The Bora of the Pascoe River,
Cape York Peninsula, Northeast Australia

Recorded and Annotated by Wolfgang Laade
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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THE BORA OF THE PASCOE RIVER
CAPE YORK PENINSULA, NORTHEAST AUSTRALIA

Recorded in August, 1962 by Wolfgang Leade, with a grant of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

Notes and Photographs by Wolfgang Leade.

The bora, or boys' initiation ceremonies of the Aborigines of the eastern Cape York Peninsula have first been described by Donald F. Thomson, "The Hero Cult, Initiation and Totemism on Cape York", in vol. LIXI, 1921, of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London. Additional information on the different bors of Eastern Cape York and their recent history will be found in my paper "Notes on the Bora at the Lockhart River Mission, Cape York, Northeast Australia", which will be published in the "Journal de la Société des Oceanistes", Paris. With this record a sound document of the same subject is presented.

During my stay at the Lockhart River Mission, where all the Aborigines of the eastern part of the Peninsula are settled, I concentrated on the bora, or, initiation ceremony, as this seemed most threatened. In fact, it nowadays no longer plays the role it used to play traditionally, and the people are largely disinterested. One reason is that since the last decades of the 19th century the young men of the tribes used to work on trochus and pearlshell collecting and hence lost contacts with the tribal elders and often did not have the opportunity to undergo the traditional initiation ceremonies. At sporadic occasions they learned this and that from the old bora leaders and their knowledge of the matter consequently remained fragmentary.

Still the few old men recorded here had a fairly coherent knowledge of the matters and therefore were asked to tell once more the myth of the crocodile hero on which the whole Bora is based and hence the usual course of the ceremony. Besides this, 12% of the traditional Bora songs were recorded.

The myth of Warri Wari, the crocodile - as it is called in his human shape (Thomson calls it Wabi which is the name of its animal form) - was first published by Thomson (I.c., pp.463 ff.) and a comparison with the version told here by the old Bora leader Billy Daniels shows that both are fragmentary but very well complementing each other; while in the version related by Thomson emphasis is laid on the hero's actions in Cape York, Billy describes in detail his historical style of the Wutati singing. A singing assistant is Hughie Temple (ab. 65), a Kanduya man who also uses the masks and drums. While George Morton describes the style of the Wutati singing, the singing of Billy, Edward and Hughie is purely Ya'a.

To work with the old men and to make these recordings I had to meet them daily on the sacred and secret bora ground (ngartyi kintya) which is taboo (kintya) to all the uninstructed, and to women and children. The kintya kintya was located in a grove of small euca-

...you hear them playfully cutting a piece of wood, lighting tobacco pipes and cigarettes, and making all sorts of additional noise. Occasionally the narrator discusses a little problem with his companions and corrects himself. In the whole, it is a radio-like version of the ceremony and the least studio-like. It would, however, simply be impossible to make the men tell and sing about their most sacred and secret matters and rituals in one document, and that from the old contacts. While in the ceremony the opportunity to talk freely with the informants is laid here by the old men, who are tabo to the people "outside" as far as they are of their own race, my informants had no objections against making known their traditional sacred myth and initiation customs to people further "outside", i.e. to people abroad.

NOTE: Under the song numbers of this record I have added in brackets the corresponding numbers of the original collection which is held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. They all refer to volume 1 of my collection from 1963-65.

SIDE I
The Saga of the Crocodile Hero, told by Billy Daniels.

Some substantial portions of the tale are omitted in Billy's narration, therefore those should briefly be mentioned here from Thomson's relation of the tale.

The crocodile, after his arrival and settling down at the Pascoe River, instructed the men in every detail of the bora ceremony and therefore the informants tell how to make the masks etc. He taught them the ceremonial dances and songs, which are all said to have been created by this bora leader, but whom he met Yangki (the rock python), then the wife of Kanduya (the echnida), and eloped with her. Yangki's people could hear the sound of his drum on the bora ground and they set out to kill him, because he had stolen Yangki. The whole Yangki episode is omitted by our narrator. He only describes the people who intend to kill him: they are relatives of his, his grandfather people. This is certainly wrong. It is different tribes or clans who unite to kill him and thus force him to flee. Some men (a strange fly) shows him that there must have been a girl (perhaps a whale. The narrator discusses a little problem with his companions and corrects himself. In the whole, it is a radio-like version of the ceremony and the least studio-like. It would, however, simply be impossible to make the men tell and sing about their most sacred and secret matters and rituals in one document, and that from the old contacts. While in the ceremony the opportunity to talk freely with the informants is laid here by the old men, who are tabo to the people "outside" as far as they are of their own race, my informants had no objections against making known their traditional sacred myth and initiation customs to people further "outside", i.e. to people abroad.

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And another person jealous of him, he then people, (they are) all brothers and cousins. They all come, come, come, come, - might be two days, few days (they walked). They come now. They want to kill him. That's his grandfather people, all Kandyu. That bugger Kandyu too, that Alligator. And that fellow (a girl) sittin' down there with the white shirt - you remember we talkin' about (her name) Malandidyi. Well, that gang all mix up, make one big heap (they gather in a big crowd) to kill this Alligator. And the Flyin' Fox people too, Flyin' Fox people come mix up along this lot. All come, and they all gotta kill him. This fellow too great: you know, he puttin' over us fellows everything! "Come on, we kill him," (they said).-Yilintyi (Yilitiyi) people and Malandidyi people, all mix up. Must be bloody Sugarbag Mountain people too mix up (with them). Now they must to kill him. (Make) ready very..."
We go another way, sung by Johnny He dive. All go 'shore. He sing and dive. Him say, "Oh, well, he start now (again). He start sing, sing, sing. He can see this bloody diamond stingaree (aluka). He can see him jump, and you see that belly belo' him 'come white. When he (the diamond ray) come, him (the Alligator) never stop (singing). The kids hit the drum.

Well, he put that thing on top. Put all these thing, put all the piccaninny. He (the stingray) go down, he go down altogether, sink, close up (nearly) to down. He (Alligator) come 'shore again. He come 'shore. Him say, "No go." Alright, he go on top hill. Sing, sing, sing, sing, sing. He look shark jump. (The shark) come, come, come, - same shark. Come, come, come alongside. (Alligator) say, "You'll take me?" He say, "Yes." All gettin' there. Bloody shark sink down. He come back 'shore.

Oh, well, he start now (again). He start sing, sing, sing. He can see this bloody diamond stingaree (aluka). He can see him jump, and you see that belly belo' him 'come white. When he (the diamond ray) come, him (the Alligator) never stop (singing). The kids hit the drum.

Song 7, sung by Billy Daniels, Edward Kanora and Hughie Temple, with 3 drums.

Pascoe bora song for dance of the yawa (diamond ray) mask.

We yawa kitikidyawa....

After a vain attempt to catch the diamond ray, the crocodile attracts the fish with this magical song.

(The diamond ray) come, come, come close to, - come, come, come, not too close. I think he come all same (like the distance of) my camp. (Diamond ray) jump again. "Oh, look, there he come! Come, come, oh, big diamond fish. He got boat belongs mouth (?) . Come, come, come right ashore. Diamond fish ask him, "You want to go anywhere?" "Yeah," him say, "yeah, I want to travel. I got no canoe. I lose my canoe. I jump on (you)." He make that jety (?) on top, put all his piccaninny (on it). When he been jump he (the diamond ray) carry him on top belo' water. Him say, "That's a good one. He never stop. Em (Alligator) no hook him (the fish) on proper; rope no good. So, he gonna lose that canoe, that same thing, diamond fish. Him stick him (he tied him to) rope rotten one. There he stingaree gone, diamond fish... All canoe gone.

(1) probably something like an enclosed platform as formerly was on the canoes

Song 6, sung by George Morton, with drum.

A tyari, tyari, tyari waina wutua ngayi kita inainwa.

(The contents of the song have no visible connection with the tale, it seems. It tells of a crow (waina waina) which tears away a piece of tea-tree bark from a native bark hut (tyari tyari).

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The song tells of the crocodile's voyage from Kitai Island (?) to Mount Adolphus Island. They go Mon' Dolphin. He climb that hill (to) have a look around where Murray (Island is). Can't find him. He must have got chart. Or somebody lead him; they tell him, "Murray Island this direction." Alright, he go across (now) go to the Sister. He camp there. That same one we sing yesterday, that flash-boy (Yori), he been with him too. That Yori, he been with him. And that Malandidyi, that girl, nice looking girl, he been there too... Malandidyi, oh, proper mad over that boy. He's a good dancer, a pretty boy.

(Here Billy refers to a tale he had previously told, the "Thimkin" or "Flash" boy Yori and the beautiful girl Malandidyi. Although Billy calls the boy a "Yori" and the girl a Kandyu and although he mentioned Malandidyi's relatives amongst the crocodile's enemies at the Pascoe River the tale definitely is of Torres Strait Island origin, and I will publish it elsewhere as the "Tale of Kaman and Panipan". Kaman, like Yori, is an outstanding dancer and this makes the girl fall in love with him. When people notice this from the flash of her smile (Panipan is the lightning) there ensues a big quarrel. An angry girl fall in love with him. When people know (pointing at the other men around), not anybody (of us). The boy goes down into the sea to live there as the black-spotted blind shark, and the girl is going up to the sky. The Yori-Malandidyi episode happens at the Three Sisters Islands and I would think that originally it does not form part of the crocodile saga.

Now today you look he (Yori) be no good (not nice anymore), he is now) blind shark, he got black spot - spot. And he start roll like that (in the water). Big low water, - then start high water, you can see that there stand all about like sea he come (with the motion of the water).

He (Alligator) go from there now. He got Three Sister (Islands). They had that dance that night. That big arguin' been start - you know - where he chuck that Yori 'long fire. Next day he leave. Yori stop there, he never go (further). Malandidyi go on top sky, on the cloud. And Yori stop along reef.

Song 2, sung by George Morton, with drum.

(29) Pascoe Bora song, in Wutati (and therefore unintelligible to my informants). Song is said to accompany Yori's dance with a mask called tiuku.

Alligator and his family, his start go. He go. He camp Cumblin' (Cumberland) Passage. Cumblin' Passage he camp. He gotta go right through southeast blow. He camp. He never go down that night. He float all night, all his kid on top, till (the) wind break. Morning time, they go to) Murray Island... nice island." He say, "Well, all sit up here. I go down now." He dive. When he (they) been sing out, then he pockyami. Young out, he can't listen. He come up. He say, "This (is) goin' to be (our) home." He (is still) there today. That's the end of that story.

But Alligator never go 'way. Sometime(s) one dream, - that's specially like Easter, Easter or Christmas, after Christmas - we gonna listen (Billy beats the drum) here still. (It is) not me, not this old fellow, not him (pointing at the other men around), not anybody (of us). Drum go. I don't know what people, we don't know. We only listen, we listen warup (drum). I think Alligator still long us fellow. That people who been die away, old singer, they still hear (that, till) today (it can be heard). That (is) a marvellous thing, you know? (Edward Kanora adds:) Sometime good fine weather. Middle night, everybody sleep. When I get up I listen - drum goin' here.

The masked dancers appear and frighten the kangas (initiands) and finally even attack them physically. Then they take the masks off and the kangas realize that the masked spirits were impersonated by men. The kangas now are admonished to keep this as their strict secret.

If the time is over the Bora leaders decide to hold the final ceremonies. All the people are invited to a place near the Bora area where also dances will be held. This place is near the beach. All people stay there overnight while on the Bora ground there is non-stop singing, the dancing. In the morning, just before sunrise the boys come out and are happily received by their mothers. Suddenly with loud drumming and singing strange beings emerge from the bush (certain masks, only a few are allowed ever to be seen by outsiders) and rush into the crowd chasing the boys with their frightened mothers into the sea. This is regarded as a kind of Bora baptism and consequently an essential part of the ceremonies. When the masked men have disappeared they go on shore again and warm themselves up with a big fire. The boys go back to the ngartyi kintya.

Now the boys dress up for the Koimpadyi pageant, they are dressed like kangaroos with long tails. Some of the singers have in the meantime joined the women who also decorate themselves, painting their bodies and putting all their shell ornaments on. The women start dancing the tyawul dance. After a while the boys appear in their Koimpadyi make-up, accompanied by the Koimpadyi songs. This is the last performance and the kangas return to the Bora ground to clean themselves from paint and make-up and then are released.

The boys are now allowed to eat everything and the good-mothers have prepared food for them (dapper is a kind of home-made bread). Then follows an exchange of gifts. The Bora leaders have received the formal payment from the boys' parents. Now the boys' parents exchange gifts with the good-parents who have for the whole period of the ceremony taken care of the boy. Nowadays, when the kangas usually have worked on boats and already earned some money of their own, they contribute money or goods from the local mission store. The gifts are quite substantial considering the fact that these people never have much money at their disposition.

Billy and Charlie independently from each other described the Okaynta ceremonies on tape. To make the description as detailed and complete as possible portions of each are pieced together and the songs belonging to the respective phases of the ceremonies are added.

Charlie has a congenial split lip and palate, but is nonetheless speaking clearly enough to be understood.

Narration

Billy: When we start the Bora the headman now, like the headman, he said, "We got (to make) a Bora." He might talk to me or might talk to George (Morton), "What do you think of it? What do you fellows think of it?" We say, "Well, it's up to you. What do you say?" He say, "Alright, we gonna grab some boy(s)."

A Description of the Okaynta Ceremonies of the Pascoe Bora.

told by Billy Daniels and Charlie Ominio

There were two cycles of ceremonies, the Okaynta and the Monka, the latter always was held later than the former. The Okaynta belong to the coastal tribes while the Monka belonged to the Kandyu who lived further inland. In praxis, the Kandyu people used to hold the Okaynta with the Wutati and Ya'lo while the latter went to the Kandyu area to participate there in the Monka. The Monka seems to have played a minor role, and talking about the Bora means unvariedly talking about the Okaynta ceremonies.

Billy starts describing how a Bora commences with the old men deciding to hold one if there are enough uninitiated boys in the village. With the consent of their parents they are "caught" by the Bora men when coming close to the Bora area. This goes on until a sufficient number of boys is held on the ngartyi kintya. The boy now has broken all his ties with his own family but during the ceremonies he has a good-father (mawarra) and a good-mother. The former watches the boy continually and tries to make things as comfortable to the boy as the strict Bora rules allow. The boy is not allowed to speak and to move, he has to follow a number of food taboos. Food for him and the mawarra is cooked by the good-mother who carries it down near to the Bora area where it is received by the mawarra. During the period of his absence the boy's real parents are not allowed to use his plate, cup, etc.

SIDE II

CHARLIE OMINIO

A Description of the Okaynta Ceremonies of the Pascoe Bora.
Alright, might catch two today. Here he come, come on to Bora ground. Alright, that's law (to) catch him now, Bora law. Catch him, get (him) here (to the Bora ground). Well, we tell the father (or) might be (the) mother. "What will you want this boy? You want him go out in the night?" He might say, "Yes."

Alright, we get him there. Next day, might be that another young boy walkin' 'round. 'Long the fence there or anywhere just inside the fence there. All that big men now, like oneself (and) come more, hold him up. Alright, (they call), "Stop! Come on! You belong our boundary. Come here! You're in jail." We get him there. The father won't pick (him) up because the law holdin' him. Right-o, we got that. And might be after noon 'mother one('s) father and mother say, "Oh, come on." (They) want to get him (their son) in (to the Bora) too. Another two might come in, of four, all come here. Oh, you see, me and us fellows, we turn round now, we feel happy. Sing go more and more, more and more, more and more. Keep singin', go, go. Might be another day he got another four. Keep come. They come here. This (is) jail now.

Mother can't... When he hit his own plate, mother can't use that plate because (or) that law belong Bora. Mother can't use him spoon, cup, only the boy use him. Even the father won't use him. Those men like... who don't know (our) sing they can't use him. We the people only use him, we can drink water with it.

Alright, we start. We might, (let's) say all we got fifteen. Well, people start off...

Charlie: All good-father here sit down, mawarra; we call him (the boy's Bora-father) mawarra. (They) all sit down here 'longside (us). Something, something: ants crawl (on you, the kanga), - (he, the mawarra) no let him ants bite you. Eye-in-'by you get some come out. This one old medicine, put him on, stop... When ants come up, come up all round here (on the legs) mawarra (weeping gesture-) all time now. (Kanga) mustn't move, not move. Just sit down like that (with legs outstretched). Mawarra, em he get work (for the kanga).

Song 10. sung by Johnny Short. (37)
Pascoe Bora song.

Kanga mintangora yawungkum oonyingara mintangora.

"The old men have to watch them (the kanga) proper from stick and dirt. 'Stretch your leg'- kanga has to sit with outstretched legs."

You only sittin' down. Alright, might be yer tired... Big men, old men (of the) Bora... say, "That boy might be tired." Mawarra go, alright, (he) hold your leg, straight him this kind, straight him (bends the kanga's leg). Alright, you sit down like that now(cross-legged). Sit down. (You) no talk, no ask-a them Bora people. Singer, (you) no ask (means: you must not talk to anybody). (You) just sit down like a dummy there, yeah. All day sit down. No smoke...Alright, we stop, stop, stop, stop. No talk.

This kind time (midday), dinner come. Alright, bring a dinner. Good-father bring him. (She does, of course, not enter the Bora area) no, halfway, halfway there, and then good-father bring him down. Alright, bring him down. He say, "Mother brought here something." Kaikai (eat), kaikai, kaikai. Some kaikai. Kaikai now. Everybody alright. That mawarra put him leg straight (again). That mawarra put him leg straight (again), put him back (outstretched) again. He get away (that's the custom), he got away, you know, something like that.

Billy: On afternoon we keep sing and sing and sing. Line up, you see. You might see four, five (masked dancers approaching). Alright, slow (turn) them boy. Everybody's face go that way and have a look behind. Thing come, come close like that. Start slow round that boy. And he (the masked dancer) talk now, "li li li li li li li." Then boy look. Oh, he shake because he look plenty now, might be four or five. Alright, he dance 'round, dance 'round, dance. Four, four of them dance.

Song 11, sung by Billy, Edward, George and others, with drums, during an actual dance rehearsal. Dance of kingfish (yapiti) mask.

They start kneel, kneel down, you know. Alright, go on wrestle him (the dancers wrestle with the kanga). Them boy wrestle him, you know. Put hand 'round like that. Another two might be 'long you, another two might be 'long me. (They) wrestle us. Finish. Take the face (mask) cut (off). He (the kanga) look: "Oh, man!" That's that. People like headman he start talk, 'That's for you (only). Not to go home and talkin' about what you seen Bora round. Keep that secret to yourself." Say, "When we die you'll be doing' the same thing." Well, they keep the secret alright. That's that. Finish.

Then (one day) he (the headman) might say, "Oh well, this time (is) up. What do you think?" He might talk (to) me and Georgie. Old fellow might say, "You better hurry up and do him, clean them boy(s) up."
Billy: (Then) we talk, like we talk now, "Dress him up (dress the kang for the Koimpadyi)". He might say, "Dress him up." Alright, like you 'n' me and somebody more, we go down, we all go down on that same ngartyi kintya here. Sit down. Well, "Come on, paint up." (Nowadays) we all get short trowsers like you got. All dress well, paint up...Alright, women paint up too (for Tyawul). Women paint up, paint up now, I might say, "Alright, I go long (to the) women; I sing for women (for their Tyawul dance)." Or he might say, "No I bring women."

Song 16, sung by Edward Kanora and others, with drum.

A tanamakita wigwina
(He makes a posture) (snakes hip)
Hendyuman
(same to the other side)

"Alligator make a little bit song but women dance" (Billy makes a posture: left arm stretched up at left side, right arm downward at right side) "Alligator show them!" (words and postures as described above: hlp shake arms now stretched in opposite directions - right arm up, left arm down. Moving of torso and head rocking to both sides). Tanamakita is the described arm posture.

So we start here (from the Bora place: the remaining singers with the kangas start marching to the place where all the other people have gathered), (singing a Koimpadyi song). Boys come, pretty, you know. Come this way, dressed like kangaroo, tail behind. They tie that tail there. That tall thing they there like (that of) a wallaby, (should be the big red kangaroo). Koimpadyi now.

Song 17, sung by Edward Kanora, Billy Daniels, Hughie (Temple, with drum.

Koimpadyi song.

Wankula raye esita wankula ye miya.

Wankul is the mother of the red kangaroo.

Dugong (rai) wants tall of Koimpadyi and kangaroo gets tail from that dugong" (probably based on an old folk-tale).

Come, come, come, come, come. People, all women look now. Headman might say, might be headman he tell them, "Look there!" People start look like: "Pretty! Flash (nice)"

Charlie: Alright, mornin' (now). (Kanga) speak him keikai now (means he can eat any food now)1. Jump over, all the same (as if) jump over, jump over, (from the Bora restrictions back into normal life). Alright, when he go now he speak him that damper. Ask him straightway too, "Mai (food) ngandu papai," ask him like that, "Mai ngandu papai."

Alright. Might be now all same me: I work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work (on a boat). I get a bit money now. My good-father been hard work, bring-a kaikai for me all that, I mean, month now (she) been hard work. Alright, I gotta try (to) pay back. I buy cloth, you know, buy some eight yard calico, material, eight yard material, and - what name here (what else)? - ten yard material this (another) kind, chemise, pants, bras, everything, thonger (food) too...Good-father and good-mother, they pay now (and also buy gifts for the boy). On (the good-parents) too, just the same, and (we) too, it's just the same. Collect them clothes what them two got, make them together. All same (if, for instance) I got him make him, you know, big bundle. Might be, alright, somebody help me, one hand catch him (takes them), hang all clothes, hang him, hang him, singlet (and) material this kind. Put him on a stick, all same like that: you carry one (end) here, another one (is holding the other end of the stick). All put the clothes here (means: we put all the clothes on the stick). Good-father and good-mother (do) just the same. Alright, (you) ask him now, ask him (because usually there is) money, inside money on top, you know. Might be 'bout 10. Just the same: inside money, (he) give me, for boy. Ask him finished. That day you can talk now, talk. All (is) over now.

The final music was recorded during a dance rehearsal. The song was not specified.

The recordings were made with Nagra and Uher Report tape recorders.

Suggested Readings:


Betty Hiatt: Female Aboriginal dancing associated with the Bora ceremony at Lockhart River Mission in the Cape York Peninsula. Reismui: The author, 1965. (18 pp. illus.)


PASCOE BORAS PLACE, WITH MASK OF THE TOKORRO (TIGER SHARK)

Song 14, sung by Billy Daniels.

(35) Pascoe Bora song, sung when the boys come out from the Bora place in the morning.

Keep on that sing, keep go (till) daylight. Come, come, come, they walkabout now on (the beat of the) drum. Mother get all the piccaninny (the boys) now, put-a-hand, catch him hand there. Dance right on the water (side).

Charlie: You look: big mob now. All Nytuima (masks) come out now, Katabe (another mask) come out. Look now: all come up. Katabe go round now. Go round, go round, go round. He (the masked dancers) charge them mother, you know, go like for kanga and chase him for kanga, all mother. Chase him altogether, chase him that way, chase him that way. Mother come round this way, another Katabe chase him round that way. All bundled like that.

That's the one, he (the masked men) been push him altogether, (the mother). Uuuh, (they) swim, swim, swim, swim, swim right up there. All mothers, all with the piccaninny, kanga. These all (mothers) he come (to) boy belong him (her), swim, swim, yeah! Mawarra, - Mawarra there on to (on shore). Only the mother catch hold of (him of the) boy now, good-mother. Yes, (they) swim. (The masked men) chase him up, chase him up, chase him up, - that Tewu (a fish mask) now, chase him (them) up, chase him up, chase him up till he (they) go on top (on shore).

Billy: When he (they) come out half way we sing another song now.........

Charlie: On top now mother proper cold now from that swim, wet clothes, uuuh. (As) soon where we get on top (they make a) big fire. We dry him up along fire now. (This fire), you know, (is made from) then coconut, dry coconut (nuts). (They) make gather him up, gather him up, all people gather him up (collect them), make a big fire, you know, (cm) place on top (of the beach). We stand up there, everyone around fire. All get warm now a little bit.

Song 15, sung by Billy Daniels, Edward Kanora and Hughie (Temple, with drum.

Pascoe Bora song, sung after the boys bath during their ritual hair-cut (yangam).

Tiki ayapa kodhanyi ngolothal.

Tiki - "We go sing" Ngolothal is up-country on the other side of the Pascoe River.