

**Napurrŋ Gapu (Our Water)**  
**(English translation version by Waymamba Gaykamaŋu)**

Leonard Bowayŋu (LB)  
Raymond Bulanbula (RB)  
Clive Gaṭaṭawuy (CG)  
George Milaypuma (GM)  
Alfred Walpay (AW)

[00:18]

LB: This, Nilatjirriwa is a big billabong. When a big rain comes, the water fills up, but before the water was dry. In the middle, there's a little bit of water, in the middle. Dried up..... there's no rain, and then the water dries up. In the Rarranhdharr (dry and build up season). When there's a big rain, it was like this. The water I'm looking at. Just dry up half way, then the rain will come here. I am Gorryindi person. I and this one Clive (are Gorryindi people), and these other two (RB and GM) are my caretakers for me for this area at Nilatjirriwa. Gorryindi and Gamaṭaṅga are looking after this place. Gamaṭaṅga is taking care of this place as well. All the area around. Yes. You know, it's just ringitj (songlines) tells (which place belongs to who). And this place, gamunungu (clan and land design) lies here, and all of these my caretakers are looking after it.

[02:25]

RB: And this place is called Nilatjirriwa. And a tree fell down here, a totemic tree. The tree fell down and became a boomerang. It's just that we are telling you some surface stories about Gaṭigali' (boomerang), but it has another name. And these two (GM and AW) and I are the labour for this place and the other two (LB and CG) are land owners. This Nilatjirriwa. Other people are also the labour and land owners, like for this place. For this billabong, they are like a company for this. They have one ringitj (songline), they are together through ringitj (songline) and belong to one company, they are together.

LB: Gamaṭaṅga is involved and Birritjama is involved for this place.

[03:41]

RB: Long time ago old people used to use this water and soaked cycad nuts, food for them. And they used to eat it. But when the water became salty, they used to move to another place by canoe or by foot. They use to go. And people from there used to go across to Murrunga, chased for the water over there. At Murrunga it used to have permanent water, and is still there. Permanent water. But here the water is not permanent, Yolngu used to come and go. Over there they used to drink water at Boḍiya. They used to drink at Boḍiya, too much (water there). And these people used to go and drink water at Yirritja and Dhuwa place. Those Dhuwa and Yirritja people mix together, there and back. Over there became salty, over here became salty, all the same. They used to go across to Gaṭtji (a homeland near Ramingini) or maybe over there Murrunga.

CG: They were chasing water.

RB: But Yolŋu from here used to be living permanently.

CG: Still living here. Come back to this place

RB: It's sacred site, those places never be left behind. "This water is no good" they didn't say that. Or they never left the place, this was their land. They always stay here, never mind whether the water is salty or bad.

CD: They grew up here.

[05:58]

RB: Then we (current generation) saw them (old people) and started following them (old people) for this place at Nilatjirriwa and there at Boḍiya. The water (at Boḍiya) is the same (people always looked after and never left the water behind), where billabong lies, drinking and when it's finished, they used to dig up more (at Boḍiya), drinking.... finished, then come back (or go back to where they came from). And other stories are.... at Gädjaw the water is the same like this through the connection. Those are sacred sites (for Gorryindi), at Boḍiya and Gädjaw. They (Boḍiya and Gädjaw) got one foundation, but their totem is different. But we will do separate designs, but they are still one Gorryindi, they are all one group as Gorryindi.

RB: A lot of Yolŋu are living like the same.

[07:12]

LB: Birritjama and Gamaḷaṅga (connection of ringitj, songlines). And other places, where there's water like December, January, February, they used to live (olden days) by water (of Gädjaw, Boḍiya, Nilatjirriwa) and Walamaṅu people from this country, Walamaṅu Ṇurruwulu and Walamaṅu Binhdhalal, and Gamaḷaṅga, Gorryindi and Mälarra and Battjimurruṅu used to live. They used to drink water for hunting from here, over there at Bälma. Like in the Guṅmul (mid wet season), people used to drink water, but not much in the middle of Rarranhdharr (dry and build up season) they used to hunt in the Rarranhdharr season. In the middle of Rarranhdharr, they used to drink water at Yurrwi (Macasar well). As Raymond was saying, when the water was brackish, like both salty and fresh, brackish, people used to move and looking for water. And Gorryindi people were living with salt water and Walamaṅu Ṇulwurru living with salt water, Binhdhalal with brackish water and Gamaḷaṅga, and that water grew them up and they learned about this place. This is how they are living.

MG: They will never leave their land or place.

[09:00]

LB: They will never leave the place. Their places/lands are holding sacred sites, songlines and foundation. Foundation is there. All boundaries for either Dhuwa or Yirritja [i], Yothu-Yindi [ii] places mother and child interrelationship, songlines are there. That's how people live.

[09:31]

RB: This water is very full. This water is now fresh. They used to soak cycad nuts this time of the year. All old people from this land. Njuruwulu, Gorryindi, they are mother and child, and husband and wife relationship. Njuruwulu and Gorryindi and Binhdhalal, this is their place, there's Battjimurruṅu. A lot of Yolḷu walked through this place. And this is their water, and there at Yirritja's and Dhuwa's land. Two places where they soak cycad nuts. That's the place where they can soak cycad nuts, and get water to drink it. There's no other spared well, water hole for them. They get some water and drink it, and separately soak cycad nuts... NO, that's the only water hole they got, ONE.

[10:56]

CG: Temporarily people used to leave and come back to the same place. They used to come back for this place because this is where the ringitj (songlines) lies. They grew up here. People came from different places, left their home, came here, people (of this island) welcomed them to become family and they sat down together. They showed them water billabongs, so they could live and followed us. Like this.

LB: Are we going to see the water, and with what level of water we live? We will show them in the bush. At the airport, at the airport.

[11:50]

RB: Where are we finishing? Another thing... the boomerang is lying, Gorryindi's totem, and I and he (GM or AW) are caretakers. They are looking after this, no one will steal the design of this land. This place, this place is a little bit no good, but there are a lot of totemic beings. A big story is there, a lot.

CG: Nobody stays here or sleep, it's not allowed.

RB: Here people stayed here short time, ate cycad nuts and something else, then went. Get some water into a container, then go. Not allowed to camp in this area. Only the cycad nuts are the food for them in this area. You know, there place at the front, how the well is standing, another totemic being is living in the water. It's a little bit ok, that totemic being belongs here. It is not aggressive, maybe old people already rested it down, they hit the totemic being for living and made it (totemic being) harmless. Then they were living, sitting. land and people. They didn't fight. They were all in one group for the place and the water, and for the food. That' it.

[14:17]

GM: Today they are still looking after this place, people all are living down here, land owners. This is their land, they are still looking after. They will not forget about this place, these yothu-yindi people. Gorryindi and Gamaḷaṅga, and all these custodians, they will not forget about this, this is their land, long before this land was allocated them (for Gorryindi and Gamaḷaṅga). They are now staying here and looking after it, the place, like this. If the water was getting salty from the other side, they will still stay on. They used to go to Yirritja land (such as Macassar well), also they used to look after the land back here (Nilatjirriwa). Foundation and design of this place is telling (proclaiming) from this land, over at Boḍiya, at Gādjaw, and move over to all the islands, one of them is called Rāpuma. This is the path going from here to beyond there, for Gamaḷaṅga and Gorryindi. Gamaḷaṅga are the main

people and Gorryindi is joining with them. But it is for everyone, from here Nilatjirriwa. This is a water hole that they are looking after with two clan groups (Gorryindi and Gamalanga) and custodians. Birritjama is looking after this place from distance. This is their main design of the land. From here it goes beyond to Nilpaywa, over there to Rápuma and Gädjaw. And water holes are like that for those places. They used to sit down in the Guṇmul (mid wet season) season, a big freshwater, when the freshwater finishes and becomes salty, then they moved to another place. We used to live like that. They used to come back to Yirritja land, and at Yirritja land they used to sit and drink, and in the Guṇmul they used to come back. They never left this land.

CG: Underneath of the land (or country) there are designs of the land and songlines sitting together. Together. Songlines and design of the land. This is how our old people (ancestors) used to live, and still today we are doing the same. Today.

GM: Today, now they are sitting (living) like that. Looking after the place.

CG: When we die, we can get the same design of the land, then return back to the soil. They will bury us.

[17:20]

GM: We will look after it as we did before in the past. Long time ago, old people (ancestors) used to look after this group of people. They are passing onto others, so they can look after. "Here look after it", "here look after it." All the time. Now these people are holding onto this land (Nilatjirriwa) and Boḍiya water hole, and Gädjaw, Nilpaywa, and over there at Rápuma. These people are looking after those places. Gorryindi and Gamalanga. And Birritjana connect with them because this is the place created by the Galigali (boomerang). This is a sacred site for these people, clan. And these people are yothu-yindi [ii]. This story is what this place, billabong, water- Nilatjirriwa tells (proclaims).

[18:25]

LB: Yes that's right Ṇarritj (George Milay). This is another story, when people looking after the country, if the land owners pass away, then caretakers (djungaya) [ii, iii] will look after the land. Looking after. Or grand-children (märi-waṭaṅu, wayirri waṭaṅu)[iii, iv] will look after, or waku-waṭaṅu or yapa-waṭaṅu [iv]. When land owners pass away, they (other people) look after it all the time. Yolḷu do like this and everyone, everywhere. This is how we live, all people. We are living with that law. Looking after each other's lands together. Songlines meet each other. The land, songlines, connection of land design and family kins... there is one line and songline there. They (family line and songlines) come together. This is how we live. All these places have songlines and their own land designs. We, Yolḷu come together to where water holes are. (Gather) At where.... all the ancestral beings (creators) created for us. Like Dhuwa, all Dhuwa ancestral beings (creators) created, such as our totems. At Dhuwa places, we drink water from there, and we live like that.

GM: What is *waṅarr* in English, 'ancestors'?

LB: Yes.

GM: Our ancestors told us and laid foundation for Yolŋu. Water holes.. for clan groups.

LB: Not by mistake

GM: Sacred business for Yolŋu people. Ancestors didn't put foundation for Yolŋu by mistake. Our ancestors.

[20:48]

LB: Like over there at Boḍiya, people are living there, where the water hole is. That place is created by a stingray. Only for living, people drink water at the water hole, when the water becomes plenty in January, February, March, April. When it comes to April, it will decrease. In June and July, in August the water is completely finished. The water could be underneath, maybe how many feet you would dig, but sometime we don't dig because the water becomes salty, so we move (to other water holes).

[21:32]

GM: This story turns into Yirritja land. I am now talking as a grandson (wayirri-waṭaṅu) [iii, iv] for the Macassar well, also Raymond and Alfred here. That is our land, water hole. Caretakers of the Macassar well are the people here of Nilatjirriwa- Gorryindi, Gamaḷanga, Mälarra. They are the caretakers. Their ancestors were staying here, they brought cycad nuts to the Yirritja water hole (Macassar well). Over there they soaked cycad nuts if this water at Nilatjirriwa became salty and went down, then brackish water. When the water became brackish. They ate cycad nuts there (Macassar well).

[22:27]

LB: That water (Macassar) well is permanent. Walamaṅu ancestral being, Dhuduyiṅu, a water python struck the place. It struck the lightning. George is saying from Gupapuyṅu point of view, but his mother's mother is Njuruwulu (Walamaṅu), yes his mother's mother is Njuruwulu (Walamaṅu) and he's looking after that place (Macassar well). And my mother is Walamaṅu, but Walamaṅu from Yelan, but I'm looking after because Walamaṅu gave birth for me and I'm looking after that place (Macassar well). The water there, people drank the water and then the water level went down.... then later people went back there (Macassar well) for the water. They were looking after it for that. And we are singing songlines in ceremony for that Walamaṅu place. Songlines lie down there at Macassar well, which is Yirritja songline. Yirritja songline is lying there. It goes down along the beach, and toward my island (Räpuma), it (Räpuma) has connection with Walamaṅu. It is yothu-yindi connection [ii]. Two water (Dhuwa and Yirritja songlines) are lying there. Yirritja and Dhuwa. There is a big amount of Yirritja fresh water, but Dhuwa water is bit brackish. A little bit of freshwater such was Nilpaywa, Murrunga. A permanent water is still there at Murrunga. Later we can go there and have a look. As mentioned before, when land owner pass away, grand-children look after the place. Also its mother's mother and caretakers look after the place with no land owners. I'm looking after the Macassar well from distance (there's no descendant of Walamaṅu Njuruwulu, thus George is looking after closely, and Leonard looks after from distance.) And these people look after the place because a lot of people are still living. The songline lie there and goes down to the beach. Yes that is how we look after the country, Dhuwa and Yirritja of this country.

[25:20]

GM: It (Macassar well) is a well on the Yirritja land. It was struck by the lightning by itself. Only for itself. The waterhole is for the water python. From Worrall (a billabong on the Howard Island), it struck the lightning and the lightning struck there at Macassar well. Right? It struck, then the name and language, clan, it all changes (from Worrall ones) to Walamaṅu. Those name, language and clan are only for Walamaṅu. Walamaṅu people call the water snake, Wunhaṅgun, Dhuduyṅu, Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ. It changes its tongue (language) just there at Macassar well.

LB: There people do like this 'Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ, Nyaduṅyaḍu, Gunulimaw, Wapididi, Miliṅinbi, Gaḍupu, these are the bunhdhurr [v] of the place (Macassar well).

GM: Yes they are the bunhdhurr for it. And we are lot of people of Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ. We are with Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ. At other places, some other different languages are there, but here it (water python) changes its tongue (language) and become Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ. That is a language for this place (Macassar well), for Ṇurruwulu Walamaṅu. And still now people are looking after the billabong, our people belonging here, Dhuwa and Yirritja people. We call them, djungaya [ii, iii], wayirri-waṭaṅu [iii, iv]. Those two people (djungaya and wayirri-waṭaṅu) are the authorities, they are discussing each other, they represent the land owner all together. The land owner, her/his djungaya, her/his wayirri-waṭaṅu, these people are looking after that water (Macassar well) and also for this water (Nilatjirriwa) where we are sitting now, sacred place. The Guḷuṅ'kuḷuṅ struck the lightning to the place. People belonging to that place are the one looking after the place. No other people. Djungaya (caretakers) for that place, only Dhuwa people are the djungaya for Yirritja. We have djungaya and wayirri-waṭaṅu [iii, iv]. We are looking after each other, we are the authorities of the place. We have waku [iv].

LB: We, Yolṅu know and practice the connection, and know how to keep eye on and look after it.

GM: We put our eyes on and look after because we know about the place.

LB: Such as which land belongs to who.

GM: We are living like this way with Yolṅu law, not contemporary or new law. We are looking after our own water resource .

[29:00]

GM: I am a Gupapuyṅu person, George Milaypuma. I am a Gupapuyṅu person, and wayirri waṭaṅu for Miliṅinbi (Macassar well).

RB: I am Raymond Bulanbula. I am a Wubulkarra person, but our (with George Milay) mother's mother is here Miliṅinbi (Macassar well).

CG: I am Gorryindi person, Clive Gaṭaṭawuy. This is my land (Nilatjirriwa), Dhuwa and Yirritja. My mother (Macassar well) and my land (Nilatjirriwa). Yurrwi, Gaḍupu, Boḍiya and here Nilatjirriwa.

AW: I am Alfred Walpay, Gupapuyŋu. This is my mother's land and over there (Macassar well) is my mother's mother's land. And there, Boḍiya is my mother's land, and also Rāpuma.

LB: I am Leonard Waṇayukumirr, I'm originated from here, this is my area, and looking after my mother, Walamaŋu. I am a caretaker for that place.

---