

1 Yo, hello everybody. This is commencement of the semester one this year and I'm a little
2 bit sorry that you can't see me very well, because I have to; I've been forced to go in a
3 room and teach from a room, because of the weather out there, and I couldn't be able to
4 teach you from out there. So I hope, you're all going to have to put up with me not
5 looking on my face very well.

6
7 Anyway we are on to ... week two of semester one 2013. ... And the subject is *wāṇa*,
8 which is a home. Generally speaking, home, or a *wāṇa* is a home where people live. A
9 *wāṇa* can be a land. A *wāṇa* can be a country, or an estate, a building, and this is what we
10 are looking at during the creation when our ancestors came through; they created land,
11 and gave us language, songs, ceremonies, and the estate of where we belong, and the
12 country of our forefathers that we live on. So *wāṇa*, the word *wāṇa* comes from the *Yolṅu*
13 language which is from north east Arnhem Land around here in this particular area.

14
15 Going back to what *wāṇa* is all about; *wāṇa* I suppose is something that is an
16 environment that you belong to, a home that you have grown up, raised family, lived by,
17 had communication with the land; this is how we look at it. This is what we look at *wāṇa*
18 as; the land of, an important, the identity of where you belong to. For example, here
19 we're talking about the birds ... home, made in a certain environment for certain seasons.
20 Here, the water birds nest in a certain area, in a certain season where they know and
21 understand, and communicate with, the environment; the water, the land. They nest so
22 that they'll be able to hunt in a nearby country, and associated with the land that they
23 belong to, with the water and the environment. They don't build, the water birds don't
24 build nests in a desert country; they find an area where it suits their best need. And
25 there's another one over here; on the reeds, just timing it right. I suppose, have a feeling
26 and a communication and adapt it to nature, what nature is going to do. I believe they
27 have thoughts and understanding of how they're going to communicate, how they're
28 going to make sure that their chicks are going to be hatched out when the nest is still on
29 the right area; and they too will be able to tour around, get used to the land, to the
30 environment, and the hunt, and gather food to survive, and start their own community;
31 start their own family, I suppose, on that same area that they belong to.

32
33 There's other birds, they nest and live; they have a home. One up here on the trees; some
34 live in trees, some live on the ground of coastal areas. They have certain areas where they
35 can adapt (to the) environment, and teach their children, teach their chicks to be able to
36 live in an environment where it suits them, in an environment that, where they have lived
37 for a long, long time. There's another type of bird that, this one in particular migrates
38 about thirteen thousand kilometres, thirteen thousand miles, say, from Canada towards
39 Africa, just to stay in that environment; just to stay in the diet that they live on, just to
40 live on the bush tucker I suppose, of how they can survive, get away from the weather
41 that might destroy them; and go half way around the world, follow the weather, follow
42 the temperature, the environment that they live in, and feed on the food that they live in.
43 And when the season comes around to breed they go back to the home where they
44 belong, and breed again, have their chicks.

45
46 Up in the tropics, there are wallabies who live, and that's their adapted land, their country
47 they belong to; that is their *wāṇa*. The wallabies on the flood plains in the bush, in the

48 tropics, you wouldn't expect to find them somewhere up on the icy mountains, or down
49 at the Arctic or Atlantic or snow areas. They are made, they belong to a warmer climate,
50 weather. And so does the crocodiles in the water, and so does the fish, the freshwater,
51 warm blooded water that they belong to. You wouldn't find fish that comes from a warm
52 freshwater up here, and see them down south in the southern Ocean, Pacific Ocean, or the
53 southern Indian Oceans, out of place; they probably wouldn't survive.

54
55 And so with the penguins, and polar bears; they wouldn't live up in the tropics, they
56 wouldn't survive. It would probably take a lot of time to get them to adapt into
57 environment. Sometimes maybe they wouldn't survive. Talking about homes, talking
58 about the *wāṅa*, the environment and the land; they are probably not very, very well
59 associated with where they go, but it's just nature that takes them where the food in
60 abundance, food, and to survive, how to breed, have chicks maybe, babies, and they start
61 all over again going the same route, learning the same ways, how they would survive.

62
63 *Wāṅa* in *Yolṅu* country is the estate that we belong to. A long time ago in the creation,
64 our ancestral creators walked and created, and gave us land, songs, ceremonies, divided
65 us into moieties of the *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja*, two moieties up here in Arnhem Land in our
66 *wāṅa*. Wherever our ancestors have come, created the land, gave us songs and
67 ceremonies; that is where we belong. That is who we are. We belong to the land, and the
68 land belongs to us. We adapt. We live and raise our children to, teaching them on
69 country, through the hunting survival; how to survive, the stories of the land, and as our
70 ancestors put us there, we never had a choice. We never had a choice to say, I don't want
71 to be here, I'd like to choose another area; because that bit of land is connected with
72 *Yolṅu* through the waters, through the ground, through the clouds, the wind, the trees; and
73 that is where we belong.

74
75 *Yolṅu* living on the country. I suppose we have survived here living on the land; this is
76 some areas that my people have lived around the Arafura swamp area in Arnhem Land,
77 and shelters that have protected us from weather, that has protected us from the hunger,
78 that has created us into being of the land. The *wāṅa* that comes into your souls, and of
79 who you are. Here we can see a shelter which is normally made for the highlands where
80 during the wet season, the valleys and the swamps are all covered up with water, and a lot
81 of mosquitoes around the swamp, have all the protection; and in a way it is protected, put
82 on stilts where down below is a fire, where you can build, make a fire, and through the
83 smoke will make the mossies go away. And it is made out of paper bark for that
84 particular season, for the wet season; and the shelter is made from paper bark, and people
85 can stay there for a certain period of time while they hunt, gather food during the wet
86 season. And ceremonies, people live on the higher lands for three months maybe, and
87 after that when dry season comes, the beginning of dry season, people go down to low
88 lands. And this is another bit of shelter which is made out of paper bark, and as you can
89 see, it is virtually all covered up, and just a small hole in there which is a hole that people
90 can come inside and get out of it; because in mozzie, mosquito infested areas, the shelters
91 are made like this to keep the mosquitoes out. While inside, there is a hole on the top
92 where people can make fire inside, keep warm, keep the mossies out with the smoke, and

93 it is a mosquito proof shelter. A kind of housing, a kind of land, kind of, a *wāṅa* if you
94 like.

95

96 But mind you, these two places are on the land; when you look at the land itself that is
97 also the land, that is also the *wāṅa*. *Wāṅa* and the land, or the country, or the estate that
98 we belong to. *Yolṅu* always survive on their home grounds. *Yolṅu* up here have always
99 been healthy by spending one season here, three or four months, and leaving that area,
100 going away to another area, starting up another camp; leaves the place fresh, moves into a
101 new place freshly, there is no rubbish left behind, just natural paperbark. People walk
102 from place to place on the country itself where they belong staying fit and healthy, eating
103 bush tucker that is freshly caught. Wild honey, fish and meat that are caught while
104 walking from country to country within that estate, from camp to camp within that estate,
105 around the *wāṅa* areas that you belong to; and that is staying healthy, fit. Where if you,
106 nowadays, want to live in a brick house or an iron tin shed that's been there for ten,
107 fifteen years, virtually the surrounding of that house, the surrounding of that camp starts
108 to fill up with rubbish, starts to fill up with mould, and the breathing and the environment
109 for people are not too healthy. People are forced to go in the community, make a
110 communities without freely, not having to go, and live, and survive the way that they
111 were meant to, on the land itself. We are being forced to go and live on another man's
112 land, another man's country which is not my home, which is not my *wāṅa*, through the
113 Government system. When the mission, they started forcing people to move into other
114 countries, and that started the thinking, changed a bit of the thinking and changed a bit of
115 the survival habits that I would live, and survive, and stay healthy and fit on the country
116 that I freely would walk by.

117

118 The home, or the *wāṅa*, has been given to you, has been entitled to you through the spirits
119 of our fathers, through the ancestors who gave you land, a country, and the spirits.
120 Whether you like it or not, whether you wish you would want to live somewhere else, and
121 change that country; you belong to that land, you belong to that *wāṅa*. Your body, your
122 spirits, the blood system are connected with the land. Where I can sit here next to the
123 billabong, and feel the spirits of my fathers in the waters, in behind the trees over there, in
124 behind the, in behind the pandanas, and sit, sit on the ground with my feet mounted on
125 the ground, and I catch bush tucker, catch tucker for my family; and I can feel that the
126 ancestors, the waters, are providing me, they are communicating with me, they know me.
127 Know me by person; they know me by, by my smells, by my sweat of who I am, because
128 the trees around the surroundings, the ground itself have recognised my sense of who I
129 am. Me and my country, we were made to stay together, to live together. And on the
130 coastal land here, some people have been given a country that they belong to along the
131 waters; splashing up the waves can let you hear your fathers calling out to you,
132 welcoming you to be in that area, welcoming you to hunt when you walk on the beach,
133 go out to sea; the land itself provides the tucker, the land itself provides the spirits. They
134 enable you to catch food, and learn from the land. They learn the ways what to do, learn
135 the ways how to get wisdom, how to feel as your own companion; you and land, you and
136 *wāṅa* are closely associated. When we are taken away and want to live in a big city, the
137 land itself cries, the land itself misses you, and you miss the land, and you miss the *wāṅa*.
138 So the country that was made, your identity, your name, your song lines, your language;

139 you tried to give it away to someone else, tried to give it away to some other foreigner to
140 build an estate, and make it into a tourist system or into a big city. You can sometimes
141 feel it, it is tearing you apart from your *wāṇa*, from your country; it makes us feel that we
142 are nothing. We get driven away to another land, and somebody else, some people who
143 want to make a, establish it for some opportunities to make money, to make businesses.
144 But I know there's an opportunity, there is a business there. There is a business there, and
145 I feel strongly that in our lifetime, in our connection with land, that we want to stand, we
146 want to fight to have our resources back, to have that identity of teaching my children; as
147 those birds back there, when we said, they have the environment, they can sense the
148 environment of what the future brings, what the future holds, whether the nesting time at
149 that level of water and that level of weather that comes through makes them feel that
150 there is something, something disastrous coming. There is something, something is
151 coming; just the land itself, just the environment itself communicates with the birds that
152 they shouldn't build a nest there; maybe take it up to a higher land, higher ground, so that
153 they and the chicks won't get washed away by the water.

154
155 That is how our country teaches us. When we stand on the country, and we talk about,
156 teach about the land, behind the trees there, they're our spirits, they're our ancestors;
157 they're our fathers talking to us. Whether it's a message that says, you're welcome, and
158 you are part of my land; or it's a message that comes through, trees are dying, not enough
159 water on the land, grass are drying out, sometimes there's not much for you, for the
160 people to live off it, and the country doesn't look healthy. It tells us something. We must
161 try and do something. Out from the rocks behind here, along the coast, the picture and the
162 environment itself shows whether it is sick, whether it is hurting, or whether it is telling
163 us that we have a problem coming up. We are taken away, or the land is being destroyed
164 by other means, by people coming to sacred grounds, to the places of the songs and
165 ceremonies where people want to sing, the rivers; sometimes it doesn't get filled up, or
166 sometimes it just fills up and washes everything away, and it starts to tell. The land itself
167 feels hurt. I feel hurt when we know the dangers are coming, when we know that there is
168 something wrong.

169
170 So *wāṇa* is more than just a land. *Wāṇa* is more than just a house that we live in, in a
171 building. *Wāṇa*, it has spirits. *Wāṇa* has stories that we can tell, and this is what we, they
172 talk about. This is what we can tell about the land, the stories. We go and talk to the
173 images, and the ancestral images on the rocks, on the trees; we've tried to dance it, we've
174 tried to explain it, we've tried to teach it through dancing and songs, and we try and teach
175 it through paintings telling the stories. We want to keep up and maintain that journey of a
176 lifetime. Like the bird, we saw about; that bird travels all the way from Canada to another
177 country just to be in that form of environmental temperature, and the country side, the
178 landscaping that it travels, wants to be in that same diet-food chain line. And on the land
179 itself here, that is what we want to maintain. We want to teach back here about the
180 ancestral spirits which, far beyond that, there is someone far greater that is alive, and that
181 is looking after us. There are spirits and there is a God, I might say a God who created all
182 these things through our ancestors, used them as instruments, used them as someone that
183 walk on the land; and through that land we feel each other. That's what *wāṇa* is all about.
184 That is what the land is all about; and this is what's the story of the land. And sadly the

185 stories, sadly the songs that we can participate, practice, teach our people about land and
186 culture; the sun is dying away, and we are being driven, we are being forced to go this
187 way and go the other way like lost people. And the land back there, the *wāṅa* back there,
188 is always calling, where are my people? where are my *Yolṅu* that we need to connect
189 together and work together so that I can stay alive? And vice versa, my people can stay
190 alive, and we can live and cure this country, and cure the land where traditions, songs,
191 and ceremonies on *wāṅa*, the estate, on the homeland centres, the land that where we
192 belong to, and the stories, and the identity of the stories that we belong to. That is where
193 we belong.

194

195 And through Government politics, I'm sorry every now and then I have to talk about
196 what the Government is doing to our people, to the land. Taking us and trying to plant us
197 on another man's country which doesn't belong to us and the spirits of that land belongs
198 to somebody else. The spirits of that *wāṅa* belongs to somebody else. But it's the spirits
199 of the land that belongs to us, and we belong to that country, is where we all need to be;
200 where we all need to be.

201

202 So there is lots and lots of things to understand between the non-Indigenous *Yolṅu* of this
203 *wāṅa*, of this land, and the foreigners who want to come and make businesses and money;
204 big money. About the land, this is what we're trying to do, is to educate our children and
205 educate other people about what should be done and how we can learn. I've gone fifty
206 years old, I'm past fifty, and I'm still learning about the land and the stories that it holds;
207 and I'm still learning how to be educated to be a real cultural man, to teach others about
208 who I am, the identity of the *wāṅa*, the land that we belong to. And there's a big iceberg
209 out there floating in the water with a knowledge of what *Yolṅu* culture is all about, and
210 even simply how to manage and look after *wāṅa*; even simply, how to be known, how to
211 be recognised. When Government bodies come along and they say, they've just been here
212 on the ground, in our communities just for maybe half an hour, or one hour on the
213 ground, or maybe six months, and they go back, and they said, 'I've been on that country,
214 I've been on that land, and I know what these people want'. But I've been here over fifty
215 years and I'm still learning, and I still don't know what my people want, and I can sing
216 songs, I can sing ceremonies from the *wāṅa*, from the land itself that is given, practice the
217 language, keep it strong. You'll never learn everything, you'll never learn everything
218 about our country, about the estate, unless you take me back and the land can teach me;
219 the *wāṅa*.

220

221 So that is what *wāṅa* is about. To conclude now, *wāṅa* can be a house, it can be a camp, it
222 can be a country with people sailing along and looking for land. All of a sudden they
223 come across a land, the sailors maybe, and they said, there's land ahead; that can also be
224 called *wāṅa*. But this *wāṅa* I'm talking about, this *wāṅa* I'm trying to teach and educate
225 non-Indigenous and my children as well, it's the spiritual connection of the land of our
226 ancestors, and the spiritual connection between me, the land, the waters, the rivers, the
227 wind, the clouds are all associated with. That is a one big *wāṅa*. That is a one big estate.
228 That is a one big country. It needs all these elements to be there. It needs me, my people,
229 the waters, a country, a hill, the ancestral spirits working through somebody far greater.

230

231 So I think that's where I'll leave that. That's where our sessions finishes today. ... But
232 that is the story of land. When we go out, go back onto country, you can feel, you can
233 feel, sometimes for a long time, and you lived on another country and you go back home
234 just to step foot on solid ground of your country, it makes you want to cry, it makes you
235 want to; it's the welcoming back that nature can provide to you.

236

237 Ma.... Thank you to you all. You can write down questions or maybe send it to the
238 *Yolŋu* studies, and anything that you didn't understand or want to know more about,
239 please drop us a line. That can only help me, and the other consultants out there, Gotha at
240 Gāwa and Midku sister (Dhāŋgal) over at Birritjimi) ... and the *Yolŋu* studies team, so
241 how we can make a strong PowerPoint presentation to suit your need, to meet the needs
242 of what you want to learn about the *Yolŋu* culture, and the language of here. Ma. That's
243 okay then. We'll leave it here.

244

245 *End of Recording.*