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The Design-Plans of Mythless Rites

1. Introduction

In my analysis of the rite of the bullroarer among the Murinbata it was possible to describe the myth of Mutjingga, The Old Woman, as the myth *of* that rite because of the demonstrable connection between them. The present article will deal with two important rites—those of circumcision and burial—which are not and, as far as I could discover, were not in the past associated with myths in that way. All that can be said is that they have a certain ‘support’ from the general system of beliefs, but are not arranged into a story-form, that is, systematically. The object of the article is to extract and analyse the structures of the rites to discover the extent to which their design-plans resemble or differ from those dealt with in the previous articles in this series. I propose at the same time to look for a possible congruence with the design-plan of yet another myth—that of Kukpi, The Snake Woman—which resembles that of the myth of The Rainbow Serpent in having no apparent connection with any rite. By those means I hope to be able to show that there is substantial support for my view that the ritual culture of the Murinbata is built to a paradigm persisting through great external differences, and between things in no apparent connection.

The study of Aboriginal religion inevitably has been much affected by theories *about* religion. Much that has been written reads as though the leading motive had been to vindicate, even to expand, some general formula, e.g. that of Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim or Freud. My approach has been to try, as far as possible, to let Murinbata religion exhibit itself. That is not to say I make a pretence of letting the facts ‘speak for

themselves.' Without construction and interpretation they would not be meaningful. But I have sought to keep as close as I could to the principle stated by Durkheim, although in another connection: 'to know what the division of labour is objectively it is not enough to develop the contents of the idea we have of it, but we must treat it as an objective fact, observe, compare; and we shall see that the result of these observations often differs from the one its intimate meaning suggests to us.'¹ One of my objects has been to show that the objective facts of Aboriginal religion can be observed and compared from a fresh point of view, and that to do so reveals many unappreciated facts and similarities which, on the one hand, make imperative a revision of the 'intimate meaning' we have held of Aboriginal religion and, on the other, provide an empirical basis on which to do so.

2. Circumcision at Puberty

The Murinbata tradition recognised three distinctive styles in which a boy might be initiated by circumcision at puberty. He was referred to by the name of the style followed at his initiation, so that he might be called *ŋi-wangga*, *ŋi-manbangoi*, or *ŋi-naitpan* (*ŋi* = penis).² The particular name-style was determined by the region to which he was taken for

1 *The Division of Labour in Society*, p. 46 (1947 ed.).

2 In Murinbata usage the word *wangga* is the name of the initiatory style as well as the name of the associated dance and song. It has no other determinable meaning, but is somehow linked with the Daly River region. No doubt it may be connected with the name of the Ngolok-Wanggar (Mulluk-Mulluk, Malak-Malak) tribe on that river. On the other hand, *manbanggoi* is probably a contraction of *maiyeŋ panggoi*, lit. 'road,' 'long,' but the song and dance that go with it are named *lirga*. The name *naitpan* is probably a variant of the adjective *naitpar*, 'distant.' That style of initiation goes with the *mindirriŋi* song and dance, which are identical with the *dingiri* of the Nangiomeri (Nangiwumiri) and the *kudjingga* of the Djamindjung (Murinyuwen).

isolation during the preliminary phase of the rite; if in a northerly direction, the *wanga* style was followed; east or north-east, the *manbangoi* style; south or south-east, the *naitpan* style. The differences between *wanga* and *manbangoi* amounted to little more than a few minor variations of songs, dances and ritual patterns: the fundamental plans of the rites were the same. The *naitpan* was the most elaborate and, as spectacle, the most impressive. It had four distinctive features. (i) On the night before his circumcision, a neophyte's escorts—'those with the penis'—performed a fire dance (*mindirriini*) which (ii) females and young boys were forbidden to see. (iii) The dancers were covered with feathers or down stuck to their bodies by blood drawn from left-handed men (*kadu takunbe*). (iv) The only musical instruments used were boomerangs, brought into play as tapping-sticks. I could see no other important differences.

If, as sometimes happened, relations with neighbouring tribes were too strained and the dangers of a boy's being abroad too great, or if his escorts were unable to persuade other tribesmen to return with them, a very truncated ceremony might be held, and boys—a very small minority—circumcised under those conditions were referred to as *ni-mulun* (lit. 'person,' 'leaves' or 'shadow'). The *mulun* could scarcely be called a style, but the three others are reputed to be very ancient and to have been 'level'—of equal importance—in the tradition. Of 23 instances of which I was able to obtain information for the decade 1935–45, 4 had been in the *wanga* style, 7 *manbangoi*, 10 *naitpan* and 2 *mulun*.

Murinbata men professed that the rite of circumcision was of small importance in comparison with that of the bullroarer. The occasions on which I saw performances of the rite seemed to me to belie them. The numbers of people concerned, the public excitement, and the conjunction with trade and fighting all made for a notable occasion. A comparison is, in one sense, mistaken in that the circumcision and bullroarer rites belonged to different families. At the first, the highest secular values were expressed; at the second, the highest religious values; the two scales were incommensurable. As I put the matter in an

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earlier article, one rite 'made a man'; the other made 'a man of mystical understanding.'

The traditional circumcisions ceased at Port Keats about the middle 1940s. The local missionary, alarmed by a supposed risk to life or well-being from loss of blood and septicæmia,³ persuaded the elders to let him perform the operation on several boys. Soon afterwards, a hospital was established at the mission. It then became customary to have infant males circumcised by a trained sister. The traditional institution lapsed. The elders put up no great resistance and the youths, one need scarcely add, were in favour of the change.

Effects on the social personality of young adult males began to be noticeable within a decade. Many older men spoke feelingly about the indiscipline of the new generation, the disrespect shown towards authority—European as well as Aboriginal—and the lack of interest in old custom, arguing that all were due to the same cause. I heard many discussions on the desirability of starting the institution anew, but all foundered on the fact that there were no longer any young uncircumcised males! The mission was held to have 'spoiled everything,' but, in fact, for a good many years increasing difficulty had been experienced in organising the ceremonies. Many circumstances were involved. A brief explanation may be offered.⁴

After the 1870s all the tribes in the region bounded by the Daly and Victoria Rivers began to be upset in manifold ways by the arrival and spread of European settlement. Distance from the centres of development in itself gave no protection. The external structure of every tribe—its *necessary* dependence on others, often at several removes, in

3 As far as I could discover no fatalities attributable to circumcision had occurred, but Aboriginal testimony on the matter is unreliable since the death of a boy in such circumstances would probably be attributed to a breach of taboo or to sorcery.

4 For other comments, see my Presidential Address to Section F, ANZAAS, 1958 ('Continuity and Change Among the Aborigines'), *The Australian Journal of Science*, Vol. 21, No. 5A, and 'Durmugam: A Nangiomeri,' in *The Company of Man*, ed. Joseph B. Casegrande, 1960.

matters of marriage, trade and ceremony—ensured that contact with aliens anywhere would have quick repercussions everywhere in the region over which equities *in rem*, *in personam* and *in animum* were connected. Since, in practice, in spite of reports to the contrary, those equities *always* had an inter-tribal aspect, the network of relations was disturbed hundreds of miles away from the nearest European. There were of course spiritual and psychological correlates of the social upsets. They all disposed far-outlying clans and tribes to move into the cattle stations, mining camps and mission settlements to protect their interests, to obtain European goods, and to seek adventure. Before long disease, conflict with Europeans, and murderous intercourse with other tribes that hitherto had been kept at a certain distance, led to heavy depopulation. Many men and women took casual or semipermanent jobs. Others, with claims on those at work, stayed close by to share the earnings. As the several causes compounded, there was a slow falling away from the old ritual calendar. The numbers free and willing to go to distant ceremonies dwindled. The impulse to hold ceremonies near at hand weakened with the scarcity of foreign visitors. Some rites simply lapsed, especially those connected with the bullroarer and with the burial of notable men, both of which required all the segments of ceremonial importance to be well represented. Others were shortened or held in token. A process that began first amongst the depopulated tribes and those drawn far from home eventually spread to those less disturbed and more numerous. A special effort seems to have been made to conserve the circumcision ceremonies, especially where any considerable number of Aborigines survived or tribal remnants made common cause. The close relation between those ceremonies and inter-clan and inter-tribal trade may have had much to do with that fact. At Port Keats, over the decade preceding the establishment of the mission in 1935, there was undoubtedly a considerable disturbance of the ritual calendar, even when the nearest Europeans were more than 100 miles away. For several reasons—in part perhaps because of the decimation of tribes to the north but mainly, I think, because of the higher appeal of the culture of tribes to the south—the Murinbata had come increasingly

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under the influence of tribes then congregating on the Victoria River. Hence the greater frequency of the *naitpan* style. But there too an analysis showed case after case of truncation or defect of procedure. An indication of the growing difficulty of following out any style in a fully-fledged way could be found in the nicknames of a number of men. There were several called Kadu Kungini ('people of the evening') because circumstances had required the rite to be held after working hours. Two were called Ngurugun ('darkness, without fire') to signify that no one had bothered to instruct them to hold fire-sticks under each arm after circumcision. Another was called Wuma, a contraction of *wungumani*, to signify that he had been *mananga malakumbara*, without a party of escorts on his return from isolation before circumcision. There were several *Ngi-Mulun*. And I met one called Peme after the name of a sharp-edged leaf on which he had accidentally cut his prepuce; his father had fully circumcised him without further ado, and had withheld him from the rite.

The primary features of the pubic rite may now be stated briefly. Except for the statements contained in square brackets the facts set out are matters of my own direct observation.

(1) When a boy reached puberty, and began to show the sexuality, waywardness and egotism of that state, the initiative to 'make him a man' might be taken by one or more of several classes of men: a senior agnate such as his own father, one of his father's clan brothers, or a father's father, or a more distant relation of that class; or one of the class of mother's brothers; or a male affine, especially one standing in the relation of wife's brother. Evidently no particular importance attached to the matter, but of course only an older and fully initiated man could appropriately put his opinion forward. Importance lay, rather, in being given by a boy's father the function of becoming *malakumbara*,⁵⁶ he who was to 'pull' or 'lead by the arm'; that is, take a boy away from his clan prior to circumcision. That function was thought to belong most properly to a *nangun* (wife's brother); if possible he should be a brother of the girl to whom a boy was already betrothed but, failing him, one of

5 *Kumbara* is an ordinal adjective meaning 'first' or 'leader.'

that class. Up to a point, the choice lay with a boy's father or, failing him, with one or more of his patrikin; but the range of choice was restricted. That, as Durkheim said, was 'withdrawn from individual discretion.' In most cases the decision would have been made years before; and it might have become well known, or kept a private matter. The actual rite was very much a public affair; the preliminaries were thought of—within the limits mentioned—as a father's own concern. He might say as much or as little about them as he pleased. But I recorded cases of men suggesting themselves as *malakumbara* only to be told by a father: 'this boy does not belong to you; his man is there'—pointing in the direction of another clan—'and he will come up for him.'

There was a certain advantage, material and social, in being *malakumbara*, but it scarcely compensated for the time, effort and outlay involved; I seriously doubt if it were a leading, even an important motive. The function has to be interpreted in the light of two contexts—men's æsthetic enjoyment of ceremony, and their mature sense of social responsibility. To be fully understandable, both need detailed reference to the place in Murinbata life of the patrilineal moieties, Kartjin and Tiwunggu. But that discussion would take me too far from the subject of this paper. It will perhaps suffice to say that the dual organisation was the anatomy on which the æsthetic life came to its best flower and on which the social ethos found shape. The moieties made a context in which duty and right, command and deference, hostility and support, were correlative; according to situation, now one, now the other, would be stressed. Thus, a man could prepare his son for manhood—*social* manhood—and might take as his own affair the right to decide on the time and circumstance of the boy's public transition; but he could not confer that manhood; only men of the opposite moiety could do that; and to do so was both their duty and their right. The duality, even the ambivalence, of the relation often showed through the actuality of the event. For example, a boy's male kin were permitted by convention to show hostility towards those who were putting him to the knife. A clan father or brother might threaten them with a spear, or actually throw it. Lasting ill-feeling among the *malakumbara* party would follow from

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any failure by the boy's kin to provide enough food for a memorable feast—the *minji*, or 'food of the penis'—after the circumcision. Likewise, the refusal by a notable singer, dancer, or drone-pipe player to form part of the boy's escort would so affront the hosts at a ceremony that bloodshed might follow. The underlying duality and ambivalence meant that every initiation was in a very unstable equilibrium: the most trifling incident could precipitate uproar and violence. The management of the ceremonies called for watchful care, perfect manners, and diplomatic skill. Every effort was made to settle outstanding trouble before the ceremony took place, or—if challenges to formal duels had already been arranged—to have them held after the boy had been circumcised. But the plans often miscarried.⁶

(2) The choice of *malakumbara* having been made, and the task accepted, preparations were set in train—quietly rather than secretly—to entertain visitors at *Mununuk*, the father's camp, on a given day. All the boy's cognates—his *darikadu*—had to be warned to be there; not to let them know, or to do so too late, was to give serious affront, and might lead to violence. Many other men would also be invited to come as *Kadu mambana*—'outside people' or spectators unrelated to the boy, all of them being at the same time *Kadu ŋulain*—'free people,' that is, people without obligation on the occasion, and 'finished people' in the sense of having completed all the ritual business of life. Food was gathered and prepared in generous amount, the pretext being that a big dance was to be held.

⁶ The Murinbata still talk about an occasion, more than half a century ago, that required an initiation to be postponed for a day while blood-kin of the boy fought a pitched battle. It took place at Madinga when Nama, a boy of the Kurangaliwe clan, was about to be circumcised. One Djabakung, a classificatory father of Nama, threw a spear that wounded a kinsman, Madjera, a notable fighter—a *kadu tunbitj* (lit. 'person,' 'spear-thrower'). Madjera retaliated with a spear that hit Kalinyin, a classificatory father. Eight men, all of the same moiety, were soon exchanging spears. Three were badly wounded in the course of a struggle that lasted all afternoon. The men of all other clans of that moiety, and of the opposite moiety, stood aside.

When the appointed day came, the men painted themselves gaily in one of the secular styles. The boy to be initiated was painted too, a fact in open conflict with the convention that he was not 'supposed' to know what was afoot, though the convention was maintained for all that.⁷ When at last all the company were present and fed, events proceeded as though for an ordinary festivity. One man—usually but not necessarily a visitor—played the drone-pipe (*maluk*); a few kept time with the tapping-sticks; others (including the women) sang; and the remainder (the visitors predominating) went time after time through the steps of an exhilarating dance. Some hours were thus spent. Outwardly, everything was on a plane of jollity and fellowship. The boy sat near his father, who might fling an arm affectionately and protectively around him. But gradually the cognatic kin, now become *kadu pirimku*—'they with the flesh'—ranged themselves so as to sit just behind and on both sides of the father, thus forming a 'little Mununuk,' the arcuate cluster commonly used on occasions of ceremony.

At a prearranged time the dancing and music died abruptly. The *malakumbara* rose from his place and, in complete silence, walked to the boy and put a hand on his shoulder. No words were needed; as the Aborigines say, 'everybody knows that thing'; but, if he wished, he might speak in a kindly but grave manner: 'now I take you to make

⁷ Aboriginal life abounds in such conventions. They couple with a clever art of putting a good face on things a realistic applied psychology. The ordeal facing boys is of course very painful; they vary in physique, temperament and personality about as much as those of any other race; and they mature as unevenly. Those facts are taken into account, very perceptively, in judging the readiness for circumcision. Much credit accrues to a boy who faces the rite manfully. The credit is the greater if, having been given broad hints and allowed to steel himself, he can still be 'supposed' not to know what is coming. Many men, recalling their own experiences, said that they were not told outright but had no difficulty in putting two and two together. I would not say dogmatically that all boys know. I listed many cases of those who ran away. I dare say that most of them were due to a collapse of courage, but a few suggest a sudden suspicion or discovery of what lay ahead.

you a man.' On that signal the people of Mununuk broke into formal wailing.⁸ It was the due part of the close kin to express the deepest grief. Both men and women so wounded themselves that their blood flowed freely. While the wailing proceeded the boy was led off to be lost to view in the darkness. He was not permitted to look back; his name could no longer be mentioned; from now on he was *kuwere*, a 'wild dog'; *kadu ni*, 'person of the penis'; and—when his 'road' became known—either *ni-wannga*, *ni-manbangoi*, or *ni-naitpan* (sometimes also called *ni-merangan*). The first camp—for that night only—was but a short distance off. The purpose was to allow the *malakumbara* to slip back unobtrusively next day to talk over with the father the details of the plan—the boy's 'road' (the direction and region of travel), the choice of song-man and drone-pipe player, the whereabouts of affines who might give gifts, and the time and manner of return. By the next night the party had to be far away.

(3) The rift with his kin and clan made, and his childish status ended, the *kuwere* was now wholly in the power of his escorts. But he was safer than at perhaps any other time in his life. He was considered to be beyond human injury because of his status; there is no Murinbata word meaning 'sacred,' but he was treated as if sacred.⁹ Everything he did was under the protective eyes of his *nangun*. His guardians' duty was to nurture him—as the Aborigines put it, to 'make him fat'—and to instruct him in all the things a man should know while doing all in

8 I am referring to the manner or style of wailing, not implying that there was no genuine grief. On several occasions I saw close kin, especially but not only women, appear to develop hysteria. They inflicted wounds—with digging-sticks, sharp stones, axes and spear-points—that incapacitated them. But there was also a good deal of simulation, more so among the men than the women. I heard men sobbing in a heart-rending way but noticed that not a tear fell; on one occasion I heard two men trying to wail *in harmony*; and, quite often, someone who appeared to be in a paroxysm of grief, would switch in an instant to dry-eyed normality.

9 I have never heard of a boy's coming to harm during that period. My informants always insisted that not even the worst of men could feel ill-will towards him at such a time.

their power to win material gifts for him from his class of affines, and to attract a large gathering to return with them as *wungumani*—‘they having the penis.’ A period of from six weeks to two or more months might elapse while that duty was completed satisfactorily. Over that time he was put under a severe if kindly discipline: a scrupulous observance of many food taboos, a sparing use of water, a modest demeanour, and a deferential attention to his instructors. Usually, his ‘road’ took him into unfamiliar country among *kadu kamalik*, ‘strangers.’ He had to learn and remember a host of new places and names, and many identities and categories of kin and kith. He also saw new dances, heard new songs, and was told new tales and myths. Thus, novelty and excitement went with obedience and discipline. He was among strangers, but he had with him at all times a boon mate, for it was the custom to include in the party one of his *pugali* or cross-cousins, in all probability his own father’s sister’s son or mother’s brother’s son, a ‘dear acquaintance’ with whom he was to have a lifelong intimacy as joking-companion. In this way he passed the time until the whole party, now known as *wungumani*, left—without ceremony—for the return to Mununuk.

(4) When at last they came near his clan-country two or three men went ahead, carrying a ceremonial spear known as *nandji mada*.¹⁰ They took precautions to stay unobserved but by prearrangement or artifice made their presence known to the older men of Mununuk, so that the day and hour of their coming were known. The last phase of their approach was left until after sundown, at the time when the Wangga dance was at its height. The men of Mununuk contrived an incident or diversion—usually connected with the dance—to ensure that everyone was intent on the festivity. The *wungumani* men were thus able to make

10 It had this name only in initiations of the *manbanggoi* and *wangga* styles. In the *naitpan* style it was called *nandji tjinggin*, which could mean ‘thing,’ ‘fingernail’ (*tjinggin* = fingernail). The other name cannot, evidently, be given an English equivalent. In both cases the spear is short, coloured red with ochre, and is tufted with the yellow-and-white feathers of the ‘white’ cockatoo. The prefix *nandji* distinguishes it from hunting and fighting spears, which have the prefix *tjo*.

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a stealthy approach and, in spite of the darkness, to throw the spear with accuracy into the centre of the circle of fires. It appeared there, suddenly, quivering in the ground, its white tuft visible in the firelight. At that well-understood signal all the *darikadu*, the boy's cognates, burst into their formal wailing as before. The demonstration—again accompanied by self-injury—lasted well into the night. The others there—the 'outside' or 'free people'—comported themselves quietly and respectfully, moving in now and again to restrain the cognates from lacerating themselves too seriously.

In the *naitpan* style the preliminaries were much more spectacular. A full day elapsed between the throwing of the *nandji tjingin* and the actual circumcision. On the intervening night the magnificent *mindirri* dance took place. The main features of difference, which I do not propose to describe in detail on this occasion, were as follows: (a) the neophyte, covered by a blanket, was brought near the dancing-ring; (b) the dancers, blooded and feathered, having hidden themselves in the outer darkness, sprang suddenly into view and ran along a path of blazing grass made clockwise around the boy's position; (c) he was then uncovered and allowed to watch the ceremonial drama.

(5) The next day was one of high spectacle and sustained emotion. Throughout the morning rumours and alarms swept through Mununuk. The *wungumani* were coming! No, they were not. There was to be trouble; everyone would fight! No, it was only a tale. By early afternoon the excitement was intense. Eventually, without warning, a long serpentine of painted men came into view a quarter of a mile away. Thence they sent a far-carrying hail towards Mununuk. *Waaaaaa! Eeeeeee! Rrrrrr!* At the sound, the boy's cognates, weeping and shedding their blood, took up the arcuate form, and sat with bowed heads, the 'outside' and 'free people' behind them and on their flanks. The rite then developed in three phases.

In the first phase, the boy stayed hidden behind a screen of trees. The *wungumani* men, keeping in sinuous serpentine, ran towards Mununuk, in short bursts, shouting and brandishing their spears. With

them were a drone-pipe player and singing men. After each burst the formation paused and clustered to dance the *wanga*. The final burst brought them to a halt a short distance from ‘the senders of the flesh.’ Again they danced the *wanga*. Then with a tumultuous shout and a flourish of spears, they changed from line to mass and came almost to the threshold of Mununuk. From that point they pranced forward within the span of the arc of bowed heads, and danced again, pounding the ground so that the dust rose in swirls. Within a few minutes they broke away and ran back to the shelter of the trees. The lamentation continued among the cognates until exhaustion brought silence. Then followed a pause of several hours. At Mununuk, the people ate or slept. In the hidden place in the timber, the *wungumanji* men painted the boy with the design proper to his status—forearms and lower legs reddened with ochre; torso and upper arms reddened and over-marked with vertical white stripes separated by white dots; shoulders and upper trunk crossed by double lateral lines of white so as to form a ‘collar’ resembling the ruff of a bird; and face contoured by white bands. A whitened band (*war'kur'*) was placed taut around his brow and head. Valuables (*nandji ni*, ‘things of the penis’) were put upon him as the traditional gifts of all his *nangun*. Thus adorned, he was ready to become a man.

(b) By now it was late afternoon. Taking the neophyte with them, the *wungumanji* again appeared at a distance—Mununuk thereupon starting to wail anew—and moved forward in the slow, stately manoeuvre of mass which is like a horned new moon, moving with pipe and song. At intervals they halted, and the dancing-men moved from flanks to centre to perform the *wanga*. With repeated shouts—*Waaaaaaa! Eeeeeee! Rrrrrrr!*—and with much fondling of the boy, they made a progress to within perhaps fifty paces of the waiting kin. From that point they took the boy twice forward and twice back. On the third occasion, the *malakumbara*, holding the boy by the hand, led him first to one flank of the arc (i.e. to the more distant cognates), then transversely to the other, in so doing avoiding the primary kin at the centre. All semblance of order then disappeared. Female kin, who had been sitting or standing behind the men of Mununuk, rose to their feet

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and sought to break through the line; male kin tried to wrest the boy from the throng of *wungumani*; child-siblings threw stones and dirt at 'those with the flesh.' All the boy's kin wept uninhibitedly. The hotheads ran to take spears and boomerangs; the cool heads sought to restrain them; heavy struggles went on in the midst of the broil where father and mother were clasping and weeping over their son.

(c) The rite now reached its climax. All the men—*wungumani*, *darikadu* and *mambara-ɣulain*—rushed to interpose themselves between the boy and his mother, who was shouldered aside. They formed themselves into a dense screen through which nothing could be seen by the women and children. Four of the boy's class of *nangun* sat on the ground and interlaced their legs so as to form a platform. An elderly man grasped him from behind and laid him back down on the bed of legs. A second sat across his chest. Others pinioned his arms and legs firmly, but at the same time with fondling and reassurances. A surgeon—*kadu ɣimar*—circumcised him swiftly. At each cut all the men shouted lustily—*Waaaaaa!*—so that no chance cry of pain might be held heard.¹¹ A slip of twine was bound around the organ to stop the flow of blood. The boy was then lifted upright. Acclaimed by all the men, and handled with tender affection, he was taken a few steps aside to where, in a hole in the ground, a small fire of wood-coals was burning. Under instruction, he micturated into the fire and squatted over it so that the heat and steam would help to staunch the flow of blood and ease the wound. A fire-stick (*minga*) was thrust under each arm.

(6) Then followed the ceremonial feast upon the *mini*, 'the food of the penis,' which had been prepared by the people of Mununuk for the *wungumani* and all visitors other than the boy's cognates. Neither they

¹¹ It is at this instant that spear-throwing is most likely. On one occasion Ngunima, a particularly fierce man of the Kultjil clan, beside himself with sorrow and anger about the suffering of Dapan, his adopted son, killed the boy's mother with one spear and with another pierced the surgeon through both legs. A third spear wounded another woman. True to his craft, the surgeon went on to complete the operation. Ngunima was later called to account but survived the battle.

nor the boy himself might partake. At its conclusion, the visitors might leave unless—as was usually the case—there were further dances that night, or other matters—especially trade-exchanges and formal duels—to settle next day.

(7) The initiated boy did not at once return to the life of the camp. While his wound was healing he stayed a little outside, still under the care of his *nangun*. Food was brought to him by his mother and other female kin, but neither his sisters nor any other young females might go near him. The healing took one or two weeks, and over that period his disciplines continued. They were relaxed—and then slowly—only after the last part of the rite, the ritual washing.

(8) The object of that part of the rite was to make him *taranga*. The precise meaning of that word presents difficulty. The Aborigines give it the English meaning 'clear.' That translation will serve—I cannot find a better one—but the word is probably best thought of as having a range of connotations in different situations. In everyday speech, water is *taranga* if it is limpid and translucent; so is a place if it is free of obstructions; and a situation in which grievances have been adjusted satisfactorily may so be described. However, there is no general or specific antonym to describe the state preceding or opposite to *taranga*. But there is no strain on Aboriginal intention to say that the word connotes 'ritually clear' in the context of initiation, even if there is no verbalised concept of the opposite state—ritual 'uncleanness' or 'uncleanness.' However, much evidence points to an implicit idea that *because* of what has happened during the rite a boy, after being circumcised, is in a state or situation of great danger—from Kanamgek, The Rainbow Serpent, and from magical causes—if certain measures are not taken to make him 'clear.'

He cannot take them himself; he must be 'helped' by others; and the helpers must be 'old people' (i.e. his seniors) and, pre-eminently, from his class of wife's brothers. The Aborigines say: '*nangun* have to do all the jobs of work.'

[There were three essential measures. (a) After the wound had healed, a boy was escorted by male kin and affines to a deep pool of fresh water, or to a flowing stream. Some of the escorts sang (actually,

chanted) and one played the drone-pipe.¹²All except the boy entered the water, about thigh or waist-deep, the drone-pipe player continuing to play. (b) One or more *nangun* filled their mouths with water and, as a privilege and duty, spat it on to four parts of the boy's body—the region of the navel (*tjirimeme*), forehead (*wulumu*), and shoulders (*lamala*)—which symbolised classes of kin: in the order given, mother, paternal grandfather, father and father's sister.¹³ That done, there was a display of gaiety and fellowship, and the boy was taken into the water so that—helped by the others—he could wash away all traces of his physical ordeal. That done, he now played the drone-pipe and, having played his fill, he was rubbed all over with red ochre and painted—again by his *nangun*—with the bright, gay design that signified his new status. (Some Murinbata told me that the playing of the drone-pipe quietened Kanamgek; others, that the washing gave the boy a new skin (*daripi*) of such a kind (untainted?) that Kanamgek did not (could not?) smell it from afar). He could now safely go near or enter known deep waters, though the same precaution—the spraying by *nangun*—had still to be taken with unfamiliar waters. There was a deep conviction that if the spraying were left undone a boy, even though *taranga*, would court death.

(c) A last task remained. He must be helped to become *taranga* in relation to the discipline of forbidden foods—a list so extensive that weeks or months might elapse before all risk of sickness from magical

12 The symbol and emblem of Kanamgek. See 'On Aboriginal Religion. IV. The Design-Plan of a Riteless Myth,' *Oceania*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4.

13 The spraying always began with the abdominal region. Some old men said that the proper order was abdomen, head, left shoulder, right shoulder. Others, that it did not matter. I could not determine the order. The partial resemblance to the Christian sign of the cross has not escaped the Aborigines' attention, but they scoff at a suggestion that they may have imitated that sign, or that there is any connection. Their conviction is that the custom was *mange detemam*—as they put it in English, 'a hard law'—long before Europeans were known to exist. I have heard them cite it as one of several matters in which 'blackfellows just missed,' meaning 'came close to the Christian fashion.'

causes was removed. The relaxation of the ban was slow, orderly, and strictly enforced; the sequence of foods was prescribed¹⁴; and the ritual form in each case was the same: each food-species must be given, with formality, by one of the class of wife's brothers. The ancient custom was to rub the entrails and/or fat of each animal species on the boy's body, and to paint him with the totemic sign associated with it. But the practice had all but disappeared by the time I reached the region. Only the first few foods were being given in that manner. After that he was now a man—*kadu tjambitj*—and bore proudly on his body, for all to see, the blazon of that status.]

3. The Mortuary Rite

In the Murinbata tradition the mortuary rite was made up of perhaps six phases. The cycle took several years to complete. In the last phase men of many clans and both moieties gathered in large numbers to bury a man's ashes within his clan-estate. Men from several neighbouring tribes invariably took part as well, for not only were some border-clans thought of as being part of both tribes—'half-half,' as the Aborigines say—but the plan of the ultimate ceremony required two opposed regional clusters of clans—quite distinct from the moieties—to perform a coordinated dance with the object of pressing the ashes of the dead into his ancestral soil. That part of the cycle began to wither long before there were any Europeans in the area. It was perhaps the first Murinbata custom (and probably of all tribes in the region) to be affected by the two conditions mentioned earlier—the heavy mortality from disease and fighting, and the instability that broke up the external structure of tribal life. The long drawn-out course of the rite and the complexity of its final phase, encountering those two conditions, made the bringing together of sufficient numbers of men from the due segments less and

14 It proceeded from the common to the rare foodstuffs. The responsibility to see that the foods were eaten in the required order was put upon *nanggum*.

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less practicable as time went on. The preliminary phases could be, and were, followed through for a long time but the culminating act soon began to lapse. There were just too many deaths in rapid succession; everyone became just too scattered. Finally, Christian burial in the Mission cemetery became the rule. Only fragments of the traditional rite now survive. There was no attempt at, nor any need for, dissuasion by any European agency (as with the rite of circumcision), or prohibition (as with the rite of the bullroarer). I could detect no great feeling, even among older people, that any significant loss had resulted. On the contrary, there was every indication of solace and gratification in the prospect of Christian burial.

As far as I was able to discover, the last full celebrations of the old rite took place about twenty years ago, some time after my first contact with the Murinbata (in 1935). To my lasting regret, I was unable to see any of them. The possibility of anyone's doing so has now gone forever. But my experiences in 1935 persuaded me that only the most fortunate circumstances would have allowed one to do so for some years before that. There had been so many deaths and so much turmoil—including pitched battles in which a few Aborigines used shot-guns—that the full rite could have been carried out only on rare occasions of transient peace or truce. My luck was simply out: I met the Murinbata at the wrong time for unobstructed research. The following account, therefore, is not an eye-witness account as in the case of the rites already described in the articles. It contains a number of fragmentary observations but should be regarded as a reconstruction at second-hand, based on accounts by men who were drawing on their memories. Except for incidental references, the discussion deals only with the deaths of mature men, for whom of course the rite was best elaborated. The distinguishable phases were as follows: (1) Isolation of the body outside the camp of death; its exposure on a platform to await decay; a ban on any mention of the personal name(s) of the dead; and abandonment of the locality. (2) Breaking-up of a dead man's chattels preparatory to their later destruction by fire. (3) Sending away his hair and stone-axe. (4) Dismemberment and cremation of the dried corpse. (5) Celebration

of a funerary feast (*magindit*) over a fire in which the broken chattels were burned at the same time as cognates gave food to affines against a counter-gift of valuables. (6) Final interment of the body-ashes at a ceremony (*mulunu*) held in a dead man's clan-estate.

In discussing the rite the Aborigines tend to fix on the two main features: *magindit*, the ceremony dealing with 'things' (the material valuables known as *nandji merkat*), and *mulunu*, the ceremony dealing with 'bones' (*munu*). But the cycle was really a co-operative effort by the living to help a human spirit (*ɲjapan*) make the transition from the here-and-now to after-life. By a series of measures the once-bound spirit was severed from all ties for disembodied existence as a free spirit. The tie with a particular identity—the social person—was broken by the ban on the name (1). The body or flesh (*ɲen*) which housed it was put outside the company of the living (1). Its visible or material form—its *ɲinipun*—was destroyed by fire (4). Its material extensions, the personal chattels, were destroyed (2, 5) in the same way. Symbols of its vitality, masculinity, and shame were sent away (3). Its wordly accounts were settled with justice (5). And its last physical traces, by the action of all, were made at one (6) with the earth (*putek*) on which, at birth, it had 'made a mark' and so become a named social identity.

The main elements of all this are reasonably clear. Some matters of detail are open to doubt and my inquiries, which still continue, will perhaps clear them up eventually. For the present I shall give only a summary account of those things on which I think my information is reliable.

(1) The disposal of the bodies of children and women did not call for high ceremony. The dominant ethos was that the young were scarcely social persons, and that women were far less important than men. From those facts no inference can be drawn concerning the human feelings. At any death from any cause there was immediate lamentation; the expression of grief at the loss of near-kin commonly led to self-injury and often to violence because of suspicion of neglect or malpractice; the emotions were certainly slow to die—one of the most commonplace experiences among Aborigines is to hear a sudden outburst of wailing,

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months or years after a death has taken place, as some incident or thought calls the dead to mind. But simply because human affection is what it is—variably felt and variably expressed—no rigid canon covers Aboriginal conduct concerning deaths outside the range for which formal ritual measures were prescribed by a tradition. The bodies of young infants might be thrown away in the bush or, wrapped in paper-bark, carried about for years by one or other parent, most commonly by the mother, to be left finally in a tree, in a shelter or cave, or simply abandoned, when grief had had its day. The same practice was followed with older children: the strength of attachment and a very practical circumstance—the weight of the burden—determined the matter.

In the case of more mature persons, both male and female; immediate disposal was by exposure on a platform outside but at no great distance from the place of death. Four forked stakes (*dLaranin* or *pandaruma*) were fixed firmly in the ground, and a solid platform made by means of crossed sticks on strong bearers at a height (5–6 ft.) sufficient to give protection against wild dogs. The body, swathed in sheets of paper-bark, and bound by strands of fibre or twine, was left lying face-up on the platform on a bed of leafy bushes. (In this region no importance is attached to the direction in which head or feet pointed.) There the bodies of women were left to rot; those of men, to await the next phase.

Immediate duties towards the dead were not parcelled out in a rigid or definitive way. There were, however, some clear dispensations. The primary kin—the ‘close people’ (*Kadu manda*)—were spared the more painful tasks. A special set of mourning terms denoted five such categories—*kuli* (father and father’s sister), *nyryir* (mother and mother’s brother), *mikmunur* (spouse of either sex), *minartji* (children of both sexes), and *daiguda* (siblings). Within that group a previous relation of restraint was now intensified, that between people ‘from the same mother,’ siblings. No brother or sister who had become *daiguda* because of a sibling’s death could imaginably touch the body or possessions. But that avoidance—called *lagarin*, the word being a reciprocal used both for persons and their possessions—was evidently felt, from all

accounts, to be as much a matter of sorrow—with—shame as of possible corruption by the dead.¹⁵ With that exception, the dispensations were probably due to an ordinary human sympathy with those who, from the nearness of tie, felt—or were supposed to feel—the most grief. The more painful tasks were thought of as falling properly upon secondary and thus less-affected relatives; on kith or ‘outside people’ if there were any present; and in any case on older persons—for youth too had to be spared needless pain. The close kin daubed themselves white with paint as a mourning-sign. But, as far as my observation and information go, there was no other solemn ceremony at that stage.

Before the bark casket was closed around a mature man someone—father, son, or other close agnate who was not *lagarin*—cut the hair from the head. The symbolism of that act is not completely clear. Possession of the hair was essential for divination; some or all of it was also sent abroad for a purpose to be mentioned; but, as well, it was thought to be somehow intrinsically connected with the being, the *social* personality, of the living. The hair of the head betokened life and vitality; it was likened to grass on fertile ground; warriors once used to wear it, from pride, piled cone-like on top of their heads. But lice (*mimbi*) in the hair betokened a person with proper feelings of shame (*yidiwe*) about shameful things, or able to have such feelings—the point is not clear. A person without lice was one without—unable to feel?—shame; whether the connotation was innocence or shamelessness, or both, is hard to determine. Taking the hair from a corpse was evidently a complex and compound symbolism: perhaps it signified several things at once—that,

15 In ordinary life, brothers from the one womb did not like to make close physical contact. Brothers and sisters felt there was something deeply contaminating in the blood, sweat, urine and faeces of the other sex. A whole set of resultant cautions, restraints and avoidances lay between them, and were extended to classificatory siblings, but with diminishing force according to distance. ‘Distant sisters are good sweethearts.’ I think that death dramatised rather than changed the character of the sibling-relations. Death as such had about it little ‘ritual horror,’ whatever the phrase means. I recall seeing one man lying with his head pillowed on, and an arm around the body of his wife, who had been dead for a day.

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being beyond life, a man was now beyond shame; but that some shamefulfulness still endured; that if the hair, a symbol of his life, were sent away then the actuality of his shamefulfulness went with it too; and shame then lay with others. But here one touches the most cryptic layer of Aboriginal symbolism.

From the moment of death, the personal names of the dead might not be spoken for years by anyone. If the dead had to be mentioned, there were seemly ways of doing so—‘the brother of X,’ ‘the father of Y.’ If a name were also (as was often the case) the name of a place or thing, then a substitute or circumlocution was used. And the place of death was abandoned, not to be used again for a long time.

(2) It was the task of a dead man’s close cognates—a task which one, such as a father or son or mother’s brother, might perform for all—to gather together his chattels and break them to small pieces. That duty could be carried out either before or after the platform-burial. Two articles only were left intact. One thing (any article might serve, but in more recent years, usually a blanket) was kept for final destruction by fire at the funerary feast. The other was his stone-axe, a primary symbol of the male. The axe was given to one of his class of *nangun*, probably someone with whom there had been special intimacy or friendship. There was thought to be ritual danger to any close kin who ‘ate from the axe’; for example, by eating honey from a tree on which the axe was used. So it was sent away to remove that risk. But it could not pass to the husband of a dead man’s sister, since that would bring her children into danger. Even food that a man had collected before death was dangerous to his near-kin, so it was set aside for the class of affines. (After the introduction of European goods, some other articles were exempted from destruction: the irreplaceable iron axes and spear-blades could be kept by close relatives, though the handles or shafts were destroyed and new ones fitted.) The pieces of the destroyed articles were then bundled together, wrapped in paper-bark, and preserved as *nandji magindit*¹⁶

16 The word *magindit*, which connotes ‘burning at the funerary feast,’ is in inter-tribal use throughout the region. I could not discover the dialect or language from which it came, but I suspect that it came from the north.

against the time when they would be burned at the funerary feast.

(3) The right of disposal of hair lay with agnates. But as in other such situations (e.g. the selection of *malakumbara* at circumcisions) there were many men with a right of claim. Any man, however 'distant' (*naitpar*) in spatial-genealogical terms, if yet still within the class of classificatory affines (*kamalik*, or 'strangers') might press his claim, but the most effective claims lay with those *nangun* (wife's brothers) who were known as *kamalik njala* ('big' or 'great strangers'); *kaka* (mother's brothers and thus wife's fathers); or *naguluk* (fathers and thus wife's mother's brothers). To gain the hair was a privilege that stemmed from right; but it meant also the acceptance of a cost that lay with duty: a counter-gift of prized valuables (see (5)). In more recent years no formalities attended the transfer of the hair; I doubt if there were any in olden times. The first phase of developed ceremonial was yet to come.

(4) Many months might elapse between the exposure of a corpse on its platform and its destruction by fire. The choice of time depended on two things: the body had to be dried out sufficiently to allow older female cognates—but no one who was *lagarin*—to take out, as memorials, both bones of each forearm¹⁷; and a due number of cognates and affines had to be present to perform the two main tasks—the extracting of some bones and the smashing of the others to pieces, and the burning of the remains so that only ashes and charcoal were left. The first task was for female cognates, the second for male affines.

The occasion was a dangerous one, especially when the solemn duties were being performed for someone who had been a great notability. Emotion ran high; the closest agnates stood by, watchfully

In 1935 some old men told me that the whole custom of 'dancing-burning' had been introduced from that direction.

17 In crannies within a rock-shelter in Murinbata country I saw numerous human bones, cleaned of all flesh, and evidently of some age. I did not disturb them, but thought they were mainly femurs and ribs. My informants—while insisting that the 'true' Murinbata practice was to keep the forearm-bones—thought that I may have found evidence of other custom of an older time.

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alert—so it is said—for possible misdemeanour or insult, or sign of malpractice; evidently, it was then that accusations of poison or warlockry were most likely to be made and lead to fighting. But when the fire had done its work—a week might be needed—the ashes and charcoal were then bundled in paper-bark and taken by one of the class of mothers—the actual mother if she were alive—father’s mothers, or mother’s mothers, to be used as a pillow until the final interment. The preserved bones went to close agnatic kin, or those stemming from the *damun* (mother’s father). Then those who had done the work washed and painted themselves brightly. The bier was sometimes made the pyre, or left intact for a time. There was an old belief that the spirit of the dead sat or perched upon it, ‘to look after his own bones,’ until his remains were pounded into the earth at the *mulunu* rite. In that case, some time between cremation and last interment, someone set fire to the bier.

(5) The fifth phase centred on *magindit*, a ceremony that took place a considerable time—as much as two or more years—after cremation. Its main feature was the confrontation of affines by agnates and cognates at a feast prepared by the second for the first, accompanied by a gift of valuables (*nandji mimbi*, lit. ‘things,’ ‘lice’) in the reverse order. It was a solemn occasion but not one for singing and dancing.

The whole emphasis among the bereaved was on giving affines their due from the dead—‘working from our own people’ by ‘cooking for *nangun*.’ The term for wife’s brother (sister’s husband) was used in this context to typify the whole affinal class. The *magindit* was often described to me as ‘different from any other thing; that is the way he (the dead) wants it; it is a thing not anyone is allowed to do.’ It was not thought of as being like the confrontation at Mununuk during circumcision, perhaps because it was the terminal of a worldly life, and not a mere point of transition to a more valued status.

Only vegetable food was appropriate to the feast. By tradition, the daily staple (*milala*, the nut of the zamia palm) was chosen, but many years ago European flour began to be substituted in whole or part. The collection of the raw food was the strict preserve and duty of the closest cognates; so too was its preparation; and it had to be cooked by them on

the same fire on which the broken chattels and last whole possessions of the dead were burned. Under the *lagarin* avoidance, siblings could not partake of the food (though they might prepare it), and it was thought improper, but not actually forbidden, for a widow and primary kin to do so. If ‘free people’ were there they could have no share in either the cooking or the eating. It was not their affair: ‘they see, they know; they don’t come up looking.’

The gifts brought by affines were all valuables (*merkat*) of the kind that entered into intertribal trade. They passed into, and through, the hands of the primary classes of bereaved people in very much the fashion followed in that system of trade.¹⁸The way was then clear for the final phase.

(6) The Murinbata who remember the *mulunu* rite—all those in middle and older life—told me that it was ‘bigger than Punj,’ meaning in both importance and scale. They cited, as proof of their statement that ‘people came from everywhere,’ the numbers who used to attend, listing names of persons, clans and tribes, remembered as having gone to places still identifiable as Da-Mulunu. I was able to some extent to confirm what they said by careful if indirect tests to work out actual attendances when men were buried at places I visited, and about whom

18 The following is a typical instance. A man N of the Nangor clan died. His own immediate *nanggun* were themselves long dead, but the *magindit* obligation was accepted by P, who had married N’s daughter L. That is, a son-in-law acted as surrogate for wife’s brother. Several other classes of affines could have done so quite satisfactorily in Aboriginal conventions. N’s hair had been sent to affines in another tribe, but the *nandji mimbi* eventually reached P. From P it passed to L, and successively to her brother J, to N’s widow Ng, to J’s three half-brothers, S, M and F, to the two half-sisters of N’s widow, and thence into the hands of two half-brothers of N. After that the articles went, in the fashion that Murinbata call *lingu* or ‘straight,’ into the system of trade. The complete sequence was thus from *kamalik* (‘strangers’? to *kamalik ngala* (‘heavy’ or ‘big’ strangers), that is, P, and from him to *minartji* (L), to *mikmunur* (Ng), to other *minartji* (S, M, F), to two further *mikmunur* (the half-sisters of Ng), and finally to two *daiguda* (the half-brothers of N).

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I had full genealogical information. Evidently, it was not exceptional for as many as twenty clans to send members. Even on the last regional occasion of celebration, eleven clans were represented.¹⁹ The idiom of valuation of rites is interesting. Whereas Punj is *nandji ŋala ŋala*, a 'heavy' or 'big thing,' Mulunu is *nandji kalegale*, a 'mother-mother thing.' But it was not a rite kept secret by men. Women too attended, taking their children with them, though men only performed the dance that was the main feature.

The male *kuli* or *minartji*—that is, the class of bereaved fathers or sons—of the man whose ashes (*lunbum*, a word used for any finely-divided stuff), were to be buried, took the initiative to summon kin, kith and strangers to the place known as *da mulunu* (there were one or more in each clan estate). Those who came ranged themselves by countries or clan-estates into two great formations which I propose to call The Butt of Spears (*Lumbu Damul*) and The Rump of Birds (*Lumbu'iltji*).²⁰ The first indicated broadly all clans coming from the north and east, the second those from the south and south-east, reckoned with reference to the clan-country of the dead. They were thus primarily the names of directions, and were only *ad hoc* regional formations. (The same names applied in the system of trade to the directions—and *a fortiori* to the people—to and from which valuables moved.) At Mulunu, a clan that was Lumbu Damul on one occasion might on another be Lumbu'iltji if it were then attending the rite for a man belonging to a clan to the north or east of its own estate. On any occasion both patrilineal moieties were

19 The occasion referred to in Casagrande, *loc. cit.*

20 The word *lumbu* means 'butt,' 'rump,' 'seat' and perhaps connotes 'base' and 'foundation' too; *damul* is the generic term for 'spear.' The name Lumbu Damul is used interchangeably with Lumbu Wargat, *wargat* being a name applied to the region inhabited by the tribe referred to in the literature as Worgait. I think, but am not sure, that Lumbu'iltji is *lumbu+tjiltji* (originally perhaps *tjeltjel*); while I was never able to determine the meaning of *tjiltji*, since it is apparently not a Murinbata word, some old men told me that it made them 'think about birds.'

intermixed in each formation, thus obliterating the cardinal segments of the social organisation.

The proceedings began at Da-Mulunu in late afternoon when the heat of the day was over. The men painted themselves with a simple but striking design (upper chest and face reddened with fatted ochre; a white line from shoulder-cap to shoulder-cap on both sides of the body; and a narrow vertical bar, edged with white, from sternum to navel). The 'close people' had brought with them the container of ashes and charcoal and the saved bones. They cleared a ring perhaps twenty feet in diameter and at its centre made a shallow hole in which they put the remains. They filled in the hole with earth and marked it with charcoal from the cremation-fire. On top they put *nandji merkat*—gifts of high worth, such as spears, boomerangs, pearl-shell and hair-belts—which all who came could see. The affines who had gone to *magindit* did the same. Now all was ready for the rite to begin.

At a distance from the clearing The Butt of Spears and The Rump of Birds gathered into formation. Someone set fire to the grass so that it would burn outwards from the grave in a widening circle. The 'close people' and affines removed the valuables, each taking the articles the others had brought. One of the formations stood by while the other—evidently it did not signify which—moved towards the clearing. Each man carried a spear-thrower and spear, (?) with its point towards the ground and its shaft held under the left arm. As the formation came near the clearing, the men in it formed a line and began to chant. *Pe! Pe! Pe! Pe! Pe!* The line passed through the smoke and burning grass, and moved in an anti-clockwise spiral round the open space, the point circling so as to come nearer the grave with each round. Every man kept rhythmic step in time with the chant. *Pe! Pe! Pe! Pe! Pe!* When the leader reached the charcoal on the grave, all in the formation gave a triumphal cry, turned inward, and thronged to the centre. Each man pounded his right foot on the grave. The leader gave a long-drawn, pulsating cry (made by flapping a hand rapidly against the mouth so as to block and release the flow of sound). *A-a-a-a-a!* *A-a-a-a-a!* (Some say it is the sign by which things are made secret or kept hidden.) The others

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responded in chorus. *Waaaaaa!* (The sound of waves breaking on the beach.) *Eeeee!* (The sound of the receding wash, or of water running in the river.) *Rrrrr!* (The sound of wind in the trees, or of flying foxes in flight.) Then they broke formation and moved outwards from the grave, repeating the whole evolution two or three times. It was now the turn of the other formation to do the same. The two thus alternated throughout the afternoon, vying with each other to vivify the rite, until all were tired. There was no musical accompaniment, neither drone-pipe nor tapping-sticks; only a solitary singer (*tjanbanai*), who stood at a distance, singing a song that he had 'found' by his own mystical power; its words and meaning were known only to him.

At sundown there was a halt while everyone rested and fed. Then the alternating dance continued until a late hour. At intervals throughout the night the singer would rise, go out into the darkness, and continue his song.

Next morning each formation carried out the spiral dance once again. That brought the rite to an end. There was nothing more to do. The *njapan* was entirely free of ties with the living, who had nothing now to fear from it. The people returned to their own countries unless there were—as after the other initiatory rites—other matters (trade, duels, fighting) to be settled.

4. Kukpi, The Black Snake-Woman

I shall turn now to an account of the myth of Kukpi,²¹ The Black Snake-Woman, whose position in the tradition is comparable with that of Kunmanggur, The Rainbow Serpent. Indeed, according to the Murinbata, Kukpi and Kunmanggur would have been 'level' but for Tjinimin's crime against his father—'level' meaning, I think, two things: coeval, and of equal force and importance. Kukpi is said to have been *tiduk* ('behind' = later in time) in relation to Kunmanggur. No other

²¹ The pronunciation varies. Some say the name almost as *Kookpi* or *Korkpi*.

connection between them is known or asserted. Nor was there any connection between Kukpi and Mutjingga, although implicit suggestions to that effect are many. Taken in their extant forms, the myths about these three eminent personages stand out like peaks from a hidden mountain range. One cannot see the range, though one knows it is there. But the Kukpi myth, on closer scrutiny, seems to dissolve into a vague cluster.

The story of Kukpi, like that of Mutjingga, deals with a mysteriously-motivated destruction of males by a female. There is no univocal version. That given below represents the best judgment I could make of the version one is likely to hear most often. In that form it narrates how she deceived and destroyed three men. But different versions of the myth mention from two to five men, and some narrators go on to include the killing—by a wise man or warlock—of two women who had acquired a knowledge of Kukpi's secret song. I have reason to suppose that the many versions are probably attempts to fuse several myths which are perhaps best regarded as originally separate entities.

The figure of Kukpi is a baffling and mysterious one. It moves in and out of focus almost, though not quite, as much as that of Kunmanggur. The background information that may be collected does little to steady the image. It leaves one with a feeling that the narrative breaks off before its time: it trails away so as to suggest that there *ought* to be something more. In that respect it lacks the sort of completeness that one finds, in spite of other kinds of vagueness, in the myths of Kunmanggur and Mutjingga.

There is another unusual feature. Kukpi, like Kunmanggur, was a restless wanderer. She made a long journey looking for a good place to rest—a warm, well-watered place compared with Kunmanggur's soft-lying place. But the places from which she started, and at which she completed her wanderings, are unnamed and evidently unknown. That fact, though not conclusive in itself, inclines one to suspect either an incomplete borrowing or a lack—or loss—of secondary development. An added weight is perhaps given to the first suspicion by the fact that a tenuous connection can be made out between the Kukpi myth and part of the bullroarer rite. During the secret phase of Punj, at least

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one song is explicitly attributed to Kukpi. The song is made up from a repetition of three phrases—(1) *pambara badinya*, (2) *dilwarawara*, (3) *yelyayemene*—in an unknown language. All that I could discover about them was that they ‘came from Kukpi.’ On the last occasion on which I heard the song, six distinct totemic designs were worn by the dancers for whom it was sung. One of the six was of the *lakumin* (pine) tree mentioned in the myth. None of the others was in any way connectable with the myth, or with the background information given about Kukpi. There are two other fragments to take into account. When a young man is escorted from the secret bullroarer-ground to sleep at night in the open camp, his escorts pause outside the camp to sing a song in which there could be a reference to a place (Mariwan) at which Kukpi turned to retrace part of her journey. And at night in the open camp, while the rest of the people sleep or pretend to, older men sing over the youth a song in which the name of Kukpi’s main song—*Wanguwala*—is clearly mentioned. I did not find it possible to make the connections any more clear. The best judgment I could form was that in the rite as it had been constituted for some time past Kukpi was but a minor figure off stage. At the centre of the stage was Mutjingga. In that context she and Kukpi were utterly distinct. For that reason I felt that I could take the myth of Kukpi, like that of Kunmanggur, as being to all intents and purposes unrelated to any extant or recent rite. But my knowledge remains unsatisfactory in many respects, and much might yet be done to clarify the matter by inquiry among the Aborigines in the region between the lower Victoria and middle Katherine Rivers.

The following statements express the consensus of Murinbata opinion about Kukpi. (1) Her sex was female, but at the same time she is freely identified with *both* sexes of the black snake. (2) She was half-woman, half-snake. Drawings sometimes give all four limbs a human shape, but the legs may be reduced to notional bumps. From between the legs a long tail protrudes. It is described as having an ‘inside’ uterus or womb but I could not find out exactly what was meant by that statement. (3) She went on her journey carrying a digging-stick (*kininga*), a primary symbol of the female. (4) There is uncertainty whether she

was truly human. The myth seems to contrast her status with that of her victims, who are referred to as *kadu daitpir* ('person,' 'lips' =true, truth). But she was clearly a person (*kadu*). I also heard her referred to as *kadu ŋamenga*, which connotes 'someone from a mysterious far place,' a dangerous foreigner with, in this instance, according to my informants, power to make children. But I also heard her referred to as *kadu banambitj*, which connotes someone who was 'self-finding, self-subsistent.' That description puts her outside the human order. Perhaps the descriptions, taken together, may best be interpreted as meaning 'human-but-more-than-human.' (5) Her repute is dual and ambivalent: a wonder-working sea-being, a restless wanderer, a danger to men; a beneficent songstress, a great water-maker, especially of deep pools and springs, and a law-giver. There is a somewhat secondary, but still strong, emphasis on her child-making power: she 'made' or 'put' a multitude of spirit-children in all the waters linked with her name. A poisonous snake (*ŋunbalin*) is referred to as her 'child.' In discussions *about* the myth the main emphasis seems to fall on her song-making; in the narrative itself, on her water-making (apart, that is, from her destruction of men). I was told that she made a song about every place at which she stopped on her long journey, and also about the morning and evening stars; that she sings perennially; and that, should she ever stop, everyone would die. The only song I was able to record was given in several versions in unknown language(s). The Murinbata thought the song had to do with the sea, but could not be sure. On many evidences I had to conclude that there was some intrinsic connection between her and the sea. (6) There is also some intrinsic connection between her and the system of subsections (*ŋinipun*). She is reputed by some to have given men five out of the eight 'skins' and to have told them to 'work out' the system for themselves, which they did. Her own 'skin' was Nanagu or Namij; that is, she belonged to the opposite moiety (Tiwunggu) from that of Kunmanggur (Kartjin), and to the classes of women eligible to be his wives. (7) Her road (*maiyeŋ*) went from north to south and is thought of as distinct from that of Kunmanggur, though the two evidently crossed and may have had one or two resting-places in common. (8) There is

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a background suggestion, particularly among the southern Murinbata, that she was connected with poison, but a poison that did not kill.

In the following account I have included (in single square brackets) important variations from the version of the narrative that seems to me most representative. The doubled square brackets contain other information that may be helpful.

(1) Kukpi started. She came from somewhere (unknown northern place). Her road (went by) open sea (past) here. Hence she went on, went on ... to Marai. She sat down (rested, stayed) at a place there. She tried (tested) that place, Marai. No, it was not good. She poked—stirred (the ground), and water (was) there; that water (since, continuously) is there. She went on to Lili. She put a big water there. She rested there. She said: ‘this place is not good,’ so she left it. She stirred—poked, made a hole. That water is still there. She went on towards Dapan. ‘I shall try this place.’ She said: ‘this place is not good.’ She left it. Water still (exists) there. Thence she left for the place called Nimati. There she rested. Water is still there: She (dug a hole) poking—stirring with a stick. She left that place (went towards) Karinggawulkul.²² She (did the same thing) poking-stirring with a stick. That water (exists) still there. She moved on to Kanung. There, she poked—stirred; water (came out). She rested there. She said: ‘No, this place is too small, too cold.’ She left it and moved to Ngaiyilu. ‘I shall try this place’ (tasting), the water. ‘No, not good.’ She stirred and the water came out. She moved to Karinmem. She put there the bamboo-grass that still exists. The water is still there. Then she went on, went on ... She kept going a long way ... she went, rested

²² There is a suggestion in some accounts that after Karinggawulkul she ‘went round’ (turned) towards Kimul, making waters and naming places as she went. That course would have taken her across Kunmanggur’s road. At one such place (Yambanyi or Yambermin) I found a rock-shelter with a vivid painting of a female figure alongside another painting with features in common with those of a painting of Kunmanggur a few miles away. The region is one where the territories of four tribes—Murinbata, Djamindjung, Nangiomeri and Wagaman—march together. It is at such places that a commutation between elements of myths seems most likely to have occurred.

at Nganangur. She stirred with a stick; water came out; bamboo-grass is still there. She did not stop long. She went past that place, went on ... and rested at Purgala (Purgaiyala). She looked back over her shoulder. 'Ah, that is the road on which I came.' Resting there, she made a song. She sang that song!

She sang:

Ah, Purgala wura nyenyi
Lawa nyenyi, wura nyenyi ...
Lardpanga lardpanga
Wanguwala karalak pindji pindji.

[A second version of the song is:

Kara nyinyi binyi binyi
Toitpayanga toitpanara
Wanguwala wanguwala.

Neither is in the Murinbata language. But everyone agrees that Kukpi was singing about her journey on the sea, and that she was 'sorry' (thought with sad affection) about her journey.]

'Ah, this place is good. It is warm. I shall stop there.' She stayed—rested there (forever).

[There is some obscurity about Kukpi's movements after Purgala. One version holds that she turned aside, went along a small creek, made a large water-hole, and reached the hills at Mariwan after a journey in an anti-clockwise direction. At Mariwan she turned and retraced her steps to Purgala. Then she went on to the unnamed place of final rest. There is mention of two intermediate places—Kiningga and Ngananggi—between Purgala and the final unnamed resting-place, at which she is said to have made a 'nest' (*diri*). I should point out that the circular excavation in which the dancers throng at the rite of Punj is also sometimes described as a nest.]

(2) A true man (was) there (who) did not see—know. He said: ('I shall go to catch a rock-wallaby.' He took spear-thrower and spear and went hunting. A wallaby went jumping towards that place (where Kukpi was). She saw it. She said *Kidjirudup!* That sufficed! The wallaby fell

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down (dead) at once. That man was still running after it ... ah! close now (to Kukpi). She called out to him *Yau!* He (startled) said: 'Who is that?' Kukpi said: 'The wallaby is lying there!' The man said: 'That is well.'

[Kukpi said: 'You are very afraid; you should not be afraid!']

Kukpi said: 'You should sit down here where there is deep shade from the *lakumin* tree; you should make fire with fire-sticks.' Slowly the man tracked the kangaroo, put it on his shoulder, carried it to a tree, left it there. Kukpi said: 'There, close to me, there ! You should sit down in the shade.' He made fire with fire-sticks (*minga*). [The fire came with one twirl of the sticks!] He put the wallaby in the smoke to singe the hair. He cut open its belly. He waited; the fire was now all charcoal. He began to make a place in the charcoal to roast the wallaby. He offered some to Kukpi. 'Do you want some of this flesh?' 'No,' she said. 'You put it on your shoulder.' The man said: 'Where shall I go?' Kukpi said: 'You should go straight to that place there, where there is a cleft; there is a clear place there.' Carrying that wallaby, he went (where she had said); he went ... close to Palarnngga, where you can look down (from a high place). Kukpi said: *Kidjiridup!* That sufficed. He was no more. He fell down (that steep place) and was broken to pieces.

[The man had lost his way; he could not find the road he had come by. Kukpi said: 'You should not go back on the same road; if you want to go back you should go that way,' pointing towards the cleft. He carried the wallaby there, up a steep place. Looking down, he thought he saw the road. Then he could not see it any more. No road was there! He could not find a way down the steep place. Kukpi said: *Kigiritup!* At once that man fell down to the bottom dead.]

(3) His people (in camp were) waiting-watching. They were talking (among themselves). *Yau!* 'What (unknown) thing did he see?' Another man went (to see, look). He followed the track, followed the track ... to that place. *Yau!* (Kukpi spoke). 'That man has gone back; I sent him back.' (He spoke to himself.) 'Who is (unknown) person here?' Then (seeing Kukpi): 'O, there is a person here, of a yellow colour.' Kukpi said to him: 'I saw him roasting (a wallaby) there, right there,' pointing. 'Yes,' she said, 'there. You track (him) from there, where the road (goes) to

the cleft over at that place.’ He went, following the track, to where you can look down (from a steep place). Kukpi said again, ‘*Kidjiridup!*’ He was no more. He fell down and was broken to pieces. She did (said) that thing to him at that same place.

(4) His people (were) watching-waiting fruitlessly. Another man got up to go. He followed that track ... to that place. *Yau!* Kukpi said: ‘One man came to me.’ The man was frightened. He looked back-sideways (across his shoulder), thinking: who is this differently-coloured one? Kukpi said: ‘That is where he went, over there. Yes, there. Do you see? I sent him on that road over there. He went on that road. You go too.’ The man went on that same road. He looked down from that high place at Palarngga. ‘*Kidjiridup!*’ Kukpi said it again. He was no more. He fell down and was broken to pieces.

(5) Those people (were) watching-waiting. (Now) they began to think-from-the-belly, differently. There was something strange-different yonder. What (unknown) thing had destroyed three men there? They said (to one man): ‘You go (try to find out).’ One old wise-man went. [That man was Padurutj, the first *wanangal* =wise man.] He was strong and big, bearded down to his chest. The north-west wind blew from that place. Kukpi was singing. The wise man heard her singing. *Kong! Kong! Kong!* The sound of the tapping sticks! She went on singing. [Kukpi was singing Ningga Ningga (the ‘sweetheart’ song). Padurutj said: ‘Something is there, where those three were destroyed.’ He crept up, looked at Kukpi, and went back to camp. He told no one what he had seen. He was sick, and then got better. He went again to that place, by a different road, upwind. Kukpi was still singing. Padurutj listened.] ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘that is the woman who destroyed those three.’ He went upwind to that place. ‘Ah,’ that wise man said (to himself), ‘what is this (unknown) thing?’ He listened-learned that song, the Kurangara song from Kukpi. [Kukpi sang: ‘*Pingarala milpirin panu waragadji mala.*’ (We do not know that language.) He listened to that song. He understood it at once. Kukpi sang: ‘I am sitting here at Purgala.’ She sang in Murinyuwen: ‘*Wanguwala kara ninyi binyibinyi toitpangu.*’ He

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got up now (went back).] He listened-learned ... then he went back to the camp.

(6) He spoke to all the people. *Yau!* 'She has destroyed-finished them, that unknown person who is there. There is a little island. It is a place where there are trees.' That is what he said. Everyone wept. They were weeping.

I am reasonably satisfied that the core-story of the Murinbata myth ends at that point. But one may sometimes hear an extension which, in my opinion, is an accretion from the Djamindjung to the south. It fuses with the story of Kukpi an account of the origin of the bullroarer which, in the real Murinbata tradition, is attributed to Kudapun, The Apostle Bird.²³²⁴ In the accretion, the fourth man to try to solve the mystery of the successive deaths of the hunters at Kukpi's hands is identified as Padurutj, who is said to have been the first *kirman* or *wanangal* (in that context implying both 'wise man' and 'warlock'). On the first visit he is said to have heard Kukpi singing both Karwadi and Dingiri songs. He knew that such songs belonged only to men, and not to women or children. On the second visit he recognised, on flat stones near where Kukpi was sitting, secret marks that are put only on bullroarers. Kukpi's son was there, and he told Padurutj that the marks and songs were both *Karwadi* (in that context implying 'sacred and secret'). He gave two stone bullroarers to Padurutj, who took them back to camp and showed them to other men, who then made bullroarers of wood. Two women now went to that place and picked up stone bullroarers. They took them back to camp and showed the men. By that time everyone knew what bullroarers were, and knew their significance. The men made a pretext of changing camp, and during the move killed the two women with stone-axes.

23 'On Aboriginal Religion. II. Sacramentalism, Rite and Myth,' *Oceania*, Vol. XXX, No. 4, footnote, p 263.

Table 6. Structural Parallels in Two Mythless Rites and a Riteless Myth

I. Phases.	II. The Rite of Circumcision.	III. The Mortuary Rite.	IV. The Myth of Kukpi.
A	Onset of puberty.	Death supervenes.	Kukpi is restless and discontented.
B	Open-secret agreement to circumcise youth as duty to the living.	Sorrowful public acceptance of painful duties to the dead.	She decides to find a good, warm place of rest at the cost of effort.
C	Removal of youth from camp by token show of force.	Removal of body from camp; exposure on solitary bier.	She abandons many places but endows them with water.
D	Youth made into a nameless wild beast.	Ban on name of dead; abandonment of death-camp. Chattels broken.	She finds a solitary, nameless place.
E	Youth isolated in a safe, distant place with friends and under a guardian.	Hair and axe sent away from clan to well-disposed affines; body cremated.	She decides to stay there forever.
F	Token return to camp to be wailed over by sorrowing cognates.	Bones and ashes brought to camp and kept lovingly by cognates.	She looks back and sings sorrowfully; she deceitfully overcomes men's fears by false sociality.
G	Old ties with childhood and kin ended; youth circumcised within a male screen.	Social ties of/with the dead ended at <i>Magindit</i> ; physical remains returned to earth at <i>Mulumu</i> .	She destroys men by magic but the first wise man triumphs over her.

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<p>I. Phases.</p>	<p>II. The Rite of Circumcision.</p>	<p>III. The Mortuary Rite.</p>	<p>IV. The Myth of Kukpi.</p>
<p>H</p>	<p>Ritual washing to make youth 'clear'; presentation of valuables and insignia; relaxation of taboos; gradual return to social life as adult.</p>	<p>Exchange of valuables between the living; spirit of dead freed to make a new entry into the cycle of life.</p>	<p>He returns taking her secret with him to the sorrowing people. Kukpi stays unmolested forever.</p>

5. Common Elements of Design

In Table 6 the two rites and the myth are set out so as to allow three things to be compared: the sets of primary elements, their assembly into structures, and their development towards ends by temporal phases. The table should be read down and across. The effect is to bring out the same kind of two-way resonance found in other such comparisons in earlier papers.

I have no evidence, or reason to suppose, that the Murinbata see any resemblance or connection between the three components of the table. But that fact, in my opinion, increases the value of an anthropological comparison.

It is sometimes said that anthropologists are intent on trying to relate everything social, even things that are not related, and that the forcing of facts into assumed 'systems' results from that cause. The criticism is not justified if one is dealing with *relations of similarity*. The similarities listed in Table 1 are between structures of like elements that exist empirically in connected sequences which have, or appear to have, like patterns. The purpose of the table is to find the common elements of the design-patterns. The judgments about the basic similarities rest on observations of a kind that any anthropologist could make. My inquiries were as careful as circumstances allowed; I have given as much as possible of the evidence for them; but, although the accounts probably contain mistakes, I feel that the similarities, not unimpressive even now, might have shown themselves to be more impressive still had I seen all the possibilities from the beginning and been able to obtain finer detail.

Certainly, II, III and IV co-exist (or co-existed) within the one regional form of life, and were 'related' in being practised by the same people. But, to the best of my belief, II and III were not thought of as being connected except as events that should have a due form in the life of individuals; they were, indeed, put into two different cognitive systems—II into a secular system, III into a religious system. And IV had no discernible connection with II, and only tenuous, partial and

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rather sidelong connections with III. I consider it to be an essential task of anthropology to deal abstractly with relations of similarity between things in apparent disconnection. In this respect I may point out that analysts of 'social structure' do not think it material that 'the people who live in any society may be unaware or only dimly aware' (Evans-Pritchard) of the existence of the classes of relations which the analysts are prepared to generalise into a holistic structure. But the 'enduring relations' of 'social structure' are not relations of observable similarity, and any general statement about them has much less empirical warrant than statements well-based on observed similarity. It is one matter to *postulate* an organic, holistic system embracing *all of many* different kinds of relations, and to search among particulars for illustrations or demonstrations or justifications of what has already been asserted to hold among the particulars: it is altogether another to begin the interpretative task by arranging for further study the empirical similarities.

In Table 1 the phase-developments from A to H (down each column) have a certain likeness, more markedly between II and III than between II-III and IV. The sets of elements compared each with each (across all columns) again have a certain likeness, also more markedly between II and III than between II-III and IV. There is thus a not unimpressive, though limited, measure of congruence between the design-plans in three respects: the sets of elements, their assemblies into articulated structures, and their temporal developments. Within each plan there is something very like the formula—setting aside, withdrawal, transformation, and changed return—that was found within the plans of the rites and myths analysed in earlier papers. And the description applied to the riteless myth of Kunmanggur and the rite and myth of Punj is not wholly inapplicable to the mythless rites of circumcision and burial and the myth of Kukpi. 'Someone is sent or withdraws from a safe, habited place to a place of solitude. In the second place—the place of removal, or in the place deserted—wildness or terror, and a sort of corruption, become ascendant. Something—trust, young life, innocence—is destroyed there. Then, after a pause, there is a return to the first place. But it is not now the same as before;

there has been a change; the old is not quite annulled and the new not altogether unfamiliar.' Some changes of words, and a more embracing generalisation, could reduce or eliminate the main differences.

It now becomes a question of trying to elucidate the human and social meaning of such a structure. What further can be said of the dynamism investing that anatomy of acts?

The rites and myths under study deal with events or happenings over time in social life. The entries in Table 5 are fairly straightforward descriptions of those events. But to call them 'primary elements' is scarcely exact; they are complex, compound and systemic resultants by no means resolved to their irreducible components. Hence my view²⁴ that if there can indeed be what Professor Firth has called a 'micro-sociology' then its task is to resolve such components. But the less exact usage suits my immediate purpose. The entries at least describe observable events.

Each column in the table exhibits the evidence of two things: an ordered arrangement of parts, a structure, which is transposable *between* columns; and, *within* the columns, three material manifestations of that structure. The structure is relatively invariant. The concrete manifestations are highly variable. Each column may be said to exhibit and define a field of social life. Two fields have in common the fact that, in each, a rite of initiation takes place. What can be said of the dynamism of both that holds true of the third, which has no empirical connection with either? With that problem in mind one may conceptualise initiation in a sufficiently abstract way to embrace all three.

Let us set up the conception of a field of life composed of entities—persons, things, and situations in relations subject to forces with a given distribution—which have been disturbed by change. The change may come about by the entry of a new dynamic entity or by a redistribution of the existing forces. The field then has to be transformed to accommodate the change. A new integration between the entities is necessitated. Initiation may be regarded as an instance of purposive transformation

24 I examined this matter in an unpublished article, Professor Firth's 'Conception of Social Organization.'

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of that kind. I shall now apply these outline conceptions to Table 5, under the following assumptions: (1) The sequences of events set out in the table are serial events. (2) The serial aspect maps out a course or path along which entities are moved by forces acting in a direction. (3) The forces that effect the movements and their purposes are human acts or operations, some of which are transitive, some non-transitive, and some intransitive; the transitive acts demonstrably effect their purposes; the others can but symbolise efficacy. (4) Each event is modified by the one preceding it, so that the modifications are progressive. (5) The progressive character relates the events dynamically, that is, integrates the entities in respect of the dynamic change, and thus eventually constitutes the serial as a newly determinate structure, a system of relations, and a process towards an end. (6) In its most comprehensive aspect, the process transforms the field and its entities from one state to another, the states being connected but qualitatively distinct.

We may now reconstruct the table in the following way. The formulation is entirely provisional. It will be looked at again in the next article when all the materials are jointly reviewed. The present sketch is simply an indication of the approach that seems to me to be necessary if the dynamism of the ritualised structure of operations is to be understood.

Phase A. There is a field of social life (F) made up of a complex-compound situation (S_r) defined by related entities in conditions of near-stationary equilibrium. The situation is disturbed by a new dynamic force (II, puberty; III, death; IV, discontent) which may be permanent (II, III) or transitory (IV), conditioned (II, IV) or unconditioned (III). The equilibrium can be restored only at a new level, and then only if something of positive value is conserved (II, a beloved person; III, a human spirit; IV, euphoric life) and if something of negative value (II, an outmoded status of youth; III, a dead body; IV, a place of discontent) is cast off. Measures of contrasted character (+) (-) are thus necessitated to restore equilibrium at a new level.

Phase B. The changed situation modifies (determines) the next temporal phase. A decision is formed (II, openly-secretly; III,

lovingly-sorrowfully; VI, sadly-hopefully) to perform ambivalent purposes (II, to give youth a higher status at the cost of loss and pain; III, to destroy the loved-corrupting body and its social extensions and to conserve its spirit; IV, to wander in hope at the cost of effort).

Phases C, D, E. The decision determines the character of operative acts to effectuate the contrasted purposes. A progressive serial of operations followed (II, the beloved youth is forced away from a familiar, disturbed place to an unfamiliar, safe place, and the symbols of his former status are cast off; III, the body, its material extensions, and symbols of its social self are destroyed or sent away, but part of its substance is saved and its spirit is honoured; IV, dissatisfying places are abandoned but are endowed with life-sustaining waters).

Phases F and G. The things of negative value having in part been cast off, and the things of positive value in part conserved, the remainder of the serial of operative acts is thus determined. A residuum of good has now to be freed from, or integrated with, a residuum of ill. The operative acts must thus still be contrasted or ambivalent. (II, the beloved youth is brought home, wailed over, withheld from his kin and, by the painful suffering of circumcision, integrated with the new dynamic force—the permanent, conditioned, continuous maturation of life; III, the corporal and social extensions of the dead are brought home to be destroyed by fire and neutralised by gift-exchange, while the last ashes are merged with the ground of former being, and the spirit is freed to find a new life, so that the new dynamic force—permanent and unconditioned death—is integrated with proximate and ultimate life; IV, some men are destroyed by unexpected, gratuitous and deceitful evil; but one man of wisdom triumphs and takes back to the living—who sorrowfully weep over their new understanding—the supposed secret of Kukpi's power.)

Phase G. In the same field of social life, there is now a new situation (S2) defined by new relations between almost the same entities in changed conditions of equilibrium, the dynamic entity having been integrated at the cost of a changed distribution of power (II, the initiated youth is cleansed, freed from restraints, adorned with the symbols of a new positive value, and allowed to enter into a new, positive locus and

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station of life distinct from but connected with the old locus and station; III, the spirit of the dead is freed from all earthly ties, is accorded due honour, and is allowed to seek a new, positive locus and status of life on a new plane different from but connected with the old; IV, Kukpi is left unmolested, and living people have sad but positive knowledge of a negative power over life that is beyond their control).

It will be apparent that this course or sequence of serial happenings, progressive in a direction and having an integrative character, exemplifies—though in a rather strange idiom—a patterned structure or form that is very familiar to theorists of dynamic systems. For example, it accords very well with many abstract models of field-transformation, and with $S \rightarrow I \rightarrow R$ models of conditioned responses, where S =a stimulated situation, I =the integration of stimuli by receptor and effector-structures, and R =the patterned response. I shall simply note the fact in passing. What is interesting—and challenging—from an anthropological point of view is that it seems to vindicate my contention that the study of Aboriginal religion has more possibilities than are explored if an inquiry is too rigidly limited to matters of social structure as conventionally understood. That approach, by analogy, limits inquiry to the receptor-effector structures of patterned responses. A religious system is a dynamic system, to be studied from dynamic concepts, not a stationary system to be studied—except as a provisional step—statically. I thus return to the impressionistic formula drawn from observable things, the ritualised dialectic of setting apart, withdrawal, transformation and return. I am profoundly persuaded that an understanding of Aboriginal religion depends on a growth of insight into that work of primitive intuition. It is like an essay on metamorphosis around a moving stability, a reconciliation of polarities that perennially condition men's being. But the tradition of study from Tylor to Durkheim, and the more recent *idée fixe* that religious things are but the dependent variables of social things, have scarcely allowed the possibilities to be explored.

Throughout these papers I have contended that one must bear constantly in mind the character of the material under study, and that

its character imposes terms of approach. For such reasons I have felt forced to use impressionistic words like 'resonance.' The problem is: how to reduce the impressionism? The material of study belongs to those expressive orders of social fact—symbolism of many kinds—that in one way or another transcend controlled methods, at least as they are at present. One seems for the moment to have but two options: to take the view that the material, because of its character, is simply beyond further inquiry—a view I am reluctant to adopt since it seems to make a principle out of what may be only the failure of one's own imagination; or to experiment patiently with ways of deducing the assumptions and principles, used by the Aborigines, that allow the facts to be as they are. For the facts are certainly realities—even if some are unrealised or unperceived realities—within the ontology of Aboriginal life and thought. In the hope of further clarifying them, I shall turn in my next article—the last of the series—to the ruling conceptions of life and death under which the Murinbata used the same ritual form to celebrate the transitions as well as the terminal of their social being.