

3 Yes. Now about school, you mentioned the meeting we had, with Ngalkamarrang, and she spoke about the children. And about the people who own this country here. They should be helping us, and we're waiting on that. Instead, they're putting themselves first, those landowners. And we are always behind. So we just go along with them so we don't get upset. That's what we do. They control the way of doing things here on their own country. But that isn't working, they're still going backwards. And we, well, we are stalled. We who come from those other places. We are from other home countries. We've turned up (here). So then, we're frightened of them, because when we make those rules about the school for the kids, those people will reject those rules.

4 Some kids attend school and others don't. But in the past, they wanted to go, and in the past they used to go to school here, when there were lots of missionaries living here. Nobody got any pension. Older people, like us, didn't get pensions. Those people back then never got that. Nothing. The government didn't organize any money for them. And children's payments, Child Endowment, they never used to have that to start with. Those mothers and fathers just had to work all the time. The law was tough back then. They would buy food, sugar, just enough for their children, for use over the weekends. They didn't take food from each other. No, there was just enough to go round. Then after the weekend they would go to work again. And they wanted those jobs, those parents, they would be working. The law was hard back then. They didn't get child endowment. Nothing. The Government gave them nothing. No UB, nothing. Back then the law was harsh, and the government didn't make any laws on their behalf. Whereas now they've made those laws, and that's why the kids just hang around the place. They just get some money, some of them, the money they're giving them without any conditions. The kids don't go to school. That's what Ngalkamarrang (the school principal) was talking about.

5 And also, way back, under that old way of doing things, the children used to go to school, even though they didn't get that money for children, Child Endowment. The government didn't do anything like that. That's what they've got now, but we're failing to deal with it here. If the people who own this country would make some decisions, everything will be okay. If we'd all co-operate and stay together, all of us living here in this country. But no, we're still just waiting here, stalled.

6 Those kids want to learn so they can do well, so they can work, and take over from us when we die. They'll realize, and they'll say, "Those parents, those older people are telling us, so now we can do what they are saying." They will grow up able to do that. A new generation. Then they'll do a good job running things when they grow up and take over the place. Because we will all be gone - we adults. But this is not happening. They haven't got a clear, strongly held idea of our culture. This concerns all of us, black or white. The children don't really have a good grasp of it, they're really confused. Because they don't go to school enough to really learn things. And whatever things (there are to learn) at home, well, no one is doing anything. They don't want to. For example, Nakodjok, the other day we invited him (to the school council meeting) on Tuesday, and also Nawakadj, these are the two who run this place here. But they said, one of them said, "I've got a headache." The other one said, "I've got to eat breakfast first." [[Laughs]]. That's not good. So we met and decided that was that, and we left that business till later on. We decided they they'd said they needed to come to some realization.

7 Now, Ngalkamarrang works at school. But the people who are in charge of this land here are always failing. So we decided, "Okay, that's enough. What should we do? We won't ask their opinion because they haven't got a clue." But neither can we make the decisions. We just discuss it. We don't try to tamper with their way of doing things, or they'd just reject our ideas. Yes. Well, it's their country. I just said told the others, "Oh well, let's just leave it. We'll just stay in our separate groups."

8 Now, in regard to this, there is a white man in Darwin who is in charge of things. He sent those documents here to the school, this was at school. We watched um, who was that woman? She awarded certificates. The kids talked about her but I don't know her name.

9 Are the kids learning much? Um...no. They just don't really understand. And they haven't got hold of the law, they've got their new way of doing things. That's what they know about. That's all they try to do. But the law itself, no, they don't know it. What generally used to happen was they would go get some wild honey, eating bush tucker with the old people. That's what they used to learn. They would teach them.

Some of them learnt, and some didn't. Back when I came here from down south, I noticed all the children going to school, and they've all grown up now. Nakodjok too, that Manilakarr clan man. Donald too. They all went to school. They're going backwards now, and some have passed away. They don't want to...they won't look after their country. I don't want balanda to come and take over. The balanda are getting ahead, but we Aboriginal people, no. The white people shouldn't take over this country here. It belongs to us black people, so no. We don't want that. That's final.

10 SE: Is it okay if I ask you some questions? [Yes.] Okay, when you were a child, did you go to school here?

12 No. If we'd come down here, I would have gone to school. But, Ngalwakadj made up my mind for me when she took me there out to the east. So I didn't go with the idea (of school), I just went...[*Mm.*] I went way over to the east and then headed south. A long way away, that's where I was traveling. [*You just stayed out there?*] I was born there in the Manmoyi area. And we went further on from there, so I couldn't come down here. The old people didn't bring me down here to school. So I couldn't go to school. They had other plans, and they took me with them. So I went to other places.

13 SE: You know about the ceremonies, the lot of them, Kunabibi, Wubarr, Kunjmurrng, that Kunjmurrng one, Mardayin...Did you go to ceremonies?

14 Yes, I went when I was a little boy and they taught me. But I didn't see that, what do they call it, Wubarr ceremony. They didn't teach me that one. Two they did teach me - just the Kunabibi and Mardayin. Those they taught me. When I went down south, I saw the different ceremonies they have there. I saw them down there. Those were public ceremonies, a different kind of ceremony. Only two of them I watched them doing. I watched their actions - their dancing. And they taught me, they said, "You just do this." [*And you learnt it?*] Yes. I tried it.

15 SE: And when you were there, you were an initiate? [Yes.] So how did they teach you?

16 Yes, they taught me and I learnt. Then the Yabburlurrwa they taught me that too. They taught me and I learnt it. And also Kunabibi. They taught me that so I learnt it too. Then with the Mardayin, I came here and saw that. Whereas it was at Bamyili or Barunga they taught me Kunabibi. So, Kunabibi and Mardayin -they taught me those, that's how I got to know them. The Wubbarr, I've never seen. Never.

17 SE: And what about the kids? [Pardon?] Your own kids, do you teach them?

18 Only Kunabibi. Mardayin they haven't seen, no. They just know that Kunabibi, and Yabburlurrwa they know. I showed them that one. But the Mardayin, I haven't shown them that one. If they held Mardayin here, I could have shown those two and taught them. They could have learnt, but they don't know that Mardayin yet.

19 SE: You're talking about those two Nabulanj?

20 Yes, but you mean Nangarridjngarridj, yes.

21 SE: So when you were learning those (ceremonies), you know, when you were an initiate, when you (pl) were there, how did you learn? Did you, I mean, did you just watch how they did it, watch what they were doing, or did you listen to them explaining?

22 We watched what they did. Whatever, what they were doing, as they did this or that. And they talked about it too. When they would finish what they had been doing, whatever it was, one of them would explain. He used to explain it. And I would think, "Oh, so that's what he's doing. That's what they're doing." We would do that, and then in turn he would explain whatever. I used to think, "Ah, that's what I'll do." I understood why they were doing it. I would say, "Please teach me!" So then I would find out, so I know.

23 When I came here, I hadn't already got a wife where I was before. I had no wife, so I was still single when I turned up in Kunbarllanjnja and started work. When I came here I got a job, because, you know, when you got a job, you could get food.

They got money and bought it. That was how it was. If I'd stayed here without a job, I would have been hungry. It was a tough system. The government hadn't made any law to help at that stage. Child Endowment, they hadn't legislated for that, or school allowance for kids, or pension, UB, none of that. They've only done that recently. It was a lot tougher. If those people back then went short of food, they would have to go and gather bush honey. [*Bush tucker?*] Yes, bush tucker they would look for, and they would eat that and bring some back for the weekend. If they went for a holiday [*Mm.*] they would come back and get a job. Those kids used to go to school, and also go camping. They would take the kids camping from school. They went to Kunnanj and the Big Waterfall. They would go along and stay there, for weekend camping.

24 SE: About teachers, if a teacher is good, what does he do? You know, some teachers are good, some not.

25 Those first teachers were no good. They were really strict and they used to hit kids. [*What about now?*] Now, its okay. They don't hit the kids. They're quite good. They don't hit the kids. But back then they used to hit them. And those kids then didn't steal things. No, they were good kids back then. Back at the beginning. They used to be scared, they would think, "We might get hit." Those missionaries who were here were bad. One of them was really tough and he would chase those kids, and go crook at them. And he would go crook at us adults too. But he left.

26 SE: A very long time ago, when there was no school, maybe before balanda came, how did children learn?

27 They didn't have a school at to start with, this was before they built the school. Back at the beginning. They just came and settled here, they came and lived here. Those balanda. They found this place, they set it up, then they built houses. Not really big houses, they were only small, like our little bark shelters. The balanda just turned up and built houses. But our old people, those first people, used strips of ironbark and paperbark to make shelters. We used to watch them, when we (inc) were only very small.

28 SE: *Before the balanda came?* [Yes, when there was no school.] ***The adults would teach you?***

30 There was no school, (balanda) hadn't come yet. People just worked and that was all. There was no school so the kids just stayed home. They would just go along doing things. With no school, the kids would sometimes go camping. So they thought okay, they would build a school for them. But there was no money, to start with they didn't have money for them from Child Endowment for kids to go to school. No. [Mm.] They hadn't started it. And no pension either. They hadn't organized that. No unemployment benefit. Nothing. The government was very strict back then. Only later on did the government arrange to give that child money, pension and unemployment, single money (supporting mother's benefit). All that was only recently created. Back earlier it was bad. The government was very tough and didn't fix it. People just had jobs and that was all. Nowadays the mothers and fathers just stay at home, and if the children don't want to go to school they still get the child endowment, the mothers. There are a lot of kids, I see them in the Arrkuluk area, kids who are not attending school. I don't know why the mothers and fathers don't send them. They don't have clue.

31 SE: *Yes. I'm just thinking, you know Ngalkodjok?* [Yes.] ***The kids who call her kakkak, there are lots of them staying at that house.*** [Half the kids are there, eh?] ***She either doesn't send them to school, or maybe they just don't want to go.***

32 They see the (school) bus coming and duck inside the house.

33 SE: *When they see it coming closer?*

34 Yes, they go inside. When it goes past, they come out and have a look. They wait and if it comes back they see it and go inside again.

35 SE: *You know, Ngabba, what the school was like before, when I first came to Kunbarlanjnja and I was teaching Kunwinjku language at the school?* [Yes.] ***Well, do you want the school to teach them language or what?***

36 Yes, they should teach them. Yes. They should teach them so the kids will learn this language. They should teach them, the old people should teach them. They will learn. So yes, they should do it. That would be good.

37 SE: Now with the kids, those Nangarridj boys, do they speak Kundebi or Kunbalak? Do they learn them?

38 Kids. My kids you mean? [Yes.] Kundebi they don't know. They just say, for example, "Ngabbard", "Karrard", "Kakkak". They know that. "Kanjok." [*Sometimes they just use people's names?*] They know some of it, some they don't know. [*But sometimes they use names?*] Yes. Sometimes. [*I hear that sometimes.*] Some kids just say people's names. They just know the names, so they use the names, they don't know Kundebi. "Kanjok!" or "Ngabba!" that's all they know. If they don't know someone who turns up, say from Kakbi, they'll just recognize them by name. They won't know whether to call that person "Ngabba" or whatever.

39 SE: Kids sometimes call me "Dedi" [Yes.] I mean the Kriol mob. [Yes.] What about kids who hate school? What can the adults say to them?

40 If they hate school? [*They hate school.*] They just wait around at home, or what?

41 SE: They don't send them? Or what do they say?

42 They don't say anything, mother, father, mother's father or whoever, none of the grandparents. Anyway, they don't talk to the kids about it. They don't say anything. When they hear anything they just agree. They should say, "Off you go! If you just stay here all the time, the money will stop, and we'll all go hungry. You should go so you can learn," they should say to them. "You should learn! Kundembuy, whatever, you should learn it and know it. You should know how to read too. You don't want to have to just (sign your name with) a cross." That's what they should tell them. Because if not, they won't know how to read and write when they grow up. It will be just like the old days there was no school for us to go to. We only know a little bit, just a little bit of this or that.

44 SE: In the past when they used to go up to the ceremonies, [Yes.], was it strict when they used to teach them, was it hard?

45 I know about that business, yes. It's very tough. But, the new generation, the ones growing up now, when we send them up to the ceremonies, they're silly. They just go their own way, sniffing petrol and stealing things. Breaking in to places. They're doing the wrong thing.

46 SE: In the old days?

47 In the old days, when we did it, back then, when they taught us Mardayin, they used to explain to us. They would say, "This Mardayin, we're teaching you. So don't go and make trouble, and don't go and steal things from people. None of that. Or you could die." They would say that, "You could die for that."

48 SE: They gave it to you straight? [Yes.] What if those people, the initiates, got it wrong, would they have been angry with them?

49 Yes. They used to go crook at them. They would rouse on them. Those people back then, you know, they were very tough those old people. They would tell them if anyone plays around with that Mardayin or Kunabibi, if anyone treats the place disrespectfully, they would kill him. They would spear him in a secret way. This happened at a very early age for that man, that child, that young man - he would have died because he did the wrong things in the ceremony by treating it with contempt.

50 SE: That was very hard. [It was very hard back then.] Did they say to you, for example, "Hurry up and learn this!?" [Yes.] They pushed you along?

52 Yes. "Do it this way. And don't change it. It's you that has to change. So you know this ceremony, this Mardayin we're teaching you. Well, if you muck around with it, we'll probably kill you." That's what they told us. They frightened us. Well we thought, "Yes. Maybe if I treat this wrongly, or I go and do something wrong, maybe those elders will see me, and kill me." That's what I had in my mind. That's what I was thinking. So for my part, I used to be careful. Whenever I would go along

with the elders, or just with the young men, we wouldn't try to make each other do anything wrong. Because I was thinking about that word I had from them. So I went along carefully, and that was fine. If those others wanted to get each other into trouble, that was their business. Because I realized the law was very strict, that law was very hard. It was the elders' law. They used to say, "Don't make yourself into something where you think you can go beyond the ceremony, or put yourself above it." That's what they said, "Mardayin or Kunabibi". They would use sorcery to sing the one who made trouble, or made a mistake. They would sing him. And he would die, whoever that man was.

53 SE: When there was no ceremony going on, you know, at home, when you were small, who used to teach you?

54 They used to tell us things, those old people -mother or grandmother or great grandmother, or my father's mother. They would say to us, for example, "All right..."- this could have been any of the old men or women - "You should look after those very old people. Look after the place for them. Keep an eye on things here, while we go hunting." They would say that. "Okay then, we'll stay here." So we would stay there, all us kids as a group together. We would stay there and keep an eye on the old man, who maybe was sleeping there. And if there was water close by we would go and have a swim. We would have a swim, then come out and check on that old man still sleeping. We would stay there till late afternoon when they would all come back. They would have been looking for wild honey or other tucker, those older people. They would come back and say to us, ask us, "Are you all okay?" "Yes, we're all right."

55 And sometimes they would argue, argue about things. Private family matters they would argue about sometimes. They would argue, those who liked arguing, but I would leave them to it and move to another shelter, all by myself. I didn't want fighting. That old man now, Peter Bilis, he was always looking for an argument when he was younger.

56 SE: So nowadays, how to they learn, for example about Christianity, or language, or hunting, all kinds of things, you know, that they're learning?

57 Yes, yes. I go around and I see what kids are doing. Nothing. They just leave them as a group to do their own thing. If a car comes along they get a lift. There were no cars in the old days. We couldn't get rides, it was all on foot, you know, with no cars. The parents used to leave us at home. Nowadays they can all get in the vehicles. They can pick them up. That's what they learn now, how to get into motor vehicles.

59 SE: *You know, Ngabba, balanda and Aboriginal people, is it...or what do you think, are they both the same? Or different? I'm thinking of when both go to school?*

60 You white people and we black people? Yes. Well with black people, we're already having a lot to do with white people, we black people are mixing with them. But there are differences. They're different systems, and that's good. Fine. The black system, well, maybe its not really that strict. Not really. Where the white system, it is really tough. Its very hard that white business. The black system is quite separate, distinct. That's how it is. But then the younger generation are going towards the white way of doing things. People nowadays. We older people still have that black system. That's what we follow. The older generation, that old way. Its gone, passed, but it's still going here. But that white system is really hard. Its very hard. The black way is not. We can't find out, you know what I mean? we can't sort out with each other what to do, we black people. The younger generation are talking about it, working out what to do.

61 For example with land, the people now are setting up some way of looking after the country, we (inc) are saying "Let's look after our country. And all you white people can just go!" That's what he's got in mind: to move onto his land and look after it. Because those white people, the white people are coming, and they'll have to push them off. At Maningrida, for example, they've pushed them all out of the way. They've got carpenters, school teachers and what else - the clinic [*Shop?*] Yes, shop. Yes, just black people. Its just Aboriginal people running it. [*Not here.*] No, not here. No. The balanda are taking over here, they've almost done it.

62 At Maningrida they've said to them, "Right, you just move on. You white people move on, its our turn". And so they're making a lot of money. That's what they wanted, so those people looking after that country are making a lot of money. They've done it. Previously, those balanda had it, and they looked after the money but only gave a little bit (to bininj). That means they understood the law, just like at Beswick, where the Aboriginal people run things. And there at, whatsit, Bamyili, where they've got clinic workers, and they've got builders. It's happened. In all those places its all black people. The office is staffed by black people. No balanda.

63 SE: *There's a lot of balanda living here. Lots. [Here?] White people.*

64 Its not good here, there's a huge mob. That's why we tell D___, [[Note, D___ is a senior traditional owner]] "Why don't you throw them out. Those two women have turned up and put themselves in as Town Clerks, two Town Clerks! Its up to you to look after this place."

65 SE: *And what did he say, that Nawakadj?*

66 Nothing. He didn't have a clue.

67 SE: *He's frightened?*

69 He's frightened. He said, "Oh, if I put pressure on them, they'll attack me, or something will happen. If I go crook at them." Back before, I did that to that town clerk who was here, Tom. "When Tom goes, you traditional owners decide among yourselves who should look after the place. Who you'll put in as town clerk, you black people." That's what I said, but they didn't do what I said.

70 SE: *You're on the council?*

71 Yes. On the council. I said, "Don't just leave it all up to those balanda. That's no good. You should try to do it yourself." I said that. I told him (Donald). But with no result. He just sat and said nothing. So I said, "All right. Just leave it. Forget it. And those balanda will just be all over you. And those balanda will just take the country."

They're talking about it, everywhere, this balanda business. Its a bad place. No, the place isn't bad itself, but the people who own it. And we have no say, we're outsiders.

72 SE: *They're not looking after the place?*

73 That's right. And that Nawakadj, he's thinking of putting other people there, and to put them on (the council) so they can talk about all this.

74 SE: *Later on...what do you think of this? Later on, just as I've interviewed you, I've interviewed other people too. Is it okay if we all talk together, have a meeting to talk about things, maybe so you (pl) can tell me something, or, okay? [Yes.] In that meeting. [Yes.] Later I'll be writing this in English, and I'll give you a copy of the paper. [Yes.] And I'll give each of the others a copy so they'll all have it and maybe you can all swap them around and look at each other's. Read it and think about it and talk it over. [Yes, that's good.] Is it okay if maybe I ask you something later on, next week or next year maybe? [Yes.] And if you think of it, if there's anything else you want to tell me, well it will good if you come and tell me and I can write it down.*

75 Yes, actually I'll tell you then what I'm thinking about country, here in this place and the other places, outstations where we live. They were arguing about it yesterday, when they were drunk they were arguing. [**At Demed?**] No, at home. Drunk. They were drunk. There at Manmoyi outstation, they were arguing. It was Ngalngarridj, actually...they were claiming that place for themselves. They said, "You weren't born here on this country." And she got upset about that, and she moved up to Kamarrkawan. [**She got personally upset?**] Yes she got very upset. When she comes here we're going to talk about it. About that country. And another thing is, they don't have any ideas and they don't know anything, they only know about arguing. They don't take time to look after the place. The young people are just coming and going, not looking after the country. And that would be good. We old people are looking after the country. So I told them, "We old people, don't leave it all up to us. You young people should realize you can look after the place. So then when we die, when we've gone, you'll be able to look after the place." [**You handed**

the place on to them?] Yes. “You organize yourselves without arguing and fighting, but those houses and airstrip belong the whole family. We shouldn’t be at odds with each other. We should have love for each other. We mustn’t be always arguing. We don’t live here very long, so we don’t really get to know the place.” I told them at the meetings that we should keep on going and just listen to each other about country. If we kept going with it and listened to each other, it would be good. That Ngalngarridj left that place and took all her stuff up top there. She was very offended. They were telling me about her. They were saying that they should come and talk about that country. Its silly. They don’t really understand.

76 SE: Is there anything you want to ask me? Or anything else you want to talk about?

[[End of interview. The remainder of the tape is personal discussion only.]]

END TAPE