



*Rainforest in Lamington National Park, Qld.
Photograph by Leo Meier.*
WELDON TRANNIES

CHAPTER 7

WORDS OF JULUJI'S WORLD

BOB DIXON

JULUJI WAS WAKENED by the early morning cold. He placed a short piece of wood on the glowing embers of last night's fire and crouched over it, warming his hands, legs and chest. His mother and sister were still asleep. But to Juluji life was too exciting, just now, to spend too much of it in slumber. Dawn was beginning to edge into the campsite by the river. Juluji sat and thought. His mind played around with words—what he was, what he would become, how the world around him was arranged.

The words that Juluji thought over were in Jirrbal, the language of his tribe, the Jirrbalngan people. The river by which he now sat in contemplation, clutching knees to chest, would later be named—in another language—the Tully River. It is in northeast Queensland, south of what is now the city of Cairns.

Juluji had been told that the river rose way over in the tableland and that it fell down a mighty waterfall called Garriya. Juluji's paternal grandfather, his *bulu*, had promised one day to take the boy to see that great cascade. When they were there, he would tell the story of how it had all come to be in the faraway days of Jujaba the creator people.

Yesterday, Juluji's mother had told him that he was now *bayi barrngan*, a youth. It was almost time for him to leave the family campfire and to live with the other young men. For the next few years Juluji would learn while he grew. As his *jiwurrul*, pubic hair, sprouted, and his voice deepened, Juluji would be instructed by the older men in ancient legends and skills. He would soon become *bayi rugun*, ready for the sacred rite of initiation, when deep scars would be cut across his belly with a piece of *guyan*, sharp white quartz—one, two, even three scars, if Juluji could stand so much pain. Only then, and perhaps not until some years after the scars had healed, would Juluji be able to claim his promised bride, Mandila. He had to prove himself to be fully a man, a skilled hunter, able to provide not only for Mandila but also for her mother, before Juluji could take the girl and consummate their promised marriage.



NAMES OF TRIBES AND LANGUAGES

TRIBE	TRIBAL LANGUAGE SPOKEN	
Warrgamaygan	Warrgamay	
Girramaygan	Girramay	these four mutually intelligible
Jirrbalngan	Jirrbal	
Dulgubarra	Mamu	
Ngajanji	Ngajan	
Yidinyji	Yidiny	

Girramay, Jirrbal, Mamu and Ngajan—although the speech of different tribes—were mutually intelligible, rather like American English and Australian English, and could be considered dialects of one language. Warrgamay and Yidiny were quite different languages, as different from Jirrbal (and from each other) as French is from German.

Each tribe probably had about five hundred members. There would have been at least two thousand people speaking the Girramay—Jirrbal—Mamu—Ngajan language.

NAMES FOR PEOPLE AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF AGE AND GROWTH

APPLYING TO BOTH SEXES

bayi/balan malay newborn baby (a few weeks old)
bayi/balan gujarra small baby (crawling)
bayi/balan jaja baby, young child
bayi/balan nyalngga child (any age up to puberty)

APPLYING TO MALES ONLY

bayi barrngan boy just before puberty
bayi rugun post-pubescent boy, not yet initiated
bayi muwarri initiated youth
bayi yara man (general term, applying to any age)
bayi bugiba old man

APPLYING TO FEMALES ONLY

balan burmbil girl just before puberty
balan nayi post-pubescent girl
balan balgari grown woman, old enough to have married and had children but not having done either yet
balan jugumbil woman (general term, applying to any age)
balan jambiba old woman

There was plenty of time, Juluji realised. Mandila was only *balan jaja*, a young child just able to run without falling over. He would not be allowed, by tribal law, to claim her as his own until she was *balan nayi*, a girl past puberty. But they could gaze longingly at each other. Mandila herself would look up at Juluji, knowing that he was her promised husband and watching him now start to grow tall and strong; and Juluji would in his turn gaze at Mandila and try to guess how her girlish features would develop into those of a woman. There is a verb in Jirrbal *ngilbin*, which describes someone looking lovingly at his or her promised spouse in pleasant anticipation. Juluji decided that it was a good word.

On the other side of the fire the dog stirred; it was a half-tame dingo that had been brought up from a pup by Juluji's father and helped him hunt *bayi mabi*, the tree-climbing kangaroo, *bayi barrngan*, the sand wallaby and even *balan gunduy*, the fast-striding cassowary. *Balan guda*, that was the name for 'dog', Juluji reflected. Why should it be *balan* when most animals, like men, were *bayi*.

Jirrbal has a system of genders, a little like French. Every noun must have a gender mark in front of it: *bayi barrngan* 'young teenage boy', but *balan burmbil* 'young teenage girl'.

Juluji thought of the gender markers. Jirrbal actually has four: *bayi* is 'masculine', used with any noun referring to a human male; *balan* is 'feminine' for referring to a human female; *balam* is 'edible', used with nouns that refer to some edible fruit or vegetable and the plants that bear them (but not meat); and *bala* is 'inanimate', used with such words as *diban* 'stone', *mungan* 'mountain', *guwal* 'language', and *jalgur* 'meat'.

But, Juluji pondered, there was more to it than this. The gender marker *balan* is used with nouns referring to women and also for anything to do with fire or water: *balan buni* 'fire', *balan yingginy* 'flying spark', *balan jilin* 'hot coals, charcoal' (Juluji poked the burning log that now warmed his feet), *balan burba* 'swamp', *balan yuramu* 'river'.

Juluji had learned the gender of each noun quite naturally in childhood. Once he started thinking about words, though, a few genders had seemed to need explanation. Why is the sun *balan garri*, with female gender, while the moon is *bayi gagara*, masculine? Then Juluji remembered the story his mother had told—that the sun was believed to be a woman and the moon her husband. Of course, that was the reason.

Most animals, he knew, are *bayi*, like men. But nearly all birds are *balan*. Juluji had broached this with his uncle, who told him that birds are believed to be the spirits of dead human females. That is why they are *balan*, like a woman. Fishes are

PRONUNCIATION OF ABORIGINAL WORDS

b, d, g, m, n, l, y and w are pronounced very much as in English.

ng is a single sound. It occurs only at the end of a syllable in English—the single sound after the vowel in 'sing'. One way of learning how to say a word like *nga*, 'yes' in Jirrbal, is to begin with sing, add a, and on repetition gradually drop off the si-. Try saying *singa*, *singa*, *jinga*, *nga*. Unlike the English word 'finger', there is no hard g sound in *nga*.

ny is a single sound, like n and y pronounced simultaneously; it is quite similar to the sound in the middle of the English word 'onion' (and identical to ñ in Spanish).

j is like d and y pronounced simultaneously, a sharper sound than that in the English word 'judge'.

rr is a trilled or rolled r, as in Scottish pronunciation.

r is very close to the Australian pronunciation of r in a word such as 'arrow'.

i is pronounced like the vowel in 'bit'.

u is pronounced like the vowel in 'took'.

a is pronounced like the vowel in 'ban'.

Each vowel should be pronounced carefully and distinctly 'they should never be reduced to the vowel sound in English 'the', for instance).

GENDER CLASSES IN JIRRBAL

<i>bayi</i>	<i>balan</i>	<i>balam</i>	<i>bala</i>
men	women	edible fruits	trees and other plants
most animals	dog	and vegetables	with no edible parts
	most birds	(and plants	meat
most fishes	harmful fishes	bearing them)	body parts
moon	sun		geographical features
etc.	fire		language
	water		inanimate things such
	etc.		as stone, wind



Horned basket (bicornual) of lawyer-cane, with ochre decoration. These distinctive pointed-base baskets were made only in the Cairns—Cardwell rainforest region.

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all *bayi* except for a couple: the stone fish is *balan janggan* and the toad fish is *balan jurungun*. 'Those two are dangerous, they can do you an injury,' Juluji's father had explained, 'so they have to be *balan*, to set them off from the other fishes, the kind that are just good to eat, which are all *bayi*.'

Most things about genders, like most things about life, Juluji had decided, did have an explanation. But not quite everything. Why was a dog, *balan guda*, always in the feminine class? He didn't know.

Every noun has just one gender, except those words that describe young children before they are old enough for anyone to worry about differences in sex. For as long as he could remember, Juluji had been *bayi nyalngga*, 'child', the *bayi* showing that he was a boy. His sister had been *balan nyalngga*, 'girl child'. But now he was *bayi barrngan*: that was a word that could only take *bayi*, showing that he had finally started on the course that would lead him to becoming a man, *bayi muwarri*, someone who was privy to ancient secrets and joined in all tribal decision-making.

Juluji's mother muttered something in her sleep and turned over. Soon everyone would be awake.

Julujulu ngaja wurrali-nyu
river penda tree I [subject] become as one with—PRESENT TENSE
I become as one with the river penda tree [my totem]

Maybaja ngaja wurrali-nyu
crocodile I [subject] become as one with—PRESENT TENSE
I become as one with the crocodile [my totem]

Juluji decided to start the day properly. He stood, stretched up high and, proudly extended his arms like the branches of a tree. '*Julujulu ngaja wurralinyu*.' Juluji spoke these words into the breeze that fanned the final embers of last night's fire. *Julujulu*, the river penda tree, was Juluji's totem, the tribal emblem after which he had been named. *Wurralinyu*, that was a verb Juluji loved to pronounce. It means 'I become as one with my totem'. Juluji said these words again: 'I am now a river penda tree, tall and strong.' Juluji had seen men strengthen themselves in this way before going into battle, invoking the name of their totem, and drawing courage and resolve from it.

Indeed, Juluji's father had told him of one man whose totem was *bayi maybaja*, the crocodile. He would bathe in the river not far from where it entered the sea and shout, '*Maybaja ngaja wurralinyu*', identifying himself as a crocodile, *maybaja*. And the real crocs swimming around in that river would never attack him because, so the story went, he had called out his crocodile totem, turned himself into it for protection. Juluji shivered. He would not want to trust belief quite that far.

His mother's eyes were now open. '*Yabu!*' he called out. '*Ngaja ngamir anyja*.' Juluji's stomach rumbled. His mother's reply was a single word: '*Gilu*', meaning, 'later on today'. Well, at least the black bean would be ready to eat in a few hours.

Yabu! Ngaja ngamir anyja
mother I [subject] hungry now
Mother! I'm hungry now.

It was not very helpful, when you felt hungry, to be told that food was being prepared: it could take all one day and that night and another day and the next night before black bean, *mirrany*, was ready. First the nuts had to be shelled, then they were placed in heaps in a ground oven, covered with leaves and sand and a fire lit on top, so that the nuts were almost steamed. This might take a whole day. After that, they would be sliced up very fine using a sharp snail-shell, and put in dilly-bags in a running stream for a day or two, with a steady spray of water projected on to them through a funnel of rolled ginger leaves.

Mirrany was such an important food! Some packets of prepared black bean (each perhaps a metre cube), were wrapped in leaves and buried in moist sand near the river as food reserves for the seasons ahead. The location of each food supply might be marked by a distinctive pile of stones; it could remain buried for six months or more until the middle of winter. All the tribes that Juluji knew of ate black bean, though they did not all call it by the same name. It was *ganyjur* in Girramay, the language of the next tribe south. Juluji's mother had originally been Girramaygan before she married his father and turned to speaking Jirrbal.

Juluji mused on the differences between the languages of these two tribes. Most words in Girramay were the same as those in Jirrbal—*buran* 'look', *miyandanyu* 'laugh', *ngamban* 'listen, understand'—but not 'eat'. Jirrbal used just one word, *jangganyu* 'eat', whether it was possum, black bean or jewfish that was being consumed. In contrast, Girramay had many different words: *nanban* for eating fruit or vegetables, *burnyjan* for eating the flesh of a land animal and *rubinyu* for eating fish: three words, where Jirrbal made do with one. Girramay even had a special word, *majan*, for sucking the honey from sugar bag made by a native bee and then chewing the honeycomb. Here Jirrbal just used *bajan*, which meant 'bite' in both languages.



Black bean
(*Castanospermum australe*)
called *mirrany* in Jirrbal.
This was a staple food,
although it required long
preparation (cooking and
leaching) to render it edible.
Discarded *mirrany* shells
were used as toy boats by
Jirrbal children and floated
down the river.

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GIRRAMAY AND JIRRBAL IN WORDS FOR EATING

Girramay	Jirrbal
<i>nanban</i> eat fruit and vegetables	} <i>jangganyu</i> 'eat'
<i>burnyjan</i> eat meat	
<i>rubinyu</i> eat fish	
<i>bajan</i> bite	} <i>bajan</i> 'bite and consume sugar bag'
<i>majan</i> consume sugar bag	

Water and honey were carried by the Jirrbalngan people in bark bags called *nuba*. Bark was stripped from a suitable tree, warmed over a fire to make it soft and pliable, then bent over, the edges being sewn with strips of lawyer-cane and plastered over with wax, to make the bag waterproof.



Juluji's mother came back from the stream with some fresh bubbling water in her bark carrier, *nuba*. Juluji wanted to talk to her about all these words. 'Yabu,' he began, and then stopped. Juluji had noticed the mother of Mandila, his promised wife, come into the clearing. Mandila's mother was his *waymin* (mother-in-law) and Juluji knew how he must behave to such a relative. She must be given the highest respect. No man could look at his *waymin*, nor speak directly to her. If he spoke to anyone else while she was within earshot, a special style of speech must

be used, a style called *Jalnguy*. Juluji knew a good deal of *Jalnguy* but he was still a little shy of using it. The most straightforward course—and also the most respectful—was simply to remain silent until his *waymin* had departed.

But he could listen. His *waymin*, catching sight of Juluji, had also to talk in *Jalnguy*, the need for respect being entirely reciprocal.

Waymin said, 'Nganaji gabirbin.'

'Jilbu, ganba dirraba yulmigu,' Juluji's mother answered.

TRANSLATION OF WHAT JULUJI'S WAYMIN SAID IN THE RESPECTFUL SPEECH STYLE, JALNGUY, INTO THE EVERYDAY SPEECH STYLE, GUWAL, AND INTO ENGLISH

<i>Jalnguy style</i>	<i>nganaji</i>	<i>gabir-bi-n</i>		
<i>Guwal style</i>	<i>nganaji</i>	<i>ngamir-bi-n</i>		
	we all [subject]		hungry—BECOME—PRESENT TENSE	
	We've all grown hungry			
<i>Jalnguy style</i>	<i>Jilbu,</i>	<i>ganba</i>	<i>dirraba</i>	<i>yulmi-gu</i>
<i>Guwal style</i>	<i>yimba</i>	<i>gilu</i>	<i>mirrany</i>	<i>janggay-gu</i>
	nothing	later on today	black bean	eat—POTENTIAL
	There's nothing now, but later on today some black b ready to be eaten.			

All nouns, verbs and adjectives are different between the respectful speech style, *Jalnguy*, and the everyday style, *Guwal*; but pronouns, endings on words and the rules governing order and structure are the same in the two styles.

Juluji understood this exchange. Pronouns such as *nganaji* 'we all' did not change between the respectful style, *Jalnguy*, and the everyday speech style, *Guwal*. (*Guwal* was the way one would speak if no taboo relation were within earshot.) *Gabir* is the *Jalnguy* word for *ngamir* hungry, *yulmigu* corresponds to the *Guwal* *janggaygu* 'eat', *dirraba* to *mirrany* 'black bean' and *jilbu* to *yimba* 'no, nothing'.

Soon the whole camp was awake, fetching water, gathering together bags and boomerangs and bark blankets. Chattering together about plans for what had to be done that day.

There was a cry of joy from Juluji's mother. His father had returned carrying two wallabies, all ready to be cooked and eaten.

'We expected you last night,' his mother said, half-reprovingly.

Juluji listened carefully to his father's reply. 'Ngali yilgan gulu mabin bulganda.'

<i>ngali</i>	<i>yilgan</i>	<i>gulu mabin</i>
We two [subject] get almost to a place not cross river		
<i>bulgan-da</i>		
big (river)—AT		
The two of us couldn't get to this place, we were unable to cross the swollen river.		

He had used the word *yilgan* which means 'get almost to a place but not quite reach it'. They had not been able to cross the river at the usual place, his father explained, because floodwaters had come down from the tablelands, and it had been too late and too dark the previous night to find some other crossing place.

There was a younger man with Juluji's father, someone from another group of the tribe. Juluji recognised him as a cousin of some sort, someone he had not seen for a good while.

Father now used the verb *nyalan*: 'tell someone what relationship another person is to them'. Turning to Juluji he said, '*Ngaja nginungu bayi nyalan wuribu*,' meaning, 'I'm telling you that this man is your *wuribu*'.

ngaja nginungu bayi nyalan wuribu
I [subject] to you him tell about relationship potential son-in-law
I'm telling you that he is your *wuribu*.

Juluji nodded and had begun to tell father of his hunger and of the black bean that would not be ready for some hours yet, but now they could have a feed of wallaby—when he was stopped by a parental frown.

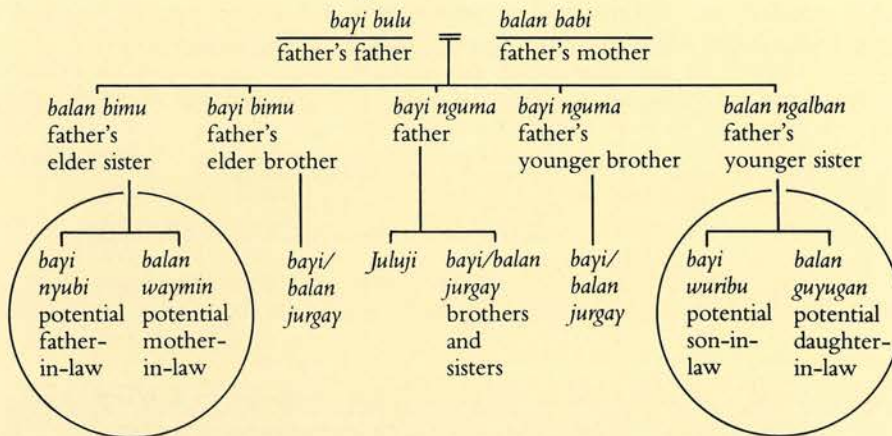
Juluji's father looked hard at him. 'Didn't you hear what I said? This is your *wuribu*. You're *bayi barrngan* now, my son, close to being a man. You must show respect. Talk Jalnguy when your *wuribu* is here, and he must speak the same in your presence.'

Oh! Juluji was suddenly overwhelmed by shame and embarrassment. He hid his face in his hands.

His father placed an arm across Juluji's shoulder. 'It's all right, you will soon learn. Come, let me explain it to you.'

Father squatted down at a flat stretch of the sand that lined the river, and drew with a stick.

PART OF THE JIRRBAL KINSHIP SYSTEM



A circle is drawn around those relatives in whose presence Juluji would have to use the respectful speech style, Jalnguy. In all other circumstances he would use the everyday speech style, Guwal.

Exactly the same principles apply through the mother's relatives. The children of the mother's younger sister (called *balan yabu*, the same as mother) and of mother's older sister (*balan mugunan*) are *jurgay*, and count as equal to one's own brothers and sisters. The children of mother's elder brother (*bayi mugu*) are *bayi nyubi*, potential father-in-law and *balan waymin*, potential mother-in-law. The children of mother's younger brother (*bayi gaya*) are *bayi wuribu*, potential son-in-law, and *balan guyugan*, potential daughter-in-law.

'Here you are, and here am I, your father, *nguma*. And your brothers and sisters, they are all *jurgay*. Now here is my younger brother—he is also *nguma* to you; if anything happened to me, he is the person who would look after you. His children are also your *jurgay*. Over on this side, here is my elder brother, the one who you call *bayi bimu*. His children are once again your *jurgay*, just like brothers and sisters.

'That much is easy. But now you must listen carefully so that you may know which language to use on what occasion, according to our ancient laws, so as not to give offence.'

Juluji squatted attentively, eyes fixed on father's drawing in the sand.

'My sisters' children are the people in whose presence you speak Jalnguy. Look, I will draw circles around them—here, and here. But you must take care to distinguish the children of my younger sister and those of my elder sister.

'See here, my elder sister is *balan bimu* to you. Now her daughter will be your *waymin* and her son your *nyubi*. *Waymin* is someone who could be a mother-in-law, and *nyubi* is a potential father-in-law. The daughter of a *waymin* or *nyubi* will be your *bulgu*, someone who could be promised to you in marriage.

'You will call my elder sister's daughter *waymin* "mother-in-law", and she must call you *wuribu* "son-in-law". Each of you must talk only in the respectful language Jalnguy when the other is within earshot.

'Now,' father continued, as Juluji furrowed his brow in concentration, 'my young sister is your *ngalban*. And her daughter will be *guyugan*; her son your *wuribu*. They are "daughter-in-law" and "son-in-law" to you. Your children, in the fullness of time, may marry these relatives.

'Here!' Juluji's father beckoned to the young man who had helped him spear the wallabies. 'This man is my younger sister's son, your *wuribu*. Your daughter is someone whom he may marry, according to our law. He calls you *nyubi*, "father-in-law", since you are his mother's elder brother's child.'

Juluji nodded, and, aware that his *wuribu* was still within earshot, replied in Jalnguy to his father. '*Ngaja nginuna digirrjulgamban*' ('I understand you').

Jalnguy style:	<i>ngaja</i>	<i>nginuna</i>	<i>digirr-julgamba-n</i>
Guwal style:	<i>ngaja</i>	<i>nginuna</i>	<i>ngamba-n</i>
	I [subject]	you [object]	understand—PRESENT TENSE
	I understand you.		

'That is good.' Father smiled in approval. 'There is more to it. Your mother's mother's younger brother's daughter is also someone whom you may marry. But we have had enough of a lesson for today. Now, be off with you, fetch some wood for the fire, then we can cook this fine wallaby and all share in a feast.'

Juluji wandered off, thinking about the diagram his father had sketched in the sand. It really did explain so many things about the way life was organised. Whom he could marry. Which relatives he must show particular deference to: those were the people who demanded the use of the Jalnguy speech style.

Juluji thought of *dirradirra*, of words. Everything had a different name in Jalnguy. 'Tree' was *bala yugu* in the everyday language style, Guwal, but *bala dandu* in Jalnguy. If Juluji were speaking to anyone about a tree and a *waymin* or *nyubi* or *guyugan* or *wuribu* were within hearing distance, he would have to say *dandu*; otherwise the word was simply *yugu*.

Words in Jalnguy style	Words in Guwal style	Meaning
<i>bala dandu</i>	<i>bala yugu</i>	tree, wood
<i>balan yibay</i>	<i>balan buni</i>	fire
<i>balan jujamu</i>	<i>balan bana</i>	water

'Fire' was *balan buni* in Guwal but *balan yibay* in Jalnguy. *Bayi* and *balan*, those little words that marked the gender of a noun, were the same both in Guwal and Jalnguy. 'Water' would be *balan jujamu* in Jalnguy, *balan bana* in Guwal. Juluji stopped and listened to the sound of a tiny spring coursing over a bed of pebbles.

Then there was a different sound. Juluji stiffened. Was that the howl of a wild dingo? He concentrated on the sound, and smiled to himself. No, nothing so frightening. But he must take care to tread very quietly.

He had stumbled across a mid-morning tryst. The sound that echoed through that patch of forest was a song of the Burran style, a love song, a man pledging his affection to his lady, expressing his longing for her. Juluji recognised the voices: two people who were not even in the right relationship to marry, and each was in any case married to someone else. Well, there could be no trouble if nobody heard about it. It would be most prudent for Juluji to tiptoe away and forget he had overheard anything at all.

But the boy stood entranced at the light rhythmic beat made by banging a length of lawyer-cane, *baygal*, on a smoothly polished *gugulu* stick which was made from the hard *jidu* tree, and the voice, soaring high in that urgent message.

Juluji concentrated on what he heard. The song had four lines. The first and third lines in a Burran song have six syllables, and the second and fourth have three syllables, a metrical pattern which is as fixed as that of a sonnet.

Here is a typical song of the Burran style, which was sung by George Watson (Nyiyija) of the Dulgubarra tribe in 1964. It relates how a man in love was lying on the sand watching young girls including his own true love swimming in the sea, jumping into the waves that come bursting onto the beach.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>jaburr banda burul</i>
foam burst spray | 2. <i>bunggu-gu</i>
wave—TO |
| 3. <i>jinbi yagun-dayi</i>
jump to these [waves]:—UP | 4. <i>nayili</i>
teenage girls |
- The teenage girls are jumping high into these waves, as the foam and spray burst around them.

Note that the first and third lines contain six syllables each, and the second and fourth lines three syllables each. When George Watson performed it he sang the four lines in strict order (1, 2, 3, 4) eight times over, and then finished on line 1.

Burran songs are used for strong emotional messages between adults: love, jealousy, or anger. The lines are sung one—two—three—four in definite order, sometimes twenty times over, without stopping for breath. The voice will suddenly become loud and then as abruptly go quiet again—a special trick of the throat that has to be acquired by any Burran practitioner.

Juluji was more familiar with corroboree songs, of the Gama style. A number of these were performed at a kind of concert whenever different tribal groups came together. A group of men painted themselves with white clay, with charcoal, with yellow clay and with the red colour that comes from baking yellow clay. As the

singer describes the antics of some bird or animal, of men hunting or women gathering food, so the dancers mimic the actions.

Gama songs are accompanied by two boomerangs, each held at the middle with the ends clapped together. Each song has two lines, sung over and over with a break for breath after about every third line. Gama songs also have a strict metre: each line must be of eleven syllables. The first part of each line, which can consist of either one or two words, has five syllables. Then there is a word of two syllables, and finally a word of four syllables.

This song of the Gama style was recorded at a corroboree held at Murray Upper, by the Jirrbalngan and Girramaygan people on 30 November 1963. The singer was Jimmie Murray (Girnyjany). Half a dozen painted male dancers mimed the actions of the baby emu and its parent as described in the words of the song. Accompaniment was provided by Jimmie Murray's own tapped boomerangs, and by his wife, Mary Ann Murray (Minyajanggay) banging a skin drum stretched across between her thighs.

1. *yinyji gulgiri guri jindar-ma-ngu*
emu down prettily striped chick stripes—MAKE-ING
2. *waga ngarba-nyu galu gabirigu*
shin jump with fright—PRESENT out there emu

The emu chick with prettily striped down, which has been made to be striped, its legs jump with fright out there.

Note that each line contains eleven syllables—four words consisting of two, three, two and four syllables. Jimmie Murray sang them in order (1, 2) nine times, and then finished on line 1. He took breaths after the third, sixth, tenth and fourteenth lines.

Juluji himself liked to sing Gama songs to his little sister. His favourite was one about an emu strutting about, proud of its pretty feathers, followed by an emu chick imitating every move its parent made, with the same mincing gait. Then the chick is startled by some sound and jumps away in fright.

The Burran song finished amid laughter and Juluji heard sounds of a more serious nature. He moved away silently, taking care not to step on any twigs or leaves that might crackle underfoot.

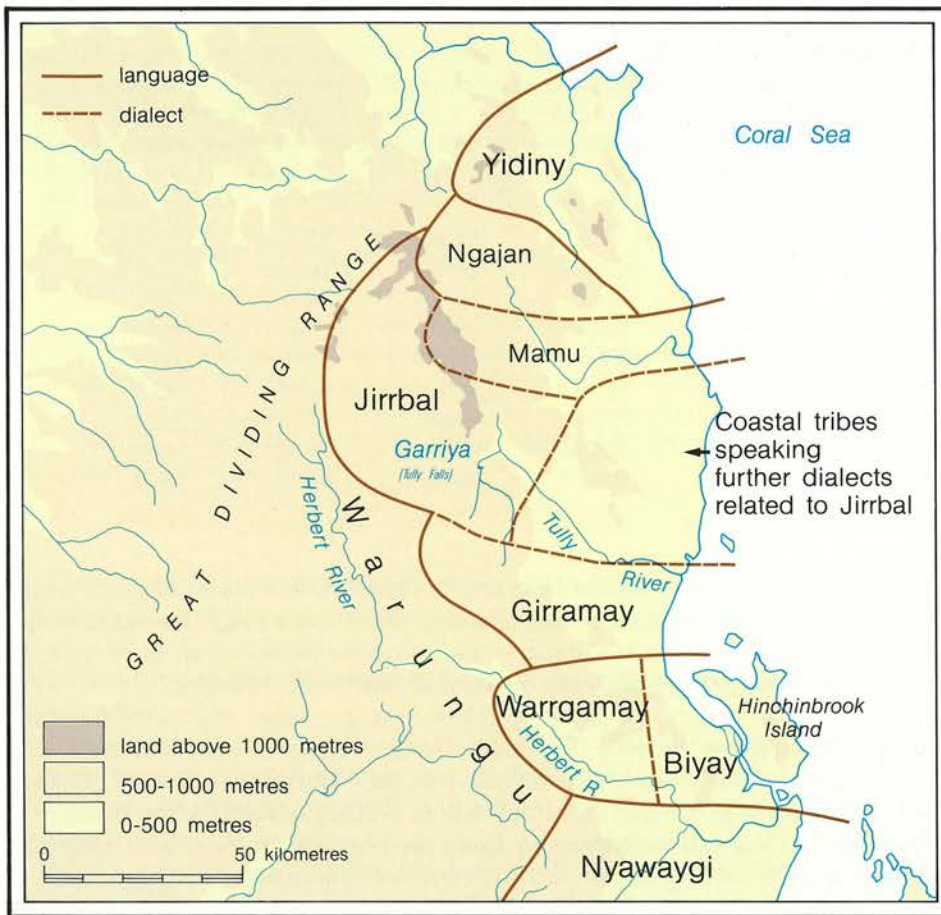
What had he been sent for? Oh yes, firewood. Not that any old sticks would do for cooking wallaby; a few pieces of *jinjila*, Moreton Bay ash, and some bits of *gujunggurru*, bonewood. Yes, that should be fine. Juluji's arms were so full that he could scarcely see in front of him as he came back into the clearing.

It seemed a different place from the quiet, drowsy camp he had left just an hour or so before. There was a sense of excitement; voices were more animated, higher-pitched.

Juluji threw his load of wood down at the fireplace. The wallabies hung over a branch nearby, now seemingly forgotten. Everyone clustered around a log at the far end of the clearing.

Strangers had arrived, messengers from other tribes. And not just one, but two, had arrived from different directions with the same message, coincidentally within half an hour of each other.

Juluji's sister explained that first the Warrgamaygan man had emerged from the forest into the clearing. He had come from the big river to the south that was later



Jirrbal and surrounding tribes.
JOAN GOODRUM

to be named the Herbert by Europeans. In keeping with convention, the stranger had halted on the edge of the settlement and waited there for a while until someone had been sent to invite him into the camp. He was found to be bearing a message-stick—an invitation to a corroboree on the Herbert River in ten days.

No sooner had this message been delivered than a Mamu man arrived from the north, announcing a corroboree on the tableland in twelve days. Each message-stick bore a number of notches, one for each day until the planned meeting. It would take some days to reach either destination.

But which should they attend? The argument was still good-natured at the time Juluji returned, but only just. His mother was vociferously in favour of going to the corroboree in the south; her parents and brothers from the Girramaygan tribe would all be going there. Indeed, her own mother had originally come from the Warrgamaygan and Juluji's mother would be able to see her *ngagi*, her mother's father. He would be great-grandfather to Juluji, and Juluji should call him *daman*, mother explained.

Juluji's father was voting the other way. He had a quarrel to settle with a Ngajanji man from the tribe beyond the Mamu-speaking Dulgubarra. And he also looked forward to spearing some pademelon wallabies, *bayi bunggil*, which abounded on the tableland.

The argument continued in many dialects. As a rule, each person spoke in his own tribal speech and could be understood by the others. Juluji listened and tried to assess the differences he heard.

This short table illustrates some of vocabulary differences between the different tribal speeches. Note that Ngajan, Mamu, Jirrbal and Girramay have most words the same or similar—they are, in effect, mutually intelligible dialects of a single 'language'. But Warrgamay shows many differences and is in fact a quite distinct language (its grammar is also very different from Ngajan—Mamu—Jirrbal—Girramay grammar).

	Ngajan	Mamu	Jirrbal	Girramay	Warrgamay
body	<i>yumaa</i>	<i>yumal</i>	<i>yumal</i>	<i>yumal</i>	<i>gambara</i>
ear	<i>manga</i>	<i>manga</i>	<i>manga</i>	<i>garba</i>	<i>bina</i>
eye	<i>gayga</i>	<i>gayga</i>	<i>gayga</i>	<i>gayga</i>	<i>gayga</i>
foot	<i>jina</i>	<i>jina</i>	<i>jina</i>	<i>jina</i>	<i>bingany</i>
firefly	<i>bulaa</i>	<i>bulal</i>	<i>bulal</i>	<i>bulal</i>	<i>bulal</i>
hit	<i>baaga</i>	<i>balga</i>	<i>balga</i>	<i>balga</i>	<i>burba</i>
weep	<i>dunggarra</i>	<i>dunggarra</i>	<i>dunggarra</i>	<i>dunggarra</i>	<i>yimirri</i>
return	<i>nguuba</i>	<i>ngurba</i>	<i>banaga</i>	<i>banaga</i>	<i>bana</i>

Girramay was the most similar language to Jirrbal. As European linguists would later assess the relationship, they are effectively dialects of a single language. A few words differ—'ear' is *garba* in Girramay and *manga* in Jirrbal—but most coincide. 'Eye' is *gayga*, 'foot' is *jina* and 'body' is *yumal* in both tribal tongues.

Mamu was fairly easy for Juluji to follow—it is another dialect of the same language (as linguists employ this term), only slightly more divergent. The messenger spoke more slowly than Juluji's people, slurring his words. He used *ngurba* where both Jirrbal and Girramay would employ *banaga*, for 'go home'.

Juluji's father was still expostulating about the Ngajanji warrior, with whom he intended to get even. Ngajan is the most northerly and most divergent dialect of the Girramay–Jirrbal–Mamu–Ngajan language.

'You ever hear those fellows talk?' he enquired of the assembly at large. 'They talk the same words as we do, but they drag them out. We say *yumal* for body, but Ngajanji pronounce it *yumaa*. And when they talk about hitting a person, it's *baaga*, instead of *balga*.'

'No, we won't go that way.' Juluji's mother found a new line of argument. 'There are too many hills to climb. Tire you out. Better to go down the coast to Warrgamaygan country.'

'And have to cross all those creeks, full of crocodiles?' father responded.

Meanwhile Juluji had got into conversation with the Warrgamaygan messenger. It turned out that he had been speaking Girramay, a dialect of which he knew a little and which Juluji's people could understand.

'My own language is too different,' he told Juluji, 'only one or two people here are able to make it out.' Then he spoke a few sentences, collapsing in mirth at Juluji's total lack of comprehension.

'See,' he explained to the boy. 'Where you say *yumal* "body", in Warrgamay the word is *gambara*. And for *jina*, "foot", my people say *bingany*. Some words are the same—we have both got *gayga* "eye"—but only a few. That's really a different language. You can learn it all right. Any person can learn a language, but you've got to work at it a bit. And you, Jirrbal boy, you won't understand my Warrgamay unless you do work hard at it.'

Both visitors were hungry. Juluji's mother pronounced the black bean to be ready. She placed the vegetable on huge ginger leaves and everyone ate. For a few minutes there was quiet in the camp.

Most of the staple vegetable foods of the Jirrbalngan and Warrgamaygan tribes needed lengthy preparation, like the *mirrany* (black bean, *Castanospermum australe*) described here.

The Norwegian zoologist Carl Lumholtz lived among the Warrgamaygan tribe from August 1882 until July 1883. By the end of this period Lumholtz was eating native food, including black pine (*Podocarpus amarus*) which is called *jubula* in both Jirrbal and Warrgamay (Lumholtz spelt it 'tobola'). On page 217 of his book *Among Cannibals* (1889), Lumholtz described how he once ate 'tobola' before it had been fully cured, and became ill as a result.

In the evening Yokkai prepared tobola, and ate with all his might. I also ate half a dozen roasted kernels, but I neglected to beat them before doing so. An hour afterwards I was sick and chilly, and felt very ill. I feared I had taken malarial fever, but Yokkai at once understood that the cause of my indisposition was the fact that I had eaten the tobola without beating it. He was right, and the next morning I was well again.

Then activity resumed. Juluji's father announced that he would cook the wallabies properly. It was not often that there were two visitors at the same time from such different tribes, and they deserved a feast. He used the verb *dangaba* 'cook in a ground oven Kapamari-style, with the meat well covered by a top layer of hot ashes'.

Father began his task. First he singed off the fur. Then he slit open the belly with a sharp piece of quartz, to extract the wallaby's guts. The liver and kidneys were roasted on the open fire, providing titbits until the main carcass had been cooked through.

Juluji's paternal grandfather, his *bulu*, beckoned the boy. *Bulu* held a stone tomahawk. 'Come,' he invited, 'we will go and search for fat, succulent grubs. If we're going to have a feast, we might as well do it properly, eh?'

Grandfather and grandson set off along a well-trodden path, taking care not to touch *balan dungan*, wild stinging trees or *balan bumbilan*, stinging nettles.

The old man showed the boy how to look for sawdust on the ground near the right sort of tree, a sign that grubs were boring into the wood. 'Here,' he pointed to a rotten log. 'Here is *bayi jambun*. Or I think so.'

NAMES OF TYPES OF EDIBLE GRUBS, IN GUWAL AND JALNGUY SPEECH STYLES

Guwal (everyday style)

bayi jambun long wood grub
bayi mandija grub in milky pine bark
bayi gija grub in candlenut tree
bayi bugulum small round bark grub
bayi gaban grub in acacia tree

Jalnguy (respectful style)

bayi jamuy edible grub

Juluji licked his lips in anticipation. '*Bulu*,' he asked, 'there are many kinds of grub, I mean those that can be eaten. How many altogether?'

'Well, let me see.' Juluji's grandfather welcomed the opportunity to sit down and get his breath back before starting to chop out the grubs. 'There is *bayi mandija*, a long thin grub with a big head which lives in the bark of *bala bubarrila*, the milky pine tree. *Bayi gija* in *bala gaburra*, the candlenut tree. Then *bayi bugulum*, a little round

grub that eats only bark. And *bayi gaban* is a brown grub that lives in the acacia tree, *bala gaban*. In that case, the grub and the tree have the same name.'

'How many words are there for grub in Jalnguy, the language that I must use when a mother-in-law is present?' Juluji asked.

'Ah!' Juluji's grandfather stood up, swinging the tomahawk to test its weight. 'Jalnguy does not have as many words as the Guwal style, you know that. There is just one word, *bayi jamuy*, for *bayi jambun*, the large wood grub, *bayi mandija*, the milky pine grub, *bayi gija*, the candlenut tree grub, *bayi bugulum*, the little round bark grub, and *bayi gaban*, the acacia tree grub. You don't have to be so specific when a *waymin* or *guyugan* is within hearing: it is more respectful to be vague in these circumstances.'

Grandfather made a gesture to Juluji to stand aside, saying, 'Ngaja bala yugu banyi.' The verb he used, *banyi*, was another of Juluji's favourites. It means 'by a quick stroke embed a tomahawk in a rotten log, then lift the tomahawk and log by the tomahawk-handle and bash the log onto a convenient tree so that it splits into two, and the grubs can be extracted from the interior of the log'.

ngaja *bala* *yugu banyi*
I (subject) INANIMATE wood split
I'll split the wood.

'See, there are only three little *jambun* in this log. We can eat these now.' Juluji's grandfather popped two wriggling yellow grubs into his own mouth and held the largest out to Juluji. 'But from the next tree we must take grubs back to camp. Here, you chop this log.' And then Juluji's grandfather added, 'Nginda bayi jambun gibi wayminu.' He was warning Juluji, 'You must provide some grubs for your *waymin*, the mother of your promised wife.'

nginda bayi *jambun* *gibi* *waymin-u*
you MASCULINE long grub provide mother-in-law—FOR
You provide grubs as food for your potential mother-in-law.

The verb *gibi* means 'provide food for your relatives'. But its most important use is to describe a boy bringing home meat and grubs for his wife-to-be and especially for her mother, his *waymin*. For it is only after he has shown himself to be a reliable provider for these kin that he is allowed to claim his wife. Thus, any young man will *gibi* for his *waymin* with an ostentatious show, drawing attention to his prowess.

Juluji's mind still ran on words. 'Bulu,' he enquired, 'how would that be in Jalnguy? How would I say *gibi* if *waymin* could hear me?'

VERBS OF GIVING IN GUWAL AND JALNGUY STYLES

<i>Guwal (everyday style)</i>	<i>Jalnguy (respectful style)</i>
<i>wuga</i> give	<i>jayma</i>
<i>gibi</i> provide food for relatives especially for promised wife, her mother and family.	<i>jaymajayma</i>

Bulu thought for a moment. 'There isn't a separate word. *Gibi* is a sort of giving. Now *wuga* "give", what is that in Jalnguy?'

'In Jalnguy you say *jayma* "give",' *Juluji* responded.

'That's right. And *gibi* is a special kind of giving. You make a show of it. So where you'd say *gibi* in the plain language style, in Jalnguy it is *jaymajayma*. Double the word to emphasise what a showy type of giving you are talking about.'

Several more caches of grubs were uncovered. The old man and the young boy carried home a good supply in dilly-bags slung across their backs, with straps around the forehead. The grubs were lightly roasted on the edge of the fire and then handed out to their kin, according to the conventions of *Jirrbal* life.

Juluji now played for a while with his baby sister, aware that such behaviour would soon have to cease when he left his mother's side and went with the other *barrngan* boys. Grandfather sat weaving thin strips of lawyer-vine into a *bala wungarr*, the long wide-mouthed basket used for catching eels.

Father uncovered one corner of his oven and poked at the wallabies with a sharp-pointed stick before pronouncing them ready to eat. Each person received an appropriate portion, according to his or her relationship to father. *Juluji*, to his joy, received his piece in a leaf that had wrapped the meat while cooking. It contained a mouthful of fatty wallaby gravy. He felt his stomach was about to burst. *Mirrany* (black bean), then *jambun* (long wood grubs) and then *barrngan* (wallaby) all in one day.

As they all lay around the fire, drowsy and full, grandfather told an ancient legend. *Juluji* had heard it before but each retelling brought a new understanding, because in the meantime he had learned more and more about tribal law and religion.

The story was about the origin of water. Once, in the creator days, in the time of *Jujaba*, all the people were animals. They had not yet assumed human shape. The blue-tongued lizard, *Banggarra*, had the only water in the world, which he secreted under a large flat stone. All the other animals had to chew *gulbira*, kangaroo grass, for the moisture it contained.

They said to *Banggarra*, 'Give us some water, we are thirsty!'

'No,' the cunning lizard replied. 'I haven't any. You chew *gulbira*, that's what I have to do.'

'But your moustache is wet,' they replied. 'You must have some water hidden away.' The lizard just turned away and grunted.

The story was told in *Jirrbal*, and all the animals spoke in *Jirrbal* except one. *Juluji* noticed for the first time that, as *bulu* told the story, the blue-tongued lizard spoke in *Girramay*. Making him belong to another tribe was a way of emphasising his villainous nature, the boy supposed.

The animals decided to follow *Banggarra* to see where he had hidden the water. *Gujila*, the short-nosed bandicoot, tried following him, and then *Midin*, the ringtail possum, took a turn. But *Banggarra* spied them and went off in another direction.

Finally, the smallest animal of all said he would try—*Galu*, the tiny mouse. The lizard was by now very cautious. He looked back to the left, but *Galu* hid on the right side of his tail. Then *Banggarra* looked back to the right, but *Galu* had now skipped to the left side of the lizard's tail.

Finally, *Banggarra* came to his secret hoard of water. He gently eased the flat stone a little to one side and began to drink. At this, *Galu* ran out and tipped the stone right off. '*Mali, mali, mali*,' he cried out, 'wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Here is water enough for us all!'

Hearing *Galu*'s call, *Jiwunyu* the swallow gathered up the water in its beak and flew low over that country, making rivers and creeks and lakes.



A long eel-catching basket, called *wungarr*.
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

‘That’s right,’ Juluji’s mother added. ‘It just shows that you’ve got to share things. No good ever came out of keeping something to yourself. It’ll catch up with you in the end, so you might as well share it out from the start, and be done with it.’

There was silence for a while; Juluji gazed into the fire. The stone that had hidden Banggarra’s water was still up there on the tableland, his father had said, in Warungu country. That was a different tribe, with another language, more different than even Warrgamay. It would be necessary to get permission from the Warungu people to go and visit Banggarra’s stone, but they could do it one day.

Then father spoke, addressing the Warrgamaygan man from the south. ‘What you told me earlier while we were cooking these wallabies. I think you should say it again, so that everyone can hear. It’s important news that may affect our lives here. I’d like to hear it once again, and everyone else should know what’s been happening over in your country.’

Guwuy spirit of a dead Aboriginal man; later extended also to cover white man
Gynggan spirit of a dead Aboriginal woman; later extended also to cover white woman

marrgin gun, a loan word into Warrgamay based on English ‘musket’
bambu egg, extended also to cover ‘musket shot’

bulugi cattle, a loan word based on English ‘bullock’

juul salt, a loan word into Warrgamay based on English word ‘salt’

The Warrgamaygan man sat bolt upright, his legs stretched out straight in front of him. He told of strange beings who had come into his tribal land. Their faces and hands were white. In fact, their whole bodies were white, but they covered up most of them with clothes, even when it was as hot as could be.

‘Those must be *Guwuy* and *Gynggan*, the ghosts of our ancestors come back to look after us,’ Juluji’s mother suggested.

‘That is what we thought at first,’ their visitor responded. ‘But now we are not so sure.’

‘Tell us about the strange weapons they carry,’ Juluji’s father encouraged.

‘There’s one they call *marrgin*. They put little *bambu* in, only they’re not real eggs, they’re harder than stone and shiny. Here!’ Rummaging in the bottom of his dilly-bag, the Warrgamaygan man produced a handful of musket shot. ‘They put this in the *marrgin*. Then they make some fire by pulling a handle. Not rubbing a stick round and round as we do. These white people—maybe they’re ghosts—they pull on the handle and that makes a spark of fire, and it sends this *bambu* hurtling on its way like a flash of lightning.’

‘It will kill a kangaroo?’ Bulu enquired.

‘It will do that all right. I’ve seen them kill plenty of kangaroos with a *marrgin*. But it will do much more. There are these huge animals the white-skinned people brought with them. They call them *bulugi*—each has enough flesh to feed about three tribes at once. When they need meat, these strangers who wear clothes kill a *bulugi*. The white-skinned people put a powder on the meat—something that tastes like sea water and which they call *juul*—and that keeps the meat for a long time.’

‘Sounds like a good thing. New animals to hunt, won’t hurt anyone,’ the Dulgubarra man ventured.

‘That’s what we thought,’ the Warrgamaygan emissary agreed, but continued with a grim look on his face. ‘We speared one of the *bulugi*. It took three hits, but



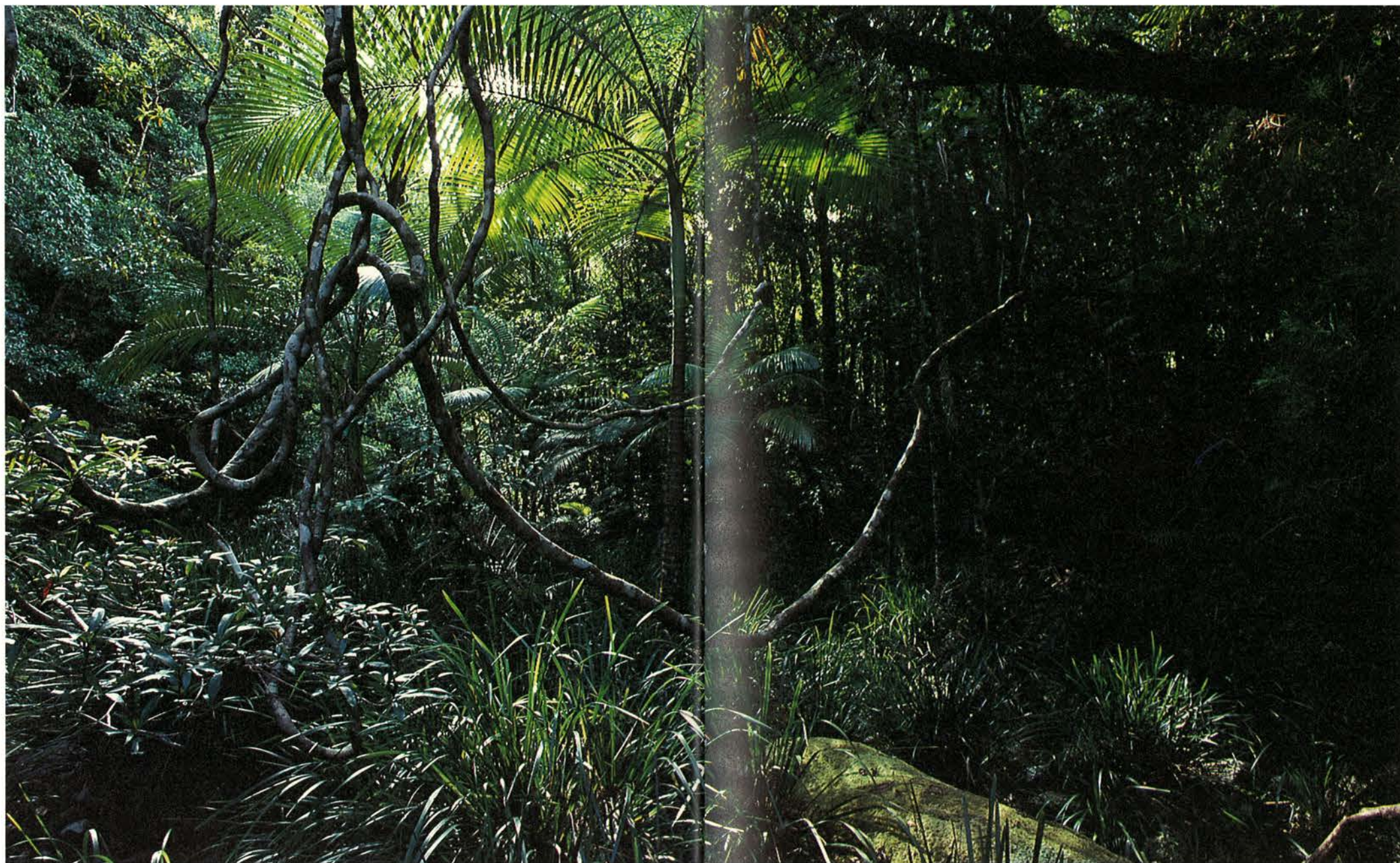
Painted softwood shield,
 northern Queensland
 rainforest.

MUSEUM OF VICTORIA



Warrgamaygan people, probably photographed about 1900. Nora Boyd (c 1880–1976), a member of the Biyay group of Warrgamaygan, thought that the shield on the left belonged to the Biyay (who lived on Hinchinbrook Island and around Halifax), the one in the middle was Nyawaygi (from Ingham down to Rollingstone), while the one on the right was Girramay (whose territory went from Cardwell, up the range to Kirrama station).

SOURCE UNKNOWN



Archontophoenix palms,
Daintree region, Queensland.
Photograph by Leo Meier.
WELDON TRANNIES

we did it all right. Plenty of good eating in that beast.'

There was a silence in the camp.

'What happened then?' Juluji's mother was almost afraid to ask the question.

'That's why I don't think they are our old people's spirits. Those white people pointed the *marrgin* at us and pulled the handle. They killed five men.' One hand was up, then the other, 'one woman, three children. Said all those *bulugi* belonged to them, we have no right to kill any.' They say they teach us a lesson not to steal.'

'So what are you going to do? Invite them to a corroboree? See who proves to be the strongest, in one to one combat, with spear and shield and sword?'

'We don't know what to do. They don't know the ways of this country. They

wouldn't come to any single combat. The old people were talking it over when I left. We don't know *what* to do. That's why they sent me to invite you to a corroboree. Maybe if we all put our heads together we can work out how to behave towards these strange white people. But they have one big advantage—those guns, *marrgin*. If we had something like *marrgin* to fight with, then we'd be a match for them. We'd be able to drive them out of our country, there's no doubt about that!'

Juluji's little sister had already fallen asleep. As he curled up by the fire next to his mother, he felt full and satisfied. But through this ran a streak of unease. Juluji wondered, as he sank into sleep, just what the future might bring.