullaby, is given the power to achieve its aim of sending children to sleep and making them strong. Other karrayngjala songs however are more gender specific as illustrated by song text 2 performed as a lullaby for girls:

Song text 2

**Yanyuwa spoken song text** | **English translation**
---|---
Karnada wardukarra | adolescent girl
Karnada wajijna | carry something on one’s hip
Wakirriwakirrila | archaic term meaning strong

The general meaning behind the song is to make young girls grow up to be strong and healthy. More specifically however, the song text refers to the mothering role that young girls will come to play as women and performance of this lullaby aims to ensure that the girl will mature to bear children and carry babies on her hip. Similarly, song text 3 refers to the process of making young boys into strong men and ensuring that the baby boy grows up to be strong and active:

Song text 3

**Yanyuwa song text** | **English translation**
---|---
Yibarrki | adolescent boy
Barrala | early morning
Bawulu | archaic term for walking long distances

Further, some karrayngjala songs are associated directly with various Dreaming beings because of the specific strength-giving abilities of those beings. For example, there are several lullabies of this type associated with the baby emu. When the song is performed, the children’s knees are tapped to give them the stamina to walk, run and move with the agility of an emu.

Another type of restricted lullaby is termed Yarrngijirri by the Yanyuwa. Yanyuwa women will sing Yarrngijirri in a social setting on a one-on-one basis with a baby or small child but Yanyuwa men perform Yarrngijirri in a ceremonial setting.9 Believed to be composed by the male Dreaming being

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9 The phrase “ceremonial settings” refers here to the ritual enactment of dreaming stories and songs for specific social, ecological and spiritual purposes (such as initiation ceremonies). The
Yurrunjü, Yarrngijirri are specific songs sung to Yanyuwa boys only and are highly descriptive of acts associated with the first male initiation ceremonies for boys called a-Marndiwa. Yurrunjü is a carrier of fire and in the Yanyuwa context, fire is symbolic of strength. Yarrngijirri are sung by Yanyuwa men as the hair belt is taken off the initiate or rdaru when he is handed over to the women, prior to their all-night dancing as they prepare for circumcision. Powerful unto themselves because of their association with the Dreaming, these songs are reckoned to have the capacity to make the boys relaxed and to put them to sleep so that they will not feel the pain of the circumcision knife. For example, the following texts highlight the inherent power of this song to alter the physical reaction of the young initiates. Song text 4 describes the effect the singing will have on the boys and song text 5 makes explicit reference to song words lulling the children to sleep:

**Song text 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yanyuwa spoken song text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jukumajuka dalaladala</td>
<td>The boys will slump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jukumajuka waliinydinyi</td>
<td>They will gather and sleep with no pain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Song text 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yanyuwa spoken song text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wangarru kurdakurda</td>
<td>The boys who have struck out (refers to the act of hitting each other with bark in the dances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luwunyu yanulbirna</td>
<td>They slumber, lulled to sleep by the words of the song</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With their origins firmly linked back to the Dreaming or Yijan, both karrayngiala and Yarrngijirri songs are performed by Yanyuwa women; however, there is one form of restricted song used for lullabies which may be performed only by Yanyuwa men. These songs are term kujika by the Yanyuwa and may be defined as “song cycles”, “Dreaming paths” or “song cycles sung during ceremonial performance” (Bradley 1992:167). Kujika were composed by the ancestor beings during the creative period of the Dreaming as they travelled across the land. According to the strict rules of performance surrounding kujika, only Yanyuwa men may perform them. They may however sing them to both male and female children and this is one way in which shared knowledge of a restricted way is acquired by both genders. Typically, kujika are performed as lullabies by Yanyuwa men when a baby is sick, ill or particularly ceremonies recount the exploits of the Dreaming ancestral beings as they travelled across the country, following their Dreaming tracks with the performance of each song verse as the ceremony progresses. Staged on specific sites or ceremonial grounds, ceremonial performances often have restrictions placed upon who can participate in the ritual and such performances also include the extensive use of dance, body decoration and ceremonial objects.
difficult to send to sleep and in this context are referred to as *wuunungu* (strong). According to kin relations, a child is sung the *kujika* associated with the social placement, semi-moiety affiliation and land ownership of its mother. This is because a mother’s Dreaming songs are seen as more potent than the child’s own who takes on the semi-moiety and social placement of its father. The child is not strong or mature enough to resist the power inherent within *kujika* and upon hearing the sacred verses is lulled into sleep, or, as Yanyuwa people explain, the child is “knocked on the head”. *Kujika* then, are restricted lullaby songs performed by men. These song cycles are powerful in this context because of the particular social relationship of the Dreaming song to the child. In contrast, *karrayngjala* and *Yarrngijirri* are restricted forms of lullaby performance sung by Yanyuwa women. These lullabies are powerful because of the origins of the songs – *karrayngjala* come from the spirit children and may be performed for both boys and girls in social settings, while *Yarrngijirri* originate from Yurrunju, the male carrier of fire whose songs are performed for boys only in the context of male initiation ceremonies.

**Anything words: the unrestricted lullaby**

The second form of lullaby songs can be loosely categorized as unrestricted. Although attributed to no human composers, these songs are in everyday translatable Yanyuwa, are not directly associated with the Dreaming and do not include any form of opaque language. They are sung to both boys and girls but only by Yanyuwa women. This unrestricted type of lullaby is not given any specific Yanyuwa term and when asked about the content of this type of song, Eileen Manankurrnumara McDinny commented that these unrestricted lullabies can include “anything word … Garrwa, Yanyuwa …” (personal communication). Unrestricted lullabies send a child to sleep essentially by making a child comfortable. The Yanyuwa phrase for this is *wulurrungku* which generally means lying comfortably down, and more specifically on your stomach. It is the same word used for putting a body correctly on a funeral platform and the implicit meaning is that in this position, the human is placed in a “proper state of being” (Bradley, personal communication). The song texts of unrestricted lullabies reflect Yanyuwa experiences of the world ranging from activities associated with everyday life to those related directly to ceremonial practices and the social dynamics of inter-gender relations. For example, song text 6 describes the ceremonial dress of a man who has been through male circumcision and subincision initiation ceremonies:

**Song text 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yanyuwa spoken song text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ny-a-ja nya-walamangi</em></td>
<td>This is he a proper subincised man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ny-a-ngirlangirlkanda</em></td>
<td>He has feather plumes on his upper arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ny-a-wurlwurlukanda</em></td>
<td>He is a proper man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Likewise, song text 7 establishes a normal pattern of behaviour for husband and wife by describing the style and place of residence for a married couple:

**Song text 7**

**Yanyuwa spoken song text**  **English translation**

*Bingkibingki wadara*  
An encircling windbreak

*Na-buyi na-alanji*  
A little camp

*Bulangi*  
A little camp (Garrwa language term)

*Majkarrangka*  
For the husband and wife

Other lullabies of this type document relations between women and men, the song texts of which are of greater interest to adults than to children. Song text 8 documents the comic scene of a man who takes a secret but crooked path to meet up with his promised wife. Upon arrival he is shocked to find that it is not his promised wife at all but another woman:

**Song text 8**

**Yanyuwa spoken song text**  **English translation**

*Kiwa-wuluma*  
He ran to her

*Ngalirrbangalirrbu*  
Taking a crooked secret path

*Kuthanda rru-wiku*  
He thought it was his promised wife

*Rru-wardambangzl*  
But it wasn’t

As shown, the content of unrestricted lullaby song texts broadly relates to the realm of everyday life experience in Yanyuwa culture. The song texts speak of appropriate forms of social behaviour and social interaction for Yanyuwa women and Yanyuwa men.

**Conclusion**

This paper has provided an ethnographic introduction to performance of restricted and unrestricted Yanyuwa lullabies with specific reference to song text content. Differences between the two types of lullaby are most evident in relation to the subject matter, the thematic material of song texts and the performance of each lullaby type by either Yanyuwa women or Yanyuwa men. Performed only by Yanyuwa women, the words and themes of the unrestricted lullaby explicitly identify with the child’s patterns of language, culture and everyday life experience. In contrast, the restricted lullabies termed *Yarrngijirri* are performed by Yanyuwa men in a ceremonial context but by Yanyuwa women in a social setting. The other type of restricted lullaby, that is, *kujika*, can be performed only by Yanyuwa men. Both forms of restricted lullaby song text provide the child with an understanding of the spiritual realm of the Dreaming through specific reference to ancestral beings, their character traits and their actions. In this sense, then, both the song and the singer have an inherent ability to produce a certain effect. As senior women and men, lullaby
singers possess the knowledge and authority to correctly enact and control the power invested in these songs through correct performance practice. Babies and younger children are not strong enough to resist and the unique combination of music and language gently lulls the child to sleep.

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