'A native died sudden at Lake Allallina'

Luise Hercus and Grace Koch

Introduction

Wangkangurru people started leaving their homeland, the Simpson Desert, gradually over the last decades of last century. In 1900–1901 there was a mass exodus and everybody left, except for one family who were ultimately persuaded to leave by their relative *Imatuwa*, who had returned to collect them. This migration is described in *Aboriginal History* 9. 1986. Wangkangurru people had maintained their traditions relatively undisturbed, but with this move they joined people who had had European contact for many years. The departure from the desert coincided with an increase of activity by European investigators. Stevens¹ describes how the ethnographers who visited the area just after the turn of the century were anxious to learn about the traditions of the new arrivals. A centre for this interest was the mission at Killalpaninna on the Cooper in Diyari country, where the Rev. Reuther had been studying the Diyari language and mythology for some time: he too now concentrated on Wangkangurru myths.

The arrival of Wangkangurru people had an enormous impact among the rest of the Aboriginal population: it made people aware of traditions and led to a kind of cultural revival throughout the Lake Eyre Basin. The presence of newcomers who were still so actively singing their own songs led to a new burst of activity in oral traditions: people made songs in their contemporary surroundings. A whole lengthy song cycle was composed in this semi-traditional environment, it was called *Kudnarri* 'the (Cooper) floodplain'. It was considered new and exciting and was loved as being communal to all the groups of the eastern Lake Eyre Basin. Parts were in Wangkangurru, parts in Diyari. Since it was so popular, the song-cycle was constantly being added to, incorporating new events. The earliest datable event celebrated in the series is the sinking of the bore at Mt. Gason (1903). Leslie Russell, (b.1906, dec. 1976) who with his 'brother' Jimmy was the last to be able to sing parts of this cycle had himself added to it, he for instance 'found' a verse about the lilies growing on the floodplain of the Cooper near the Kopperamanna crossing. When Norman Tindale visited the many older people who were living at Pandie on the Diamantina in 1934 the first song that Sam Dintibana, the senior Diyari rain-maker sang for him was not his favourite song from his own ancient tradition: it was a verse from the *Kudnarri* cycle. These much-loved songs remained in the memory of Diyari and Wangkangurru people until the 'sixties and 'seventies and parts of the cycle were recorded on various occasions during that period both by Peter

¹ Stevens 1994, p. 218.

Austin and Luise Hercus at Marree (Hercus tapes 155, 163 and 195). Peter Austin² studied and analysed some of these verses. Other elderly people in the camp were pleased to hear the songs again, and on one occasion Mary Dixon (Diyari, b. ca 1890, dec. 1969) joined in. The first verses of the cycle refer to the travels of young men looking for girls. Throughout this sequence, when it was sung long ago, women had to call out in Diyari *warli yura?* 'who are you': Mary Dixon did this during a performance on Hercus tape 195 (January 1968 at Marree). In this paper we discuss just one verse from this cycle. It deals with an historical event of 1917, a sudden death at Lake Allallina.

How Ned killed a man at Lake Allallina

Blanche Ned in his earlier years

Ned *Palpilinha* was the last Wadigali man: his mother had come from Wadigali country, from along the Yandama Creek near the New South Wales border before he was born. Because he was brought up at Blanchewater, he became known as Blanche Ned. He spent the last years of his life, in the late twenties and thirties, with Wangkangurru people at Pandie Pandie. Tindale saw him at Pandie Pandie and recorded a Wadigali vocabulary from him. He is buried near the former Old Clifton Hills outstation, next to the Ngamini rain-maker Nipper and the Yarluyandi man Lagoon Charlie *Kuranta*. The memory of Blanche Ned and his 'brother' Blanche Tom lingered among Aboriginal people in the Lake Eyre Basin. The people at Pandie and Birdsville remembered Ned as a kindly old man, a 'loner' because he was the only one who could speak his language, Wadigali, which he had learnt from his mother. Further south however he was recalled by some very elderly people who had known him at least twenty years before he went to Pandie. Mary Dixon (Diyari) remembered him, as did old Alice (Kuyani). They recalled that he was also known by the name *Ngapa WiRari* 'Water moving about', which refers to the Blanchewater Creek. Blanche Ned, like his 'brother' Tom, was described as having been in his younger years an aggressive person who enjoyed arguments. He was dedicated to his own traditions, and this naturally made him more and more isolated. He occasionally stayed at Marree, but spent much of his early life in his adoptive country at Blanchewater and in adjacent areas of Murnpeowie Station.

Ngarlangarlani—Lake Allallina

Occasionally Blanche Ned visited the camp at *Ngarlangarlani* just outside the precincts of Killalpaninna Mission and stayed with the mixed group of older people that remained there. Traditionally *Ngarlangarlani* had been a site for the Storm History, a major myth that traversed Lake Eyre: it started just to the east of Coober Pedy and ended at Mt. Gason. The myth relates how the people who travelled with the storm camped at *Ngarlangarlani* and liked the place. They began asking the old Man *Warrpa*, the Storm himself 'how much further do we have to go, can we not stay here by the lake?' The Storm said 'no' and carried them on to Poongalissie *Pungalaty* and Mt Gason. Thus *Ngarlangarlani* was a mythological site that had significance and attracted the

² Austin 1978, pp. 531-534.

Lake Allallina after rains (photograph by V. Potezny)

more traditional people. In the first two decades of this century this included some of the Wangkangurru people who had left the Simpson Desert in 1900, a few Wangkatyaka people from the lower Diamantina, as well as a few Diyari and some of their northern neighbours, Ngamini and Yawarawarrka. The people in the camp originally had one thing in common: they preferred not to live right at the Killalpaninna Mission, presumably because they felt freer here, they were away from supervision and nevertheless had the benefit of rations. It was at *Ngarlangarlani*, not at the mission, that ceremonies were held, for instance the 'Molonga' dance was performed there in 1901 (Jones and Sutton 1986:36–38). There was a core of people at *Ngarlangarlani* who were particularly jealous of their traditions, and quarrels could easily break out regarding traditional matters. Blanche Ned, it appears, on one of his visits from Murnpeowie was involved in a quarrel with another man at the camp, a quarrel resulting from a previous feud. This ended with Ned killing the other man.

This violent death stunned people in the camp to such a degree that an old man composed a song about it as part of the new semi-traditional song cycle called *Kudnarri*, largely in Diyari. The text is not clear at this point: it could have been a Yawarawarrka man named *Ngati Purkula*. He taught this verse to Jimmy Russell and his parallel cousin Leslie Russell. Jimmy and Leslie Russell sang parts of the cycle together (on Hercus tape 195), in January 1968 at Marree. Mary Dixon who was present also knew the verse about *Ngarlangarlani*, but she did not join in, neither did old Alice.

The same song was subsequently also recorded by Leslie Russell alone for Peter Austin, and Leslie explained that he was 'sister's son' to the man who was killed.³

³ Austin 1978, p. 533.

Figure 1 Lake Eyre-Cooper Creek, showing the location of places mentioned in the text

Figure 2 Enlargement showing the location of Lake Allallina in relation to the Bethesda Mission and Cooper Creek

The song

Leslie Russell introduced the song, speaking in English and Arabana:

Sing'm along	<i>tharli-tharli.</i>	<i>Mathapurda-nha</i>	<i>pirda-kapukanh</i>
tongue-tongue	old man-ACC	kill-ANC	

Ngarla-ngarla-nga
Ngarla-ngarla-LOC

'Let's sing the verse with the words *tharli-tharli*. He killed that old man long ago at *Ngarlangarlani*..'

Alice Oldfield echoed his words:

<i>Ngarla-ngarla-nga</i>	<i>pirda-ngura.</i>
<i>Ngarla-ngarla-LOC</i>	kill-IMP

'At *Ngarlangarlani* he got killed.'

Jimmy and Leslie Russell then sang the following verse:

<i>Apinyera lilángáa</i>	Because of a vengeance party he died
<i>Ngarlángera diyángera</i>	At <i>Ngarlangarlani</i> he threw (a boomerang)
<i>Pinyángera lilángera</i>	Because of a vengeance party he died
<i>Nganhángera diyángera</i>	It's me he threw it at!
<i>Tharlíngera tharlíngáa</i>	(One speaking a strange) tongue, a tongue

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<i>Ngarlángerá diyángerá</i>	At <i>Ngarlangarlani</i> he threw (a boomerang)
<i>Tharlíngera tharlé liláli</i>	(Because of one speaking a strange) tongue, a tongue, he died.

L.H. What does he say there?

Alice. Leslie-*nganha*
 Leslie-from

Leslie.	No, no,	<i>mathapurda</i>	<i>nguru ..</i>	<i>Ngati-purkula</i>
		old man	other	<i>Ngati-purkula</i>

Alice. Yea, Yawarawarrka.

Leslie.	<i>Arayi,</i>	<i>mathapurda-ki</i>	<i>pirda-kapukanha</i> , that's him we been sing'm
	Yes	old man-EMPH	kill-ANC

L. *Minha-ku?*
 What-DAT

Leslie. I don't know, I wasn't in that ha ha!

Mary.	<i>Pirda-kapukanha</i>	<i>Ngarlangarla-nga</i>	<i>kanti-purru...</i>
	Kill-ANC	Lake Allallina-LOC	club-having
	<i>Ngarlangarlani</i>		
	Lake Allallina		

(He) killed that man—who had a club in his hand—at Lake Allallina.

The song follows the conventions of traditional songs in that extra syllables are added to words in a parallel fashion, hence the repetition of *-ngera*.⁴ Words may be transformed in various ways in songs as analysed by Peter Austin⁵, so *lilanga* was said to be equivalent to *pali* 'to die', and *tharli-tharli* was explained as equivalent to *tharli-pirla-li* 'one speaking a strange tongue (ergative case)'. Ned being of Wadikali origin certainly was 'one speaking a strange tongue'. The song says a vengeance party killed the old man, but the work of the vengeance party, both the singers and audience agreed, was carried out by one man—and the documents quoted below explain the reasons for the vengeance. The words *nganhángerá diyángerá* were not clearly explained to Luise Hercus, but they were given to Peter Austin as *nganha diya* 'it is me he hit'. This was no doubt intended as the surprised final thought of the victim.

The line *tharlíngera tharlíngera* in the explanation given to Peter Austin gives an even more dramatic account: the word 'tongue' was said to refer to the old man being hit on the back of the neck so that, as he died, his tongue protruded like that of a bullock. This explanation was subsequently quoted also by Tamsin Donaldson.⁶

⁴ See Koch 1987, p.52 for further comment on metre and added syllables in this song.

⁵ Austin, *ibid*.

⁶ Donaldson 1979, p.78.

*Jimmy Russell (standing) with Mick McLean at Dalhousie in August 1975.
(Photograph by H. Creamer.)*

George Aiston. Until his death in 1944 George 'Poddy' Aiston ran a store and museum (now deserted and reduced to rubble) at Mulka on the Birdsville track. Among the many people, both Aboriginal and white, who were indebted to him were the mail-drivers. Fred Teague of Hawker (dec. 1994) drove the Birdsville mail in the later thirties. He took this humorous snapshot of Poddy Aiston who was showing him some weaponry from the museum. (Photo made available to L. Hercus by Fred Teague in 1988.)

Historical background

During her work on the history of the Killalpaninna mission Christine Stevens discovered a set of contemporary documents about this killing.⁸ On June 29th 1917 the missionary Bogner wrote from Killalpaninna to the Police Sergeant who was stationed at Mungeranie:

Dear Sir,

A few weeks ago there was a rumour that **a native died very sudden** out in the camp a few miles from here at Ngalangalannie Lake. Further information came to hand that he was killed. I do not know this blackfellows (*sic*). They came over from Murnpeowie station with their own buggy. The man suspected to be the murderer is called 'Ned' and his lubra. The victim is called 'George'. All information in this letter I got from Theo. Vogelsang....

Luckily for Ned this Police Sergeant was none other than the famous and widely esteemed George 'Poddy' Aiston, who was later, in 1924, to be co-author of *Savage Life in Central Australia*, and who had close friendship with a number of Aboriginal people.⁹

⁸ Public Records Office, Adelaide: Aboriginal Affairs GRG 52-1.

⁹ Austin, Hercus and Jones 1990, p.138.

Aiston evidently wasted no time and went to Killalpaninna on July 7th 1917 to make inquiries: Christine Stevens found the report he sent to the Police Inspector's Office at Port Augusta. This report contains an account of how Mr Theo Vogelsang the 'Overseer' at Killalpaninna had heard that a man named George had died:

They told him that George had had a fit. Mr Vogelsang thought no more of it, but about 3 weeks later heard a rumour to the effect that George had been killed by a blackfellow named Ned. Ned had killed George because George had boasted that he had killed a gin and a white man near Innamincka by lightning, the gin that was killed by lightning was the mother of Ned's gin Agnes. Mr Vogelsang further stated that George was hunted out of the camp at Killalpaninna because he was always threatening to kill the blacks there by making lightning and boasting that the white man and gin .. at Innamincka were killed by lightning made by him.. The blacks drove him out of the Killalpaninna camp and he went to the shepherds camp at Ngananganinna Lake, the night before he died there was a corroboree at this camp.

Aiston's letter then reports his own inquiries:

On the 8th July I went to this camp, the first camp I came to was deserted and there was a comparatively freshly made grave about 80 yards northwest of it, a little further round the lake I found the fresh camp the blacks had made, at this camp I found Robin, in answer to my question as to how George died Robin stated that early in the morning George got up and standing up called to Ned who was camped below him on the sandhill: 'Oh Brother come and fight me, and I will kill you with lightning same as I killed the white man and the old woman at Innamincka—I will kill Agnes same as I killed her mother'. Ned called back—'Oh Brother I come to fight you now'—with that Agnes screamed and ran at George and hit him in the ribs with her digging stick and knocked him down. Ned then hit him on the head with a piece of wood he had picked up before he had left his own camp...

Ned is at present at the Kannawaukaninna Bore...

I would respectfully ask for instruction as to what I am to do in this case...

Aiston then went on to say that he himself thought that it would be in the best interests of all concerned if no action were taken.

Aiston wrote a second letter on the 18th of July to Inspector Thornton at Pt. Augusta to strengthen his previous recommendation to let the matter rest:

I have just been informed that blacks had assembled at this corroboree from Kanowna and Goyders Lagoon for the purpose of deciding what was to be done to George, who had for years terrorised the blacks right through this country... Two justices of the Peace here, Mr A.J. Scobie and Mr A.F. Scobie... are both of opinion that they could not commit on this evidence—Mr Bogner JP of Killalpaninna¹⁰ reckoned that if it were possible to give Ned and his gin a thrashing it would be all that they deserve...

There is no doubt that the authorities took Aiston's advice and no action appears to have been taken against Ned.

¹⁰ Aiston makes it clear that this idea is obviously Bogner's, not his own.

Sam Dintibana's song

When Norman Tindale visited Pandie Pandie in 1934 he worked with all the senior men. This naturally included Ned Palpilina: Tindale's notebook contains a Wadigali vocabulary from Ned which is the only reliable evidence we have from this language. Tindale did not record Ned, so we cannot hear his voice. He did however record the senior Diyari man, Sam Dintibana, and the first song that Sam sang was a verse from the much loved *Kudnarri* cycle. The words of this verse are not analysable to the present writer.¹¹ but it is definitely not the verse about Blanche Ned.

An analysis of Sam's song shows the uniformity of the *Kudnarri* tradition over the years: the verse contains the same addition of *-ngera* at the end of words, standard throughout the Diyari parts of the cycle.

Recordings made by Norman B. Tindale on the Diamantina in 1934, cylinder 1 record 1:

*Bala:ngera marga:ranga bura:ngera*¹²
Bidi:ngera bidi:ngera
Marga:ngera bura:ngera
Dabu:yangada bara:yala
Mawa:yunga wardi:ngera
Dabu:ngera dabu.ra:yala
Mawu:yungera wardi:ngera
Bidi:ngera bigera:ya
Marga:ngera bura:ngera
Bidi:ngera bidi:ngera
Marga:ngera bura:ngera
Dabu:yunga dabu.ra:yala
Mawu:yunga wardi:ngera

Musical analysis of the two songs: Sam Dintibana (1934) and Jimmy and Leslie Russell (1968)

The two songs, recorded thirty four years apart, show a number of differences musically, yet the two songs have been identified as being from the same series, the *Kudnarri*. This analysis examines the structural points of the songs, showing where they differ and where they are the same.

The notations show only the vocal part in order to illustrate the analysis more clearly. In the 1934 version, a percussion accompaniment is audible starting midway through the first line of the song. The 1968 version uses an accompaniment of sticks and a tapping against a tobacco tin right from the beginning.

¹¹ The words of Central Australian songs are different from ordinary speech, grammatical endings can be omitted, initial consonants are often altered and extra syllables added, see Austin 1978, pp. 531–534. The meaning is usually esoteric and is not accessible even to native speakers without an explanation.

¹² *bura* means 'to tear', and *marga* means 'to crawl'.

Ned Palipilinha

*Photograph taken by N.B. Tindale on the Diamantina Expedition of 1934.
(Courtesy of South Australian Museum)*

Melodic features

The melodies of each version, lasting approximately 11 seconds, are sung three times. A full version of each melody is performed every two lines as shown on the notations; the two crotchet rests indicate the end of each full melodic exposition. A breath can be heard clearly in the 1968 version between the second and the third melodic repetitions; however, seeing as the placement and the length of the rest is the same in the 1934 version, it is most likely that breaths were taken in those places as well.

Both versions of the melody have a range of a third. The 1934 performance uses a major third the first time, but the following repetitions encompass a minor third. The 1968 version employs a minor third each time the melody is sung.

Musically, the structure of the melody consists of two melodic phrases, each of which corresponds to a line of text. The first melodic phrase vacillates between either a major or minor third, and the second phrase is sung on one note only. The 1934 version uses three adjacent notes whereas the 1968 version skips a third up and down, leaving out the tone between the interval. The 1934 version, as a rule, employs more ornamentation than the 1968 version.

In both cases, the first full melodic performance differs from the two following repetitions in the beginning melodic phrase. Due to a crack or brief interruption in the 1934 cylinder (shown by the "break" above the score), the first part of the melody is incomplete, but the remainder of the first phrase shows the melody staying on the B longer than in subsequent performances of the melody. When the word *bidingera* occurs, the melody repeats the A in the same way as subsequent performances of the second melodic phrase. The next two performances of the melody are then the same.

In the 1968 version, the first musical phrase uses an extra D to accommodate the word, *apinjera*, otherwise the repetitions of the melody are the same.

Rhythmic features

In most cases, when words are used ending with *-ngera*, a distinctive dotted or syncopated rhythmic pattern is used.

1934 version	q	q.	e	q	= mar-ga-nge-ra (staff 2)
1968 version	q	q.	e	q	= li-la-nge-ra (staff 1)

Words without the *-ngera* ending use a non-dotted rhythmic pattern:

1934 version	q	q	e	e	h	= da-bu-ra-ya-la (staff 3)	
1968 version	q	q	q	q	q	q	h = a-pin-ya-ra li-la-nga

One place where the word with the *-ngera* differs from the above analysis is in the 1968 version on the word, *nganhangerera*. This word uses a syncopated figure which returns to the normal *-ngera* pattern when the following word, *diyangerera* is sung.

q	q	q	q	q	q	= ngan-ha:-nge-ra
q		q.		e	q	= di-ya-nge-ra

The structure of the melody, the melodic range, and the distinctive dotted rhythmic pattern generated by the extra syllables in "*-ngera*" make the tune recognisable as the same for both versions, even though there are differences in the first melodic phrases.

Wima song

sung by Sam Dintibana in 1934

A 9568 A, 01:19(1)

First melodic phrase break

Voice

A - ya-la - nge a-ba-ya-la-nge— ra mar-garanga bu - ra - nge-ra

Second melodic phrase

bi - di - ngera bi - di - nge-ra mar - ga - nge-ra bu - ra - nge-ra

da - bu - yanga da - bu - raya-la ma - wa - yu nga wa - rdi - nge-ra

da - bu - yu nga da - bu - raya-la ma - wu - yanga wa - rdi - nge-ra

bi - di - nge-ra bi - di - nge— ra mar - nga ngera bu - ra - nge-ra

bi - di - ngera bi - di - nge-ra mar ga - nge ra bu - ra - nge ra -

Song about Blanche Ned

sung by Jimmy and Leslie Russell in 1968

A 2076B, 08:24 (Song item 8)

First melodic phrase breath

Voice

A - pi - nya - ra li - la - nga ——— Nga - rla - nge - ra di - ya - nge - ra

Second melodic phrase

Pi - nya - nge ra li - la - nge - ra Nga - nha ——— nge - ra di - ya - nge - ra

breath

Tha - rli - nge tha rli - nge. ——— Tha - rli - nge tha - rli - nge - ra

Pi - nya - nge ra li - la - nge - ra Nga - nha ——— nge - ra di - ya - nge - ra

Pi - nya - nge li - la - nga ——— Nga - rla ——— nge - ra di - ya - nge - ra

Tha - rli - nge - ra tha - rli - nge - ra tha - rle tha - rle li - la - li

Conclusions

The unique fact that we have both European and Aboriginal accounts of the events at Lake *Ngarlangarlani* gives us some insight into the way in which traditions came into being.

In the oral traditions of people in the Lake Eyre Basin a basic distinction was made between traditional songs and 'rubbish' songs. Traditional songs had their own style and technique and celebrated the History time; furthermore they showed distinctly archaic linguistic features and the interpretation was esoteric. 'Rubbish' songs dealt with personal events, seeing the first motorcar, seeing the first rabbit, an injured Aboriginal stockman lying in a ditch, managing to attract attention by waving his hat around on a long stick and being rescued, a jealous wife, a drunken skirmish and so forth. From the few songs of this kind that have survived it seems that their language was very close to the spoken language. When telling of a dramatic turn of events or when expressing strong emotions the oldest traditional people would often sing their words, their intonation would change to a chant. The sentence structure would still be like the spoken language, and the meaning perfectly clear, they would in fact be composing a 'rubbish' song. There seems however to be a third category of songs, which is somewhere between 'rubbish' and traditional. This category includes a couple of 'train' songs recorded from the Flinders as well as the song cycle under discussion, the 'songs of the Cooper' or *Kudnarri* cycle: in these compositions everything except the date of the subject matter is traditional. The comparison between the two performances— the one at Pandie in 1934 and the one at Marree in 1968—shows that this cycle represents a well-established tradition. The fact that there should be different explanations for some of the words in the Blanche Ned song (as recorded by Austin and Hercus respectively) shows that the event was already shrouded in myth.

Apart from the verse about Blanche Ned and one other¹³ verse of the *Kudnarri* cycle there do not seem to be any further songs in the whole of the Lake Eyre Basin that deal with particular historical events for which a European account is also available. This makes Jimmy and Leslie Russell's song all the more valuable.

The story of Blanche Ned was told with a certain irony: George was spoiling for a fight but was killed without being able to strike a blow. It follows the theme of 'the biter bit', so common in Aboriginal mythology. The traditions about Blanche Ned show myth in the making. The event was associated with *Ngarlangarlani* and was already by the 'sixties part of the 'History' of this site.

There is a closely parallel case associated with *Wimparanha*, Wimbra waterhole on the Gregory, on Stuart Creek Station. A duel took place there, probably a little earlier than the events at Lake Allallina, around 1910, but we have no historical record of this. Two Kuyani men, one belonging to Stuart Creek and the other to 'the Mirrabuckinna mob' from near the northern tip of Lake Torrens had an argument about traditional knowledge and they fought on the flat just south of the waterhole. Their respective supporters watched in horror as they actually killed one another. There is the same feeling of irony in this story: each wanted to kill, and so each died. A Kuyani man made

¹³ This other verse reflects the Aboriginal reaction to a station building being erected in a remote location not far from Lake Eyre. Work on this by Luise Hercus and Grace Koch has been submitted under the title 'Wire Yard' to a future publication in honour of Sally White.

a song in traditional style about the event which Arabana people referred to as *YuRupula pantirda* 'Two Men are fighting': In the 'sixties the Patterson brothers, speakers of Kuyani, could still sing this song and show the exact place where there had been many broken boomerangs lying about, evidence of the fight. If traditions had not broken down altogether, who knows whether Blanche Ned and George as well as the Two Men at *Wimparanha* waterhole might not have become minor Ancestors associated with a particular site?

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List of grammatical glosses

ABL	ablative case	IMP	imperfective
ACC	accusative case	INST	instrumental case
ANC	ancient past tense	LOC	locative case
CONT	continuative suffix	PAST	past tense
DAT	dative case	PRES	present tense
EMPH	emphatic suffix	PURP	purposive
HIST	historical past		