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WOMEN'S REALM: A STUDY OF SOCIALIZATION,
SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION AMONG
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

by
G.K. Cowlishaw

A thesis submitted as a requirement for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sydney
March, 1979
Except where otherwise acknowledged in this text, this thesis represents my own original work.

Gillian K. Cowlishaw
ABSTRACT

This thesis argues for a new perspective on the position of women in Australian Aboriginal society. It contains a critique of previous literature, particularly in two fields; first that which treats women's independent actions to limit their fertility as if they were a function of the group's need to control the population, and second that which treats women's position in society in a piecemeal fashion. I argue that the domination of women by men is the *sine qua non* of Aboriginal society, but that areas of women's independence none-the-less have important repercussions on society.

Material on contraception, abortion and infanticide indicates that women have considerable control over their own fertility. The motives for exercising this control are then examined in terms of the obligations women have towards infants and children. The socialization of women is considered both as formative of their attitudes and as an aspect of men's domination. The marriage system presupposes men's control over women, but here again women's independent actions are seen to be only explicable in terms of their subordinate position. More generally it is argued that subordination does not imply subservient behaviour; on the contrary in this case it entails at least unconscious subversion.

Chapter five is an examination of the factors determining the fertility of Aboriginal women, stressing the probability that fertility was low and accounting for this partly in terms of dietary factors. In the light of these findings Chapter six deals with the wider question of population dynamics in pre-historic Australia. Finally
in Chapter seven I argue that the processes of struggle between categories of people within a society are central features of its formation and dynamism.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For hospitality, help and friendship in the Northern Territory I owe a great debt to the people of Bamyilli, Beswick, Malanganuk and most especially the Rembarnga people of Goinjimbi. The warmth, affection and humour which I experienced while living at the single women's camp were a personal joy and assisted my work. There are too many individuals who helped me and whom I count as friends to mention by name, but Dorothy Murray, with whom I shared a camp throughout my stay was an invaluable companion, informant and loyal friend. Lorna Martin, and her family, Nellie Camfoo and many of the younger people also gave valued help. The whole community was tolerant and supportive.

To my supervisor, Dr. Les Hiatt I owe a great deal, perhaps most of all for the approach to anthropology which originally inspired me. He encouraged me to continue with post-graduate work and, helped me to find financial support to do so. He waited patiently for the thesis to take shape. His criticisms and suggestions have been of great benefit. Any facility of expression shown in the thesis is largely due to his detailed and painstaking work with my manuscript.

Chris Eipper, my fellow post-graduate student at Sydney University not only showed interest and support at a time of frustration and difficulties but made pertinent and incisive criticisms of various sections of my arguments. He took time from his own work to read mine, a sacrifice for which I am extremely grateful.
Michael Allen generously read a good deal of my thesis when
he was very busy. His copious comments and criticisms and the dis-
cussions I had with him were of great value. My discussions with
Harry Lourandos have also been very productive. I am grateful to
Mary Patterson for reading and commenting on the whole of the thesis
at a time when she was engaged in quite a different endeavour. Others
who read and made useful comments on one or another section of the thesis
are Paul Alexander, Linda Connor, Annette Hamilton, Peter Hinton,
Jan Reid, John Rivers and Peter White. Among many others who have
made some contribution through correspondence I must mention
Isobel White. I profited greatly from discussions with Dr. John Murray
of Crown Street Hospital. Barbara Sheret as a friend and colleague
gave generously of her help both in major practical ways and in
encouraging me to continue at low points. Lucy Raig donated her
skills as a typist and commentator. Philip Jessup, my father, rescued
me from penury after my scholarship ran out. Sally and Nick Cowlishaw
managed to live with me through the production of this work; though
they had little choice I remain indebted to them for their general
good cheer.

I am grateful to Magrit Koetig for drawing the map and diagrams
and to Pat Attwater for her typing skills and assistance at the final
stages.

During my research I was supported by the Norman Haire Fellowship
from the Medical Faculty, Sydney University, and they generously
extended my tenure beyond the usual period. My field study was funded
by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. I thank both of
these Institutions for their assistance.
Finally I must acknowledge the work of all those writers and scholars on whose observations so much of this thesis depends.
INTRODUCTION

It was the practice of infanticide among Australian Aborigines that set me on the course leading to this dissertation. The killing of a newborn infant by the mother or a companion raises fundamental problems for theories that depend on a notion of the adaptedness of human behaviour or the adaptiveness of cultures. More importantly it demonstrates that attention must be paid to the actions and attitudes of women. If women exercise some control over their own reproduction this would suggest a sphere of considerable influence in Aboriginal society that has been underestimated. Thus the nature, extent and limits of women's power must be re-examined.

Paying attention to women's behaviour is not merely an attempt to correct an androcentric bias in the ethnographic data but to correct a theoretical bias also. It is sometimes implied that power structures are only illuminated through analysis of particular decisions. This leads to a concentration on male hegemony as manifested in the decision-making process. However it is my contention that there are many conflicts of interest which never become subjects of dispute. By examining the social position and independent actions of those without public power it is possible to understand how particular issues and not others are disputed, and also the process by which other conflicts are dealt with.

My general argument is as follows. Women act in ways that confirm yet protest against their subservient status. In other words, certain

---

1. See Lukes (1974) conceptual analysis of power for a useful treatment of this subject.
kinds of behaviour of women, especially in the spheres of socialization, marriage and infanticide, can be seen as reactions to their position vis-a-vis men. At the same time I show that women have autonomy in several areas of action, and this is also a feature of the structural relations of males and females. That is, certain conditions of existence in Aboriginal society make the separation of "women's business" from men's a functional concomitant of men's domination of women. Partly this is because it allows the women to continue with their activities undisturbed by men's interference. This is clearly efficient, both in areas such as food collection, as well as in childbirth, child rearing and in religious activities.

Aboriginal women, though apparently controlling their own reproduction and being in a position to control their own production and distribution, remain in a subordinate position. They participate in the reproduction of the conditions of their own domination, and this above all accounts for their oppression. Because the structural arrangements are continually being reproduced, both in the minds of individuals by the process of socialization, and in the actions and relations of groups and categories in the society, there can be no radical questioning of the basis of social arrangements. But there is implicit questioning on the mundane level. Women's actions in several areas express some dissatisfaction with the logic of the system. In other words, internal conflict is ensured by the subjection of women.
The thesis begins with an enquiry into contraception, abortion and infanticide. It is evident that women do attempt contraception, though without much success. They do, however, successfully limit the number of children they rear by abortion and infanticide. Infanticide is more effective and more common than abortion. It occurs in three main circumstances: when the progeny are regarded as abnormal (e.g., deformed babies or twins), when the birth interval is short, and when the mother is considered too young for child-rearing. Conception in such cases is thought to have been in some sense irregular. Either it was the wrong kind of spirit child which entered the mother or it entered her at the wrong time.

In Chapter 2 I examine attitudes to motherhood in order to establish why Aboriginal women practice contraception, abortion and infanticide. Children are indulged to an extreme degree and the responsibility of this indulgence falls largely on the mother. Women are fully conscious of the burden created by children, and consequently they often reject motherhood. Childbirth is solely women's concern; men disapprove of abortion and infanticide but cannot stop them occurring because they are kept in ignorance of such events. The ambivalent attitudes which characterise motherhood are epitomised in indulgence of children's wishes on the one hand and the aggression displayed in infanticide followed by infant necrophagy on the other. Such ambivalence, while a universal feature of human attachment, is exaggerated in Aboriginal motherhood because children are both the source of a woman's power and an instrument of her oppression. An account of necrophagy is given in terms both of the symbolic and the emotional significance of the act.
Chapter 3 begins with a detailed study of socialization with particular attention to the sexuality of girls. I then go on to show how institutions such as puberty rites, ritual intercourse, rape and wife-lending reinforce the patterns of subordination laid down in girlhood. However I also argue that sexually women are less socialized than suppressed, and the violence to which they are subjected at times, indicates that men's control over them is insecure.

Chapter 4 consists of an enquiry into the marriage system beginning with an account of the way men obtain wives, and the political process of marriage arrangements. I then discuss various kinds of discontent generated by gerontocratic polygyny, including those manifested in a high frequency of elopement. With reference to jealousy I argue that this is an example of the way "disharmonic social orders" (O'Loughlin) work themselves out in the psyches of individuals. The jealousy of men is accommodated, that of women is suppressed. Women's subsistence activities are shown to produce the bulk of the food, and it is argued that economic relations are exploitative. Finally I show that men's control of women depends not on the individual violence of husbands towards their wives, but is embedded in the wider patterns of domination.

In Chapter 5 I amass evidence as to the fertility of pre-contact Aboriginal populations, emphasising that the structural position of women is vitally important. While I attempt to deal exhaustively with the factors which would determine pre-contact fertility, including lactation, spontaneous abortion, privacy and the subincision operation, the important and previously underestimated factor is the effect of
nutrition on ovulation. I argue that women expend more energy and have lesser rights to food than men. The fertility level resulting from these factors is also important for the level at which infanticide would have been practiced.

Chapter 6 deals with population dynamics in Australia during the last 40,000 years. Most previous discussion depends on notions of the adaptedness of Aboriginal society, and ignores the structural position and motivation of the actors who are allegedly employing the "population control mechanisms". I also draw attention to the flimsiness of the empirical base on which the argument has been conducted. Female infanticide particularly has been declared rather than demonstrated in a number of cases. I show that the demography of local regional populations probably showed much greater instability than has been recognised, and that the behaviour of women may often have exaggerated rather than controlled these population swings.

Finally in Chapter 7 I criticise the view that man should be seen as a passive victim of history. I argue that it is the struggles between classes or class-like formations that determine social developments and explain the dynamic processes constituting societies. I pursue some further implications of this view, showing how the ideology of male superiority, women's position in ritual and the psychology of certain oppressive practices can be seen as aspects of the struggle.
My thesis owes a lot to the burgeoning field of women's studies in anthropology and other disciplines. However, the debt is a diffuse one. The inspiration for the study came less specifically from works on women and their role in various societies than from an impatience with accusations by women of androcentricity in anthropology. If men have the field virtually to themselves of course anthropology will be androcentric. The balance can only be redressed with some gynocentricity! My debt to writers in women's studies will be paid if I have shown how attention to women's behaviour and attitudes can clarify the dynamics of at least one culture area.

My work is based mainly on the existing literature on Australian Aborigines and only secondly on my own field work. On some topics early writings are the major source of information, but I have also consulted the more modern literature extensively. My field work consisted of seven months spent during the dry seasons of 1975 and 1976 living in the single women's camp at Goinjimbi. The official name is Gulperan Pastoral Company since a cattle station was begun there in 1972. The two camps of Weemol and Goinjimbi lie some 325 km east of Katherine in the south of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve. The people are mostly Rembarnga with some Ngalgbon, and number between 70 and 130. I was fortunate to be able to share the single women's camp with two widows and a young girl as well as various temporary guests. Such domestic intimacy is not of course an unmixed blessing, for as well as emphasising problems of identity, and the lack of privacy for eliciting information and writing, it is hard to avoid total involvement in the immediate and pressing problems of the community.¹

¹. More information on the community is in Appendix B.
My research has been concerned with Aboriginal institutions and behaviour before contact with European invaders. I have however suggested that some insights into traditional behaviour can be gained from examining reactions to White\textsuperscript{1} influence, but this is a minor strand in the thesis.

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1. Throughout the thesis I use White as a proper noun to refer to the descendents of the Europeans who invaded the continent in the 18th century.
CHAPTER ONE

CONTRACEPTION, ABORTION AND INFANTICIDE

"You men in easy chairs say populate or perish. Well I have populated and I have perished, with no blankets" (Kingston, 1977).
A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the practices adopted by Aboriginal women to reduce their reproductive rate: contraception, abortion and infanticide. In dealing with contraception it is necessary to discuss wider issues such as Aboriginal ideas about conception, the effect of genital operations, sexual attitudes and practices and some aspects of women's social position. Abortive practices are crude and the implications of this are discussed. Infanticide raises wider questions about attitudes to infants, to family size and the fact of women's control in this area, but this chapter will concentrate on identifying the major features of behaviour directed to controlling reproduction. Subsequent chapters will attempt to account for them.

Sources

Much of the material on the reproductive lives of Aboriginal women comes from explorers, travellers, medical officers, government agents, squatters and missionaries. For the most part professional social anthropologists of the 20th century have considered child-birth, sexuality and even socialization peripheral to their theoretical preoccupations with kinship and totemism. I therefore need to comment briefly on the reliability of the early literature.

There are virtually no systematic studies of Aboriginal social life before about 1880, and by that date tribes in south-eastern Australia were decimated and traditions radically undermined. In general, the best sources of information for my purposes come from northern and central
Australia. Everywhere, of course, it is likely that interference with reproduction was concealed from intruding missionaries and officials. For that very reason the existing information is all the more valuable.

Authors who are recognised as the best authorities on south-eastern Australia, such as Howitt (1880, 1904), unfortunately deal only briefly with the topics that concern me here. My interests are very much better served by the writings of W.H. Roth, a government medical officer and surgeon in western and northern Queensland from 1890 to 1910. Another medical officer who wrote about the Aborigines' reproductive beliefs and practices is H. Basedow who worked mainly in central Australia and the Northern Territory. Here, of course, we also have the classical writings of Spencer and Gillen (1899, 1904) as well as Spencer's own later work (1914). The work of all these men is of the highest standard. Collections of ethnographic material made by authors such as Brough Smyth, Curr and R.H. Mathews were compiled from answers to questionnaires sent to landowners, missionaries, government officers and others, as well as from their own research. I have had to rely heavily on these reports, but in many cases I believe that no apology is necessary. In other instances I do have serious reservations about the validity of the material and I now indicate the main criteria I have used in evaluating it.

First, writers intent on castigating or praising Aborigines should be treated with caution. In any case, they provide little information. Second, authors who evince interest or surprise are likely to be

1. For example, in 1894, a Mr. Lindsay Crauford answered questions about Aboriginal beliefs and customs briefly but authoritatively. A footnote explains that "Blacks in the neighbourhood are very hostile; constant attacks and reprisals [occurred] during the last ten years, in fact since the first white man settled here we have held no communication with the natives at all except with the rifle. They have never been allowed near this station, being too treacherous and warlike" (in J.A.I., 1894:180).
reporting in good faith, even though they sometimes do not clearly
differentiate between what is common and what is rare, or between
direct observation and second hand reports. Third, speculations
about Aboriginal feelings, thoughts and attitudes are of doubtful
value unless supporting evidence is supplied. Fourth, the best
assurance of reliability is consistency among independent observers.

In general, I have not been influenced in my assessment of early
ethnography by the occupational category of the author. We might
reasonably expect certain biases in the observations of missionaries
or pastoralists, but it would be naive to suppose that medical officers
and geologists are thoroughly disinterested. I have tried to evaluate
all reports on their own merits in accordance with the criteria
indicated above.

Conception Beliefs

Aboriginal beliefs about conception are a subject with a long history
of controversy. Early reports (Spencer and Gillen, 1899:122-5, C.A.\(^1\);
Roth, 1903:22, Qu.) stated that Aborigines are ignorant of physiological
paternity\(^2\). In other words, they see no causal connection between
copulation and conception and are unaware of the role of semen in
reproduction. Various anthropologists subsequently confirmed these
assertions (Basedow, 1925:61-2; Sharp, 1934:23-4; Kaberry, 1939:42).

---

1. For each piece of ethnographic evidence I will indicate the general
area to which it refers using the usual state abbreviations as well
as the following; C.A. - Central Australia; A.L. - Arnhem Land;
N. - North (as in N.Qu.) and C. - Central. Occasionally no place
reference is given when the author believes himself to be speaking
of all Aborigines.

2. Just as Malinowski later reported that the Trobriand Islanders
were ignorant of the role of coitus in conception.
In 1937 Ashley Montagu, anthropologist and anatomist reviewed the existing data and concluded that Aborigines believed that "neither male nor female parent contributes anything whatever of a physical or spiritual nature to the being of the child" (1974:7). He maintained further that:

"We may also exclude the possibility of contraceptive practices here, for in the first place, among the peoples we are considering there is a complete absence of knowledge concerning the role coitus and its accompanying processes actually play in procreation, so that there is no occasion for the use of contraceptive measures, and in the second place even if there were it can be conclusively shown that none of the measures which are commonly employed by the peoples of Oceania is capable of securing the end desired" (ibid, 259-60).

The first point begs the question and the second is irrelevant. By ruling contraception out of court, Montagu precludes examination of a question with a vital bearing on the subject of beliefs about conception. While he did show that the connection between coitus and conception is by no means self-evident, Montagu's main contentions are based on a naive epistemology. Knowledge of such things as genetic ties, conception, the physiological role of genitor and genitrix is by no means simple. A good deal of controversy developed around this topic with evidence that Aborigines in some areas clearly and explicitly asserted their understanding of the causal role of semen and copulation in the reproductive process, though they did not stress these causes of conception (e.g., Warner, 1937:23-4; Thomson, 1936).
I will briefly outline some important issues which have been raised in this dispute. Barnes has pointed out that far from the Aborigines and the Trobriand Islanders being ignorant and everyone else enlightened, "physical paternity is a fact that, until recently, nobody can have known scientifically" (1974:69). He shows that the distinction between formal science and informal ethno-science is of importance even in our scientifically oriented society (ibid, 65). Other authors have emphasised that the context in which knowledge is elicited determines what is affirmed. Thus Strehlow says that denials of physical paternity were only made sweepingly in the presence of women and children and younger men (1971:597). This view seems to be widely accepted among anthropologists. Meggitt for instance says:

"I agree with Warner and with Roheim (1954) when they say that the Aborigines' answers to questions about conception depend on who is asked and in what circumstances. In ritual contexts, men speak of the actions of the gunuwari as the significant factor; in secular contexts, they nominate both the gunuwari and sexual intercourse. The women, having few ritual attitudes, generally emphasize copulation" (1962:273).

Dixon's linguistic investigations led him to distinguish between the basic level of belief and the mystic level of belief. He says of the Tulley River people, who Roth had reported to be ignorant of physiological paternity 65 years earlier, "There is a verb 'to be the male progenitor of' that had clear reference to the particular act of copulation that induced a conception" (Dixon, 1968:653). This is the basic level of belief, but "Explicit discussion is normally in terms of mystic belief, but basic belief is implicit in the reasoning,
language and actions of the Aborigines" (ibid, 654).

It would be agreed by most anthropologists that Aborigines do know that coitus is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conception to occur. There remains an area of dispute between those who would assert that Aborigines consider coitus as a secondary cause and emphasise spirit child impregnation because it supports patrilineal ideology (Leach, 1967; Warner, 1937), and those who assert that Aborigines actually suppress the knowledge of coitus as a cause of conception (Roheim, 1938; Lommel, 1949; Spiro, 1968; Tonkinson, 1978a).

I will not discuss this question further but turn to evidence of beliefs and behaviour which have more significance for women's attitudes to their own fertility and to contraception.

It is clear that conception beliefs and attitudes are a sensitive area of enquiry. Views differ as to whether Aborigines are frank about sexual matters (R. and C. Berndt, 1964:121) or secretive (Thomson, 1933:507; Hamilton, 1977:29a). Tonkinson describes the shocked reaction of older men to the mention of menstrual blood and fluid. Tonkinson regards this ban on the mention of these exuviae as somehow in conflict with the lack of prudishness and the relaxed attitude to sexuality in general (1978a:85). But Aborigines may be astonished at the reverse situation among Whites where sexual attitudes are replete with tensions but discussion is comparatively open.

1. One of the Goinjimbi women consulted me after a White man mentioned in public that his daughter was menstruating. Besides the embarrassment caused by his remarks, there was genuine puzzlement at how he could know such a thing.
The matter is further complicated by contact with Whites. Strehlow (1971:464) and Stanner (1933:27) say that Aboriginal attitudes alter with contact as they follow the Whites' dictates of propriety.

This is the reason Stanner gives for the fact that he found serious discussion of sexuality with most natives nearly impossible (1933:15). It seems more likely that unformalised taboos referring to sexual matters hide a fascination with the subject which, in certain conditions, such as with a particular kind of listener, can be expressed. Variation in the level of reticence in different circumstances is attested by I. White (1975:133). Thus one element in the dispute about Aboriginal conception beliefs is the effect of circumstance on the information produced both in regard to specific beliefs and concerning sexual attitudes and behaviour in general.

The main features of traditional conception beliefs centre on the existence of spirit children. For a woman to become pregnant she must be impregnated by such a spirit child, and this may happen in a number of ways. For instance a spirit child may be searching for a mother (Mountford and Harvey, 1942:157); the mother may shake the branches of a tree where spirit children are (Stanner, 1936:193-4); the husband may give a woman food which contains a spirit child (Kaberry, 1939:41-5); it may be speared or caught in the shape of an animal or fish (A.R. Brown, 1912:181; R. and C. Berndt, 1964:122); the father may be asked by the spirit child in a dream to tell it where its mother is (Lommel, 1949:162). In most cases the father must find the spirit child, or at least he has a major part in specifying where and when the woman becomes impregnated. The connection of
this impregnation with place or species in central Australia determines the clan affiliation of the child (Strehlow, 1947), but in other areas the nature of the spirit child and the place it is "found" have no affiliative significance. In many descriptions of the conception beliefs of Aborigines, the behavioural correlates are underplayed, though these could act as a useful check on what is believed and indicate what the consequences of particular beliefs are. Particularly for my purposes it could indicate differences in men's and women's beliefs. In so far as information is available I will describe behaviour which might attest to particular conception beliefs.

The existence of increase rites would indicate a firm belief in spirit children, and the ability of men to influence them. Maddock reports that increase rites are held to increase the population and that the men believe them to be successful (1969:297). However, while the large ceremonial sequences have aspects which are directed to maintaining fertility of animal and plant life, there is not a great emphasis on human fertility in ritual. Kaberry says of the Kimberley area, "There are rites associated with child-birth itself, but none to increase fertility, though such do occur in other communities .... The onus is upon the man to find and dream of a spirit-child, and it is doubtful if the notion of female sterility exists" (1939:233). Elsewhere she says, "Conception and finding do not necessarily coincide; in one instance a child was born four 'moons' or months after the finding" (1935:416). She does not discuss differences between men's and women's beliefs or any actions that might attest to the reality of the stated belief. Montagu goes further when he asserts that: "the quickening and this alone is recognised as the first sign of pregnancy" (1974:275). As this occurs at about four
and a half months after conception it is hard to accept that Aboriginal women are not aware of the nature of their condition sooner. Warner gives a description of the first recognition of pregnancy thus:

"The ideas surrounding birth give the father a prominent part in the procedure ..... As stated, a father dreams that the child comes to him, asking where it can find its mother, and enters the mother's vagina. The next day the man informs the wife that she is going to have a child, or if it is his first child to test the value of his dream, he may keep it a secret. The natives believe these dreams are always true since a wife usually tells her husband a few days later that she has felt the movements of a child within her. The husband knows then that his dream is true" (1958:68).

This somewhat ambiguous wording seems to imply that the women co-operate in the men's fiction of their control over the knowledge of their wives' pregnancies. Stanner reports that "In the pure native theory the sexual act seems to have mostly an erotic significance, but in the altered belief it is considered to be in some way connected with pregnancy" (1933:28). Again this is men's view and could be an indication of attitude rather than belief. Meggitt (1962:273) observed that Walbiri women recognise the cessation of menstruation as the first sign of pregnancy. There is also specific evidence of Aboriginal women recognising sickness and swelling breasts as the first sign of pregnancy (Kaberry, 1939:42; McConnel, 1934:317). T.G.H. Strehlow argues that in central Australia spirit children could only enter women who were already pregnant. He says:
"the very manner in which the 'conception site' of every individual is determined, points to the belief that the totemic ancestor who desired to be reincarnated always enters the body of a woman who was not only married, but already pregnant. In the Aranda speaking area, for instance, the conception site of every person was determined solely by an experience of his mother which could happen to her only at a time when she was already pregnant beyond any possible doubt: for the conception site of her child was normally the place where she had felt the first symptoms of morning sickness in that pregnancy or even the first pains associated with that condition. It would therefore seem to be a natural assumption that the soul or spirit of the ancestor entered into an embryo or foetus that had already come into existence by the natural means of procreation" (1971:596).

Both these observations show that pregnancy was recognised in the early stages, indicating a knowledge of causes of conception other than spirit child impregnation.

Rembarnga women told me that they as well as the men had found or dreamed spirit children, and described a number of cases in detail. But they blamed men as sexually selfish and greedy when their young wives had frequent and unwanted pregnancies. The older women clearly believe now that men who are sexually demanding are responsible for children being conceived in too quick succession. There was also genuine puzzlement that women could become pregnant again so quickly as one had done twice within six months of a birth, but this sounded more like an assumption of a physiological constraint than anything to do with spirit child beliefs. The women described by Warner and
Aboriginal women generally, may hold beliefs similar to the Rembarnga women, and if they do, this has most obvious implications for any contraceptive actions they might wish to take. We can assume that women do know of their condition within the first two months of pregnancy, for the physiological changes after conception are unmistakeable. Do they then not tell their husbands until the quickening, or is the early stage of pregnancy regarded as a sign of what is about to happen; that is, spirit child impregnation? The latter view might be likely if spontaneous abortion in the first four months were common. There are some medical opinions to that effect but the evidence is insufficient for a definite statement.

Of more significance for my enquiry is the widespread belief that many acts of intercourse are necessary for conception to occur. R. and C. Berndt (1964:121) report this for the Great Victoria Desert, Meggitt (1962:273) similarly for the Walbiri, and Hamilton (1977:28) for the central Australian Janguntjara. Burden has pointed out that "Aborigines believe that they do have some degree of control over conception .... If a child is desired it is believed that frequent and oft repeated acts of intercourse are necessary .... if they decide not to have any more children and if they follow traditional practice of occasional intercourse only, they will not conceive" (n.d.5). Such evidence about women's contraceptive attempts is rare, but supports the view that women share men's dualistic view of conception, and attempt to avoid both spirit children and coitus if they do not want children.
B. CONTRACEPTION

Spirit Child Avoidance

The first method of contraception to be described is spirit child avoidance. There are only rare observations of attempts by women to avoid spirit children or by men to manipulate them, and those that can be found are only incidental to discussing other issues, usually beliefs. Stanner says that Murinbata women (north western Australia) are sometimes impregnated by a particular type of spirit child which is deformed or diseased. When born "Such children are killed by being buried in the ground. Single girls are particularly liable to conceive from wakul wiya. Women will not shake the leaves or branches of trees for fear of disturbing and being impregnated by these [spirit children]" (1936:193-4). The observation that young girls are believed to be endangered in this way is significant in view of the fact that they are not supposed to have children. It could be seen as an endorsement of the infanticide that occurs when a young girl does give birth (see below, p. 42 ff). Stanner does not further explore the implications of women wishing to avoid conception, nor state whether it is only these deformed spirit children that are avoided.

Thomson says of the Wik Monkan tribe of Cape York:

"At the baby totem center ..... increase rites were performed by men and also by women when they wished babies to go to other places ..... As this rite is performed, the names of places to which it is desired to send babies are mentioned. Sometimes
the names of individuals may be called, especially, my informants added, in the case of a woman who is maritji, "too much run about", and who will not remain with her own husband, in order to "make a big row come out", i.e. in order to bring down vengeance upon her head" (1936:391).

Here the conflict of interest is clearly indicated. Women want to send spirit children elsewhere and men want to decide who is to become pregnant, sometimes as a punishment, or perhaps to control a woman, and at other times no doubt to create his own descendents. Bates' description of a man distracting a woman while the spirit child enters her also implies that there is a recognised difference between women and men in their desire for children (Bates, n.d. 290). Roth writes of spirit child impregnation among more southerly groups in Queensland, "The woman will probably be out hunting, and suddenly sing out that she sees a snake in question, and, as often as not, run away" (1903:23). The woman will then look for the snake and if it can't be found she is pregnant. "It is the husband here who asks the baby to be sent as a punishment when vexed with his wife" (ibid).

Another punishment is the sending of twins to the woman, and this is also reported by Mjöberg who says of central Queensland that a mother-in-law punishes her daughter-in-law by sending her twins if she is inattentive (1918:422). Roth further describes the four ways a woman may become pregnant. Two are by her own conscious actions, of sitting over a fire where a particular fish was cooked, and catching a certain type of bullfrog; one is by dreaming which cannot but be involuntary; the fourth is by the actions of a man having told her to be in an "interesting condition". Twins are sent by a medicine man
from another country, and both parents are angry with him (1903:22). Again these reports show women avoiding conception in some circumstances, and men attempting to make them conceive.

Spencer and Gillen also say of central Australia that a malicious man can make a women pregnant by using the *Erathîpa* stone which holds spirit children. They further state that a jealous husband might say, "That woman of mine has thrown me aside and gone with another man, go quickly and hang on tightly", meaning that the child is to remain a long time in the woman and so cause her death" (1899:338). Again here, as among the Tully River people described by Roth, the women appear to be helpless to avoid a pregnancy. But among the Warramunga, "the women are very careful not to strike the trunks of certain trees with an axe because the blow might cause the spirit children to emanate from them and enter their bodies" (Spencer and Gillen, 1904:331).

The focus of these descriptions is on the belief system, particularly of the men. The incidental behaviour that is described is that of men, so that women's independent actions are only hinted at, except for the one clear statement about the women avoiding certain trees. This is out of a large volume of literature devoted to the elucidation of Aboriginal beliefs about spirit children and conception (e.g., Montagu, 1937; second revised edition, 1974). The lack of information about women's avoidance of spirit children may simply be due to it not being particularly obvious behaviour, to it being women's business and therefore not being discussed with men, or to it not being practised. If it were the latter, the only satisfactory explanation, in the light of the evidence that the women did at least sometimes want to avoid conception, is that they regarded coitus rather than spirit children as the primary cause of conception. It is probable that their beliefs
differed from men's in emphasis but the indication in the above material is that at least sometimes they did try to avoid spirit children.

The one recent report which is relevant is from White who describes the Dog ceremony performed at Yalata. It is an extremely secret women's ceremony performed in the past for a woman who was barren. White says:

"I was unable to gain a full explanation for the women's extraordinary fear of the consequences of the Dog ceremony, except for a hint that they were afraid of becoming pregnant ....... It could be that even talking about the matter might bring about the effect and certainly none of the women participating would have welcomed another pregnancy" (1975:133).

This is a clear indication that central Australian women at least did attempt, independently of men, to manipulate spirit children.

Ritual and Magical Contraceptive Methods

By ritual and magical methods of contraception I refer to actions which call on supernatural forces to stop conception. These may also be directed at spirit children as in this report of "smoking" from South Australia:

"After a woman has had a child, a shallow hole is dug in which a fire is built and leaves of the Eremophila longifolia (vakuaka) burned to give off thick smoke. The woman squats over the hole and the smoky fire. This practice ...... is said
to ensure that at least three years shall elapse between the birth of successive children. The women claim that the "smoking" is not a contraceptive measure, but merely a magical method of "spacing" the births, in other words, of making the woman less desirable to the muri [spirit children] (Mountford and Harvey, 1941:160-1).

This is very similar to the descriptions of my Rembarnga informants' methods of preventing a girl from having a child too early. Others describe a similar "smoking" which takes place at puberty or after parturition (Basedow, 1925:252-256; 1907:13-15; R. and C. Berndt, 1964:126,152; Mathews, 1904:335). The purpose of this rite is not given and I would suggest it is partly meant to have a contraceptive effect. Hamilton says that "smoking" is commonly said to discourage conception but is used in all situations where there are genital wounds or bleeding. The same central Australian women claimed to have infallible contraceptive songs (1977:31). Hamilton earlier reported from Arnhem Land that the Anbara women claimed to achieve contraception by smoking, wearing a string harness and eating a certain ground up stone (1970:21-2). Strehlow reports from central Australia that a woman may be "sung" by her husband to stop conceiving, the exact reverse of Spencer and Gillen's report of a spiteful husband sending his wife an unwanted and malevolent child. This information indicates that men may sometimes wish to help a woman curtail her fecundity. Rembarnga women also reported that a man could stop his wife conceiving if he wished by mixing a little blood from his thigh with kangaroo meat and giving it to his wife.
Use of Plants as Contraceptives and Abortifacients

There exists for various areas in Australia reports of the use of decoctions of plant substances to cause temporary or permanent sterility or to induce abortion. Only a few of the plants involved have been identified and none have to my knowledge been exhaustively tested for abortive or contraceptive properties. D.F. Thomson gives one of the few full descriptions of such plants and their use in Cape York.

"In the koko Ya'o, Kanju, Yänkonyu, Ompelä and Yintjingga tribes there is a firm belief in the contraceptive (not abortifacient) properties of certain plants. I was informed of this fact by both men and women in widely separated localities, and in each case the names of two plants that are used, ka'atä and pi'alä, were given to me. I had striking evidence of this belief when collecting genealogies from a group of Kanju people on the Batavia River. After writing down the names of a man and his wife that occurred in one of the branches of the pedigree, I asked as usual for the names of their children, and received the spontaneous reply, "No got, keni yänkoi'n, he shut mesel," i.e. she has not got any, she has eaten medicine; she has shut herself. These are the exact words volunteered by one of my informants – a woman with whom I had never discussed the question. The men, as usual, in all matters pertaining to women, such for example as childbirth, generally disclaim any first-hand knowledge of this medicine, but freely admit that a "keni belong women" is used, and declare that they would be angry if they found

1. As these two uses are not usually separated in the literature I have included abortifacients here instead of in the section on abortion.
2. Webb (1959:140) points out that boiling or treatment with hot water must be a post contact development. Previously soaking was probably general as one of Webb's informants stated and as Rembarnga women told me.
their women using it. Most of my information on this subject was obtained from the old women. They stated that this *keni* was "old fashioned" and all agreed that when they used it "piccaninny no more come out".

He continues "The two plants mentioned above, *tjarra* or *ka'atä* (*Dioscorea sativa var. rotunda*) and *pi'alä* (*Entada scandens*), are both good *mai'yi* and are freely used as foods, the root of the former, and the bean of the latter, but in each case only after a tedious process of cooking and subsequent washing in frequent changes of water. When used as a contraceptive the *keni* is generally eaten raw, sometimes roasted, but in each case without the prolonged washing to which the same material is subjected when used as food. A very large *tjarri* rootstock, called *tjarri kalnpa*, a "male" *tjarra*, is selected, and this either raw or cooked, is given to the young women by one of the older women credited with a special knowledge of such matters. I was informed that this *keni* is taken in the early morning on an empty stomach, after which the woman lies down, refraining from drinking throughout the day, until sundown. The old woman declared that once a woman had taken this medicine she would never have a child. One explanation of its action was that it "dried them up", another that it closed the genital passages *so that the tall'äll could not enter*. These are, of course, merely the speculations of my informants, for in such matters, which are not freely discussed, there is probably nothing that could be called an orthodox belief.

I have no evidence as to whether these plants have any real contraceptive properties. A great number of native "medicines" have no therapeutic value, but properties are attributed to them that are really of a magical nature ...." (1933:506-507).
No further research appears to have been conducted to ascertain the efficacy or otherwise of these plants, despite the fact that they are identified by their botanical name. The rest of the evidence is either from anthropologists who have not identified the plant or substance, or from botanists who have not detailed the circumstances of their use.

R. and C. Berndt say of western South Australia, "A certain plant contraceptive was generally used to keep a reasonable interval between the birth of children. It was termed komeri and was taken by both sexes to counteract for a time the potency of the man's semen" (1943:244-5). No samples appear to have been collected or analysed. Taylor, a missionary from Groote Eylandt, says that contraceptives are "found by the natives in their [sic] bush" (1937:2). Here the nature of the substance is not even vaguely identified. Mjöberg (1918:516) says that white clay is eaten as a contraceptive by the women of Cape York. He had the substance analysed but the analysis did not suggest any abortive properties. This substance is elsewhere said to be used as a treatment for diarrhoea and other stomach ailments (Roth, 1897:163; Elphistone, 1971:259) and would seem to be immediately ruled out as having any contraceptive effects.

Contemporary information from Ernabella is that the women claim they use raw yam as abortifacient (Burden, 1975, pers. comm.). The women from the Victoria Desert area say that when they chew a particular grass they become temporarily sterile but the grass only appears after rain and not during the drought years. The women, according to my informant did not use the plant deliberately as a contraceptive (Tischler, 1976, pers. comm.). Another informant said that the ash
from the bark of two trees was used to prevent pregnancy (Reece, 1971, pers. comm.). Other central Australian plants with high estrogen content are Alfalfa and the Solanums. The arid zone research centre in Alice Springs is currently researching and analyzing the use of plants by Aborigines in central Australia but they have not yet been able to assess the effectiveness of any of these (P. Latz, 1976, pers. comm.).

Rembarnga women in Arnhem Land described to me part of the "bamboo" which was eaten in the past to stop a woman conceiving. Women at the settlement at Bamyilli also said they used "bamboo juice" in this way. The bamboo shoot was scraped and soaked in water and given to a young girl to drink, but although one woman's childless state was attributed to its action the women no longer use it. C. Dunlop, a botanist in Darwin, says that this plant may be *Flagellaria indica* which Maiden (1975) describes as astringent and vulnerary. Further analysis would be required before any contraceptive effect could be ruled out.

Rembarnga women also said that for contraception, ash from the iron-wood tree had to be mixed with a stone spear, crushed to powder and given to young girls. Hamilton reports similarly from Arnhem Land that permanent sterility could be achieved by eating the ground up slivers of a bamboo spear (1970a:25). Webb, a botanist, in a series of articles on plant use among Aborigines has given some attention to those plants claimed as having contraceptive or abortifacient properties. He lists three plants used by Australian Aborigines as "Sterility (oral)

1. The Solanum group of plants which grow extensively in Australia are a rich source of a plant steroid, solasodine, which is to be commercially exploited for the production of oral contraceptives (Collins et al., 1976). I have been assured by a biochemist that the plants would have no contraceptive effect in the raw state.
contraceptive) plants". These are *Curcuma australasica* - apparently used externally but method not clear; *Cymbidium iridifolium* - seeds; *Morinda reticulata* - decoction of leaves and root drunk. A further plant, *Callicarpa*, is listed for Torres Straits. Webb says "All the reputed 'oral contraceptive' plants, despite the doubts of their authenticity and the polypharmacy which surrounds their use, are worth screening for oestrogenic activity, particularly since worldwide research has recently developed in this field" (1959:109). In a further article Webb says "Leichhardtia australis; dried and ground seeds are reported to be an effective oral contraceptive" (1969:142). He suggests that "Alkaloids are known to occur in Asclepiadaceae, to which ...... Leichhardtia ('oral contraceptive') belongs[es], so that some pharmacological activity of the plants used internally for specific purposes would be expected" (ibid, 139). In 1973 Webb was even more positive, pointing out that the "tropical flora contains a much higher percentage of physiologically active compounds such as alkaloids than does the flora of temperate regions" and that "There are also several records of plants used to cause abortion, and which (when taken by mouth) prevented conception (ibid, 293). He goes on to say that it is "extremely risky to generalise about the efficacy of many of these so called medicinal plants, because their use was inevitably associated with ritual and other customs" (ibid, 294). I would add that the details of the treatment would also need to be reproduced if a proper test were done, for the state of the body, the amount of the drug and any other substance taken before or with the drug may be crucial to its action on the body.

The available information is limited and all is from the north or central part of Australia. There may be few pharmacologically active plants in the more temperate regions as suggested by Webb. But it is
also true that few observations were made of these practices, and it is likely that information on such matters would, at least in many areas have been difficult for male researchers to elicit as it is "women's business" and not to be spoken of in front of men, much less by men.

While the literature is inadequate to assess the geographical extent and the frequency of the usage of plants as contraceptives and abortifacients, it can be stated that plants were used for such purposes in central Australia, Northern Territory and northern Queensland. It seems likely that, while Webb sees a distinct possibility that these plants have some pharmacological effect, they would not have been highly effective or reliable. That is, they may have reduced overall fertility slightly and increased the likelihood of abortion\textsuperscript{1}. The view that these methods seldom achieved contraception is supported by the fact that abortion by manual pressure and infanticide did occur as will be described below. The lack of faith shown by the Rembarnga women in their traditional contraceptives is further evidence of its ineffectiveness, for while their current contraceptive needs are all directed to the medical profession, other traditional medical practices are still followed including infusions of leaves to stop pain.

**Genital Operations**

The genital operations that Aboriginal men undergo as part of their initiation are of interest here because of the supposition made by many observers that the operations were intended for, and did

\textsuperscript{1} It is possible that those physiologically active plant substances would at least have added to the probability of spontaneous abortion in women who were very young or old. (A further discussion of this matter occurs in Chapter 5.)
indeed achieve, contraception. A description of the operations follows and a brief account of the early views of them and the subsequent reversal of these views. I will suggest that a modification of currently accepted views should be made in the light of later evidence; that is, subincision would have reduced the probability of conception to some extent. The major source for the earlier material, is a detailed and exhaustive article, using the then current evidence, by Basedow (1927).

In the east part of Australia and a part of the south-west and an area around Darwin there was no genital operation at all. Circumcision alone is practised in some areas of the north and south of the continent. This is performed on boys from ten to fourteen years with a stone knife, several hacks being necessary to sever the foreskin. There is another form of circumcision called "firestick circumcision" by Basedow, which is performed in the Cooper Creek area. It is described as follows:

"the assistant seizes the patient's organ and pushes the prepuce back over the glans. The operator immediately applies the red-hot end of his firestick to the crinkled mass of skin in a mid-dorsal spot below the corona. The skin blisters and fizzles, and the burn inflicted is so locally severe that the

1. Distribution maps for these rites are given in R. and C. Berndt (1964:139) and Elkin (1977 end paper).

2. The bruising thus inflicted would have lessened bleeding and modern use of the razor blade is dangerous because bleeding is free (Cleland, 1953:409).
tissue is actually destroyed ..... The wound usually heals by prolific granulation, the process ultimately leaving a large flat scar which securely knits the prepuce on to the dorsum of the penis. In a sense, a condition similar to circumcision is thus brought about, to the extent, at any rate, of keeping the glans permanently exposed" (Basedow, 1927:126).

Another form of genital operation practised over a wider area of the eastern border of the sub-incision area is an incision of the urethra made near the scrotum, from ½ to 1½ inches long. This creates a permanent hole in the urethra. The sub-incision operation proper consists of an incision beginning at the external orifice of the urethra. It is described by Basedow as follows:

"the actual operation consists in slitting the whole or part of the penile urethra along the under (that is the thinnest) side of the canal. The initial cut is, in most cases from 2 cms to 2.5 cms long, but on subsequent occasions it is extended, bit by bit, right up to the edge of the scrotum" (ibid, 135).

It was widely reported before 1900 that the operation was intended to and did achieve birth control, and admiring comments were made about Aborigines having solved the Malthusian problem (e.g., Creed, 1883: 95-97). Subincised males were believed to be incapable of impregnating a woman. It was also widely reported and even more widely repeated, that some Aboriginal men were spared the operation in order to impregnate the women when it was wished to increase the population
(Miklucho-Maclay, 1880; Lumholz, 1908; Ravenscroft, 1892; Curr, 1886; all quoted in Basedow, 1927:148-9).

Roth (1897), Spencer and Gillen (1899) as well as many lesser known writers argued that this account of the operation was mistaken. Two points were made. Firstly the operation did not in fact achieve population control of the kind suggested as all males in a subincising tribe were operated on and still fathered children. Secondly the operation was not intended to stop insemination and such an idea would have been impossible among people who had no knowledge of the role of semen in conception. Roth and Spencer and Gillen were emphatic about this nescience partly to counter the erroneous view of subincision. Now the latter argument has been somewhat weakened by the demonstration that many and perhaps all Aborigines do understand that semen has a necessary role in procreation. However, there is no evidence that the operation was intended to achieve population control and this must be accepted. As for the first point though, the protesters seem to have exaggerated their case unnecessarily and beyond what the evidence warrants.

1. Enquiries into the "meaning of" and "reasons for" subincision by I. Jones (1969) and J. Cawte (1973) are remarkable for their superficiality and ignorance of anthropological method of eliciting and evaluating information. Jones’ references to defective concepts of time and confused logic in the thinking of Aborigines are ethnocentric and insulting to Aborigines. Interviews with five informants in the space of a few weeks led to the following conclusion, "the act is a powerful force in maintaining tribal cultures. It may, in addition be a fertility rite and a means of identification" (ibid, 189). Cawte has claimed priority in discovering that a major reason for subincision is an attempt to emulate the kangaroo's bifurcate penis. While his conclusions are unremarkable in presenting a number of possible reasons for the rite, his methodology does not inspire confidence. A few informants were asked supposedly non-directive questions but their main response seems to have been acquiescence. Cawte has produced what he calls the Walbiri hypothesis (1973:388) on the basis of the claim that myths he heard emphasised the "subincision" of many marsupials. He gives no evidence that the Walbiri in fact have this or any other "hypothesis" explaining subincision.
It may be that the operation did reduce to some degree the likelihood of the semen impregnating the woman. Also male genital operations may have reduced the rate of coitus at particular times. These points will be pursued further with regard to fertility in Chapter 5. Here the aim is simply to establish that genital operations were performed with no intention of achieving contraception, though it is probable that it did have some contraceptive effect.

The genital operations performed on women were also widespread over the continent. They probably had little direct contraceptive effect except perhaps in the cases of severe and accidental mutilation causing sterility. Roth says:

"I have had dozens of opportunities for making suitable examination in cases of venereal disease and verifying the fact, [of vaginal laceration] but as to how far the occasional large extent of the rupture was intentional or accidental on the part of the original operator, it is of course, useless to express an opinion" (1879:175).

Evasion of Coitus

A final way that women could avoid conception is by evading coitus. Information on such a matter is of course by its very nature, difficult to come by. But there are some indications of women's views about men's sexuality. I will also discuss opportunities and occasions for sexual intercourse.

I have shown that Aborigines believe that many acts of intercourse are necessary for conception to occur. Thus women's avoidance of
intercourse for contraceptive reasons need not be absolute. That is women could attempt to avoid frequent intercourse and believe this to be effective as a contraceptive measure. Several authors have noted that Aborigines appear to have very active sex lives (e.g., R. and C. Berndt, 1964:159-66; Kaberry, 1939:103; I. White, pers. comm.). However, this does not preclude the refusal of coitus by women who wish to avoid pregnancy. White herself reports that women put sand in their vaginas if they don't want coitus (pers. comm.). Hamilton says this also (1977:34). Two comments by Roth are revealing. He says that women of north Queensland believe that men drug them with a certain plant and copulate with them without their, the women's, knowledge (1903:24). Such a belief implies that men are seen to be sexually demanding, and to be able to manipulate women's sexuality without her being able to do anything about it. Further Roth reports:

"It is also believed that the menses can be stopped by their husbands and others collecting and cutting up any grass, etc., on which their menstrual flow has fallen - but as this is the last thing the men would touch, any confirmation of this belief is not forthcoming. On the other hand, were their periods to be thus purposely stopped, the men would be enabled to continually pay them sexual attention, a course to which the women assured me they objected" (1903:24).

As described above, husbands were blamed for the frequent pregnancies which Rembarnga women are currently experiencing. Hamilton's

1. It might be argued that post-contact evidence should be discounted as beliefs and attitudes would have changed. I would contend that while adoption of new techniques and tools may be rapid, these will be used at first only to achieve previously desired goals. These goals and the attendant values change less rapidly. Thus the older of my informants would hold views on reproduction similar to those of their mothers who in many cases died before contact.
central Australian women informants also expressed this view (1977: 34). If women then believe that copulation with men causes pregnancy, and perhaps for this or for other reasons wish to avoid coitus, how can they achieve this? In general it seems that women do not overtly refuse men their wishes in this or any other matter but use the characteristic mode of individual non-cooperation or subversion.

There are several recognised methods among the Rembarnga of subverting a husband's sexual wishes. The baby can be pinched or simply said to be awake and require "bipi" (the breast) or the woman can say she is cold and sleep near the fire, keeping it stoked so that the fire light will preclude privacy. Or she can say "someone looking, there", a common warning to stop children in their tracks but also an effective curb to adults requiring privacy.

Direct evidence of women avoiding coitus also comes from some other recent authors. Hausefeld (1972) says that women are far from being submissive and reports the case of a wife who left her husband because he was sexually demanding. L. Reece reports attempts by girls at Swan Reach in South Australia to find a "safe period" (pers. comm.) when they could not conceive. R. and C. Berndt say that women have left their husbands, "and one insisted that the only sure means of avoiding further pregnancies was to keep away from men" (1964:124). White reports central Australian women's attitude to coitus, "Husbands, who are expected to take the initiative ..... are seen as somewhat bothersome in their sexual advances, particularly by those women who have already borne a number of children and want no more" (1975:136). This of course is the occasion for sand in the vagina mentioned above.
The lack of privacy, which women can manipulate to their own
ends, is the second aspect of the situation and one that is probably
more controversial. It seems to me that members of small groups of
people living in close proximity to one another are usually well aware
of the place and occupation of all the other members of the group.
Privacy is difficult to achieve in a community where solitude is
feared. Even for married couples at night in the camp there are many
disturbances; there is often a moon or leaping fire light and someone,
adult or child is often awake and moving about. Hiatt says, "Normally
a man and his wife are too embarrassed by the close presence of others
to have intercourse in the camp during the night" (1969:6). There is
agreement from some other authors that most sexual activity takes
place away from the camp in the daytime (Berndt, 1940:288; Lommel,
1949:158), although these authors are usually discussing adulterous
lovers rather than married couples (e.g., Hart and Pilling, 1960:37).
Others say that menstruating wives sleep on the other side of the fire
from their husbands, implying that they do copulate when on the same
side of the fire. Meggitt says, "Spouses usually copulate only at night
in the privacy of their own shelters, for they would be deeply shamed
if anyone observed this behaviour" (1962:89). Clearly, with others
sleeping nearby, conditions are not ideal for frequent indulgence.
Among the Murngin, Warner reports that a couple "lie in such a
position that they will not be noticed by their camp mates" (1937:127).
Earlier he describes a man waiting for his young and jealous wife to
sleep so that he could copulate with his older wives (ibid, 91).
T.G.H. Strehlow describes the care with which liaisons must be arranged
and says "where lovers met illicitly, both of them had to be on
their guard during the whole of the brief time available before their
absence was noticed" (1971:494).
Berndt describes how liaisons are arranged by sign language in the morning around the camp fires. But in the daytime young women without children are at the beck and call of older women and their husbands; if they are away it will be noticed and discussed. When out gathering with a group the women may be out of sight of others but keep in touch by calling. These are the times when brief periods of privacy could be achieved. As Goodale says of young married girls, "If she is going to accept a lover, this is the age to do so for as my informants commented, "Children make such bush meetings difficult"" (1971:130). Kaberry remarked on this problem, "the fact that a child is rarely out of its mother's arms, limits her opportunities for a casual affair and ensures a certain amount of domestic peace" (1939:155). Clearly women with young children have no chance of sneaking away unremarked. Older women especially those without children would have a much greater chance of such liaisons, both because there are fewer demands made on them and because their privacy is respected. Sexual intercourse must thus depend on full and equal cooperation between lovers and spouses as well as the cooperation of go-betweens and even others who must shut their eyes to what they observe.

While it is difficult in the light of these factors to imagine a woman being unwillingly coerced into sexual intercourse, she will experience sexual demands from puberty at least. Further, it will be shown below that one of the key notes of a girl's education is fulfilling the wishes of men, so how far she is able or willing to express any reluctance for coitus is debatable. The nature of sexual coercion is a complex and subtle question, but I suggest the following themes are common to this aspect of social intercourse between the sexes in Aboriginal Australia.
A woman feels obliged to accede to her husband's or lover's wishes, whether they are sexual or for food\(^1\). A man will be sensitive to a woman's reluctance to engage in coitus as to any reluctance to fulfil other demands, but he can seldom force her to comply. However a husband's bad temper is to be avoided, and any desire she has to avoid conception cannot be mentioned to him. Thus any reluctance on a woman's part for coitus will be infrequently expressed and well camouflaged.

I have shown that despite the dearth of material, there is evidence of women attempting to achieve contraception. They avoid spirit children, perform ritual acts and take medicine to reduce fertility, and at times avoid coitus for contraceptive reasons. It is possible that some marginal reduction in fertility occurred as a result of these actions and this is the subject of a later chapter.

We now turn to other means of limiting the number of children a woman raises.

C. ABORTION

The limited material on abortion shows general agreement on a number of points which I will illustrate. The following are typical descriptions.

"they have no hesitation in having recourse to [abortion] effecting their object by blows. One girl was known to have thrown herself across a log to produce the death and speedy delivery of the child" (Palmer, Qu. 1884:280).

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1. To feed a husband is a euphemism for coitus, as I discovered inadvertently when enquiring into the distribution of food.
Abortion in west Queensland was common in later months in several of the districts Roth was familiar with.

"It is performed by the fixation of thick twine wound very tightly round and round the abdominal walls, combined with the 'punching' by hand or stick upon the more palpable and apparently firmer portions of the unborn child as recognised through the abdominal walls" (1897:183).

Roth also remarks elsewhere that stillbirths were prevalent in the north Queensland coastal areas owing to violence, both women's and their husbands' (1908:14). It seems probable that these were pre-term infants deliberately or accidentally aborted.

From west Arnhem Land R. and C. Berndt report that:

"Abortion was brought about by well-known and generally recognised methods by the women themselves, often unknown to the men. Three methods were mentioned; these were drinking hot (almost boiling) water, the pounding of the belly with stones, and the tying of rope or cord round the belly and gradually tightening it..... Menstruation is also induced, if slow in appearing, by steaming, massage or violent exercise" (1951:45).

In the Kimberley area observed by Kaberry a woman would abort herself or enlist the aid of another woman to pummel her belly or place hot stones upon it (1939:156). More recently Billington found that in Arnhem Land "Miscarriage is apparently not uncommon amongst the Aborigines. All of the women who were questioned gave..."
details of methods for inducing miscarriage .... No instance was known in which miscarriage had caused the death of a woman" (1960:50). At Oenpelli there were 194.2 miscarriages to 1,000 live births (ibid).

Meggitt asserts that among the Walbiri of central Australia "Abortion, which is induced by manual pressure on the abdomen, is uncommon and greatly deplored" (1962:273). He is of course reporting the men's view, and he earlier describes one, and possibly two cases of abortion (ibid, 98–9). Women may publicly and even privately deplore the practice without renouncing it. Goodale gives a fuller description of the situation among the Tiwi.

"Some Tiwi women, practise abortion, and all women past puberty know the methods. Drinking the milk of the milk-wood tree will cause an abortion, as will eating or drinking something very hot, including today strongly seasoned foods prepared in the settlement. Jumping from a tree to the ground or hitting the womb\(^1\) with a stick will also produce an abortion, I was informed. When one of these methods proves effective, the mother will be alright if the anera (placenta) wherein resides the pitapituí [spirit child] is discharged, at which time the bleeding will stop. However, if the placenta is not discharged, the bleeding will continue and the mother will die, for there is no known cure" (1971:145).

Bates also mentions thumping and stamping on a woman's stomach, sometimes after tying a string tightly around it, as a method of

\(^{1}\) I presume this refers to external blows to the abdomen.
abortion (1905:50, W.A.). Hamilton reports from Maningrida:

"The women said that abortion could be procured by drinking hot tea, by placing hot stones on the abdomen, or by pounding the stomach, but all denied that they had ever attempted abortion themselves. Miscarriages were apparently frequent in the past" (1970:28).

Rembarnga women also knew of the method of tying string tightly around the abdomen but said they had not practised it. They did not like to discuss the matter.


The stage at which these abortions are attempted is not always clear. Hiatt (1967:7) states that the foetus may be killed shortly before birth. Roth's and Palmer's descriptions seem also to refer to a late stage of pregnancy. Bates says the abdomen is massaged and thumped if the birth is painful, and that this kills the baby and sometimes the mother (nd, 14:280 and 14:294). Roth asserts that abortion is common in later months (1897:183). Strehlow (1907:1017) says that an unwanted child is killed by the mother before birth by pressing on the lower part of her body firmly. Rembarnga women were familiar with miscarriages at later stages of pregnancy and I was told
"if a girl don't like him she kill him after or inside before he's born by hitting him or pressing his head". Other reports of frequent stillbirths may indicate that this method of abortion was not uncommon (Mountford and Harvey, 1941:158; Roth, 1903:25; Grey, 1841:249).

It is apparently not an easy matter to dislodge a foetus late in pregnancy as it is encased in fluid which protects it from blows and pressure. The probable effect of the pressure and pounding would be to cause bleeding into the uterus which in turn would cause the foetus to be expelled. This is dangerous because the bleeding may not stop, and infection is likely to result (Llewellyn-Jones, pers. comm.)¹. At least the treatment will cause extreme pain and serious bruising. The comment of Goodale above suggests that attempts at abortion frequently failed, and we might speculate that in these cases infanticide occurred at the birth of the infant. It is possible that where attempts at inducing abortion failed to achieve their object, they caused the infant to be deformed and thus subject to infanticide. Devereux states that this occurred among the Mohave Indians (1948:138).

Evidence that abortion was also attempted early in pregnancy comes from several sources. R. and C. Berndt describe methods of inducing late menstruation which sounds like the inducing of early abortion. They say "Menstruation is also induced, if slow in appearing, by steaming, massage or violent exercise" (1951:45). It is hard to see why Aboriginal women would be concerned with late menstruation unless fearing pregnancy. A nursing sister from central

¹. It should be noted that few members of the medical profession have experience of these kinds of abortions.
Australia says that girls are expected to menstruate at the same
time every month and if they do not their stomach is pummelled to
induce bleeding (M. Tishna, pers. comm.).

Thus it is probable that abortion was attempted at the early
stages of pregnancy also, but that at the later stages it could
actually be observed. Any early attempts at abortion would not have
been obvious to others in the camp, let alone any outside observer.
It is relevant to note that Aboriginal women do not announce their
pregnancies early. In fact as mentioned above, it is often implied
that they do not know they are pregnant until their husbands tells
them so.

A number of other methods are mentioned. Hot stones on the
belly (Kaberry, 1939:156) could possibly cause the foetus to die and
be expelled, but the drinking of hot suffusions of leaves and herbs
(McConnel, 1934:317; Mjöberg, 1918:515; Goodale, 1971:145) is
unlikely to be effective. Basedow reports the rubbing of powder
on the armpits and pubes (1925:64), which is also unlikely to induce
abortion. Even less likely to achieve the desired end are the magical
methods mentioned by the Berndts.

"It is said that a pregnant woman desirous of bringing about
abortion or causing a miscarriage, goes to a particular waterhole
which never goes dry. Here the big Snake, 'aru:gin magically
kills the baby" (R. and C. Berndt, 1951:45).

In fact this could well be an oblique reference to opportunities for
deliberate abortion.
In all these accounts, and from enquiries among more recent field-workers, it appears that there was no attempt to abort by inserting an instrument into the cervix. Billington remarks "Vaginal methods of emptying the uterus are unknown ....." (1960: 50). Such methods have been widely used elsewhere and do not appear to be as fraught with danger as the medical profession would have us believe. Those who do develop such techniques become skilful practitioners although presumably the process is always painful (MacArthur, 1976 of P.N.G., pers. comm.; K. Miller, A.B.C. guest speaker 1977 of rural Colorado). Himes reports abortion expertise among Papuan women from Kiwai and the Marquesans (1936:21,23). The method of abdominal massage known as Bomoh is more like that of the Aborigines. It is used by women practitioners all over south-east Asia. "The aim of the massage is to squeeze the uterus so that the pregnancy gets dislodged and an abortion takes place" (Sambhi, 1977). Debilitating pain always follows and serious complications are not uncommon but Dr. Sambhi gives no statistics.

Aboriginal women relied upon this more crude and dangerous method of direct pressure or upon infanticide instead. It is relevant here to mention other aspects of obstetrics among Aborigines. There is an apparent reluctance to interfere with a baby's birth. The foetus is expelled without any manual assistance, which is probably sound medical practice in normal births. Roth says "The genital passages are never touched by anyone, and the child, without any guidance is allowed to fall into the shallow excavation below" (1897:183). De Vidas gives a clear and detailed account of childbirth "There is no interference whatever with the mechanisms of child-birth. Neither assistant touches the child or the vaginal outlet until the head and
body are fully born" (1947:118). He further says that the cases he has observed of breach birth and retained placenta have usually proved fatal.

"When the after coming head refuses to be born, the body and limbs of the child are pulled and clawed at in panicky efforts to extract it ..... Inversion of the uterus is common in cases of retained placenta by virtue of the Aborigine's habit of delivering the placenta by pulling on the cord. The maternal death rate from haemorrhage and shock in these cases is high" (ibid, 119)^1.

Goodale has already been quoted making a similar observation of the result of retained placenta after an abortion. Hamilton remarks that among the Maningrida women obstetrical knowledge is nil (1970a:30). The dislike and fear of the insertion of contraceptive devices such as an I.U.D. is attested by Hamilton (1977:30) and Reid (pers. comm.), and by my Rembarnga informants. It seems then that Aboriginal women in general may have been reluctant to interfere with their internal genitalia and partly for this reason did not develop more sophisticated methods of abortion.

Two conclusions that can be drawn from this section are that Aboriginal women did abort (though the frequency is very unclear), but the only effective methods were violent and dangerous. Secondly and as a corollary, there must have been powerful motivation to achieve this end for such a painful and risky practice to be undertaken. The reasons given by observers will be presented beginning with a revealing account by a Spanish priest.

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1. This evidence from de Vidas comes from his being called to assist after the infant had died.
Dom Hernandez writes:

"Most if not all the cases of abortion were due to ignorance. For, thinking that the pains and inconvenience that usually accompany gestation were caused by blood congestion or by *djakolo* (charm or object introduced by magic into the human body) women tried to get rid of them by some of their barbarous methods - striking or hard kneading of the belly - and the result was, naturally, abortion. Thus when, on one occasion, a bush woman was reprimanded at the mission for having killed her unborn child, she replied innocently that what she had ejected was not a child but a rat!" (1941:125).

Hernandez' naive views of women's motivation aside, this explanation is doubtless a part of the complex of beliefs about spirit children and pregnancy. Of the women in the Kimberly area Kaberry writes:

"At present and for some time in the past women have resorted to abortion. It cannot be called deliberate racial suicide, and as far as I could ascertain it was *not* done in accordance with the wishes of the husband. Women practised it simply because they could not be bothered with the pain and trouble of child-bearing. The root of the trouble is evidently psychological, and it can only be due to the breakdown of tribal life and perhaps the separation of parents from their children, once they have reached the age of three or four years. The women favour the use of hot stones as a method; one of the women, Dolowei, has strangled her first child and committed abortion at least three times after that" (1935:417).
Goodale reports of the Tiwi:

"It was difficult to find out just why some women tried to abort their child. One woman told me that if a wife became pregnant too soon after having reached puberty, it was not good for her to continue the pregnancy. The baby if allowed to be born may be too weak to live. But I think an equally strong reason to abort a pregnancy when the mother is young is the desire of some young wives to postpone their motherhood so as not to interfere with their love life. This was the dominant reason given in 1962 by young female informants who frankly admitted that they had induced sometimes several abortions and would do so again should they become pregnant before they had decided on which of their boy-friends they would eventually 'marry'. I think, however, that the willingness to abort a pregnancy has become much more common in recent times than it ever was in the past, for then it was only by becoming a mother that a woman gained any real status in the society" (1971:145-6).

Gribble says women aborted after quarrelling with their husbands (1932:41). R. and C. Berndt found isolated cases of abortion to prevent the birth of a child which had no legal father (1942b:147). Billington reports that "the reason for inducing abortion which was given without hesitation by both informants at Oenpelli, was "she no wantim children, she want-im play-about"" (1960:50).

Goodale and Kaberry think that abortion is a manifestation of pathology in some sense and has proliferated recently as a result of culture contact. However their own evidence indicates that abortion

1. Stanner and others give the same opinion of the infanticide which will be discussed below.
is a traditionally known and accepted practice. It may be that a falling local population leads to a higher rate of infanticide and abortion, or rather, a greater reluctance of women to raise children for proximate reasons such as the heavier demands on the labour of young women in this situation. That is, when for some reason the population becomes unbalanced in a particular group, and there is a shortage of women to collect the food for perhaps old or predominantly male members of the group, they may refuse to raise more children rather than increase their burdens. I would suggest that abortion is a known and accepted practice, but will usually occur when a woman is highly fertile and so conceives young and often; when she is easily aborted, which may be a physiological variable; and when her own position is such that the infant would clearly reduce her satisfaction with life. The latter is intended to include both the situation described above where she is already overburdened as well as those where she wants to retain her freedom. That is I would argue that the evidence points to an understanding on the part of Aboriginal women that motherhood is a contingent good, and can be rejected in certain circumstances. The material on infanticide to be presented next further supports this view.

D. INFANTICIDE

Infanticide refers to the killing of a new born infant by the mother or a companion. It has been reported from most of the areas in Australia for which ethnographic information is available.

1. This is a more detailed version of the evidence presented in a paper which discusses the reasons for infanticide (Cowlishaw, 1978).

2. Four of thirty five respondents to Government Questionnaires denied it had existed in their local group (N.S.W. Government Report, 1945; Victorian Parliamentary Report 1858).
Frequency is hard to assess and there is much speculation from later writers. Early observers' accounts vary between those who assert it to be uncommon and those such as Taplin (1879:14, S.A.), Gason (in Smyth, 1876:52, Vic.) and Jung (1882:98, S.A.) who say that thirty per cent of infants were killed at birth. A more meaningful idea of the frequency of the practice comes from reports that a woman would only raise two or three infants (Meyer in Smyth, V.I., 1876:46, S.A.), that the first one or two were always killed (Smith, 1880:7, C.A.; Palmer, 1884:280, Qu.), and that older women admitted to having disposed of two to four infants (Gason, ibid). These reports are predominantly from south and eastern areas. From central and northern Australia the assessments are equally varied of both the extent of the practice and the reasons for it.

Who Kills the Child?

In most cases it is stated or at least implied that the mother kills her own infant (Le Soef, 1878:290, Vic.; Victorian Parliamentary Report, 1858:51; Smith, 1880:6, S.A.; Spencer and Gillen, 1899:52, 1904:330, C.A.; Taplin, 1873:11, S.A.; Stretton, 1893:231, N.T.; MacKenzie, 1852:117, Vic.; Roth, 1908:13, Qu.; Mjöberg, 1918:392, Qu.: Thoneman, 1949:121, N.T.; Gribble, 1932:40; Warner, 1937:96, A.L.; Hiatt, 1967:7, A.L.; Meggitt, 1962:277, C.A.). Roth for some of the Queensland tribes and Schürmann for S.A. (1879:223) say that it is the woman that accompanies the mother who performs the act. Strehlow (1907:1017) says the grandmother and Howitt (1904:749) says the grandparents decided if an infant should live. Chewings (1936:120, S.A.) says a grandmother kills one or both twins but also gives two cases of mothers killing their infants. The usual practice of privacy for women at child-birth ensures that only women would know what occurred. A few
accounts indicate that the real or classificatory mother or older sister is the preferred midwife. Multiparous women often go alone to give birth.

Smith (1880:6) says that preventing infanticide or suicide by the mother is the midwife's most difficult task. Meggitt reaches a similar conclusion after reporting the circumstances of one case of infanticide.

"On the day of the birth, Ruby's 'mother' took her to the widows' camp in the usual way but then went off with the other women to collect rations. The baby was born soon after. Ruby later told me that she was angry and frightened at being left alone, and that, in any case, she did not want a third child so soon after the birth of the second. She hit the baby on the forehead with a digging stick; the blow did not kill the child at once, so she pressed its face into the sand" (1962:277).

He adds that comments from Walbiri "made it clear to me that the rule demanding the presence of a midwife at every birth aimed partly at preventing infanticides" (ibid, 278). As we have seen, not all women have a midwife present, and there are other reasons to suspect that Meggitt is reporting the men's view of the matter and that women would not consider this to be the function of the midwife. It is significant that Meggitt and Smith both report that mothers are assumed to be hostile to their newborn infants.

Men are said to overtly object to their wives committing infanticide and abortion (Smith, 1880:7, S.A.; Warner, 1937:96, A.L.;
Meggitt, 1962:96, 227, C.A.; Hiatt, 1967:7, A.L.). Hamilton's old women informants told her that infanticide was women's business so that the men wouldn't know about it. They described the secrecy surrounding a pregnancy and infanticide if the baby was not wanted. A woman could rely on no one talking about such women's business. If the husband did find out, they said "Might be he kill her, hit her. Might be he say nothing" (1977:34).

My Rembarnga informants readily admitted that infanticide did occur in the past. It is accepted that women did this for a number of reasons, some of which are seen as sufficient excuse by women and others not. Older informants said that young women used to kill their babies and older women did if they had too many. A brother would be angry if his sister lost a baby for any reason. However men did know that infanticide had occurred in the past and recognised that it was sometimes necessary. Hospitalisation for childbirth clearly reduces infanticide but such deaths as that of a hare-lipped infant after being in hospital several times seem to be a continuation of the practice.

There is a minority of writers who describe situations where men must at least cooperate. In South Australia, in times of severe hardship, Howitt says the father suggested leaving the child behind (1880:190) or leaving it outside the camp because it was said to be 'magiced' (1904:748). This must occur sometime after birth and presumably is a rare and local occurrence. Spencer and Gillen (1899:52) give the impression that men know and cooperate with infanticide as does Roth (1908:14). However, it is clear that in general it is women who kill the child at birth without the knowledge, and presumably

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1. One man told me that there is no need to kill infants now. "Now the Mununga (Whites) are tamed, we have to get more people".
without the agreement of their husband or their kinsmen.

Method

Descriptions of the method of killing the infant vary a good deal with some authors giving several methods, others only one and many omitting to describe the method. The two most frequently used methods are smothering, usually with sand, and a blow from a waddy or some other object. Also mentioned in one or two places are drowning, leaving the child behind or outside the camp, stamping in the chest, or breaking the neck.

In the following account three types of infanticide are distinguished, in terms of the reason for the occurrence. These categories relate to the explanatory framework to be developed in the following chapters. The reasons are not intended to be mutually exclusive. That is, more than one of these reasons could, and I would argue usually do, apply.

Infanticide for Child-Centred Reasons

There are several reasons for infanticide to do with the child itself. Deformed children are always killed at birth, and it is believed that, as with premature babies, the infant is of some other species which has entered the woman by mistake. Not all authors who report the killing of deformed children give this or any rationalisation for the practice. It should be noted here that, as discussed in the section on abortion, it could be that some deformed infants are the result of attempts at abortion (Grey, 1841:251, N.S.A.; Fison and Howitt, 1880:358, Vic.; Dawson, 1881, Vic.; Roth, 1906:6, N. Qu.; Mjöberg, 1918:392, N. Qu.; Meyer in Smyth, 1876:46, Vic.; Spencer

One or both twins are reported killed and again some women say that it is like a dog to have a litter (Warner, 1937:96, A.L.). Hilliard says of central Australia "... there has been speculation as to the number of men involved in a multiple birth" (1968:102). Goodale reports that Tiwi women believe a lover must have been responsible for the second spirit child entering a woman "... hence the 'shame' and probable concealment of the event from the mother's husband" (1971:145). Rembarnga women see twins as abnormal and expressed a certain disgust at the idea of feeding two babies at once. Most authors report the killing of twins without giving any reason (Schulze, 1890:237, S.A.; Chauncey, in Smyth, 1878:272, Vic.; Fison and Howitt, ibid; Dawson, 1881, Vic.; Roth, 1903:25; 1908:13, N. Qu.; Mathews, 1904:219, S.E. Aust.; Spencer and Gillen, 1927:39, C.A.; Underhill, 1953:4; Hamilton, 1977:29, C.A.; Meggitt, 1962:277, C.A.; Chewing, 1936:1020, C.A.). Rose denies that infanticide of twins occurs on Groote Eylandt (1960:515).

There is little evidence for and a good deal against differentiation by sex in the practice of infanticide. Those authors who say girls have less chance of living than boys are Le Soef (Vict. in Smyth, 1878:290), Wyatt (S. Aust. in Woods, 1879:162), Dawson (1881) and Buckley (in Blainey, 1975:98), but their casual statements appear to be the result of very limited observation. Kennedy (1914:382), also an untrained observer, states that male babies were killed and females spared. Fison (1880:135) argues for the improbability of female infanticide among hunters and gatherers as it would be non-adaptive considering
women's role in the economy. Women provided more food and were harder workers than men, and in no way burdened the group. However, women committed infanticide when alone and they may not have been moved by such considerations. Sharp (1940) says that female infanticide is indicated by his finding a high proportion of male infants. Authors who deny any sex bias in infanticide are Eyre (1845:324), Bates (1905:50), Rose (1960:515, Groote Eylandt) and Yengoyan (1972:88, C.A.). Warner reports the indigation in a camp when a woman gave birth to twins and killed the boy "it was said that a boy made a people strong, while a girl only caused trouble" (1937:96). This raises the question of whose interests were served by keeping the girl, and what were the mother's motives in the matter. It will be argued at length below that such questions are not answered by appealing either to questions of adaptation or population control, nor to questions of sentiment, though the latter may have some bearing especially on the mother's actions. The interests of categories of people in the matter must be of primary importance. Sectional interests and rivalries in which women play a significant part, though not as principals, are the key to understanding the sex preferences which Warner describes. As the interests of different groups are balanced in the wider system, there is no support here for systematic sex preferences in infanticide. There may be temporary imbalance because of local group population fluctuation, a factor to be considered with the wider demographic questions.

Two other categories of children said to be killed at birth are half-caste and illegitimate children. These are slightly different

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1. See Chapter 6, Section C, for discussion of Sharp's views.
2. Chapter 6, Section D.
categories from those listed above in that the concern is with the genitor. Information about half-caste children is contradictory and difficult to assess. There is probably much variation in local conditions. A few observers say that half-caste babies are killed by jealous husbands (Taplin, 1879:14, S.A.; Eyre, 1845:324, S.A.; Roth, 1908:13, N.Qu.). Others say that half-castes are treated no differently from other infants (Vic. Parlt. Report, 1858:83; N.S.W. Govt. Report, 1845). Apparently it is difficult to tell at birth what the pigmentation of the skin will be and this, together with the frequent observation of the fondness for all children once suckled for some time, makes it unlikely that half-caste babies were systematically killed. It is also likely that there were marked local differences in Aboriginal attitudes to Whites fathering children, and if fathers indeed did kill half-caste children this was a phenomenon at least partly to do with race relations (Mjöberg, 1818:392; Meyer in Smyth, V.1., 1876:46). A Rembarnga woman killed two of her daughter's half-caste babies some years ago. She is said to have acted properly by some women informants but not others, though all regard it as her own business.

Several authors say that illegitimate children are killed at birth. This can refer to those born to young girls prior to marriage, which can only happen where girls marry later than puberty (Mathews, 1904:219, N.S.W.; Taplin, quoting Meyer, 1879:14, S.A.) or it can refer to the offspring of adulterous or incestuous relationships (Meggitt, 1962:98; Howitt, 1880:385). Sharp (1933:428, N.Qu.) and Stanner (1934:16, N.W.A.) deny that illegitimacy is recognised. Kaberry says "In the tribes which I studied
there were no illegitimate children, and the particular character of the spirit children beliefs made it almost an impossibility. There seemed to be a dogma that no unmarried girl could have a child" (1939:106, N.W.A.). R. and C. Berndt of central Australia say that illegitimacy can occur when the woman is unmarried (1942b:147). Meggitt's implied view is that women abort when the conception was adulterous (1962:98-9), though apparently a man should treat his wife's lover's child as his own (ibid, 97). Thus illegitimacy, in the usual meaning of the word, would rarely be a reason for infanticide. Improper conception though, is the reason given for the disgust with multiple births, deformed and premature infants and perhaps other unwanted babies. Thus all the cases of infanticide considered so far are, to the women concerned, cases of illegitimacy if this refers to the conception being improper. Abortion and infanticide would thus be seen as legitimate ways of dealing with an illegitimate foetus or neonate. But there are other, very different reasons given for infanticide to do with the mother's situation. The first of these is characterised as the pragmatic rationale.

**Pragmatic Rationale**

Considerable sifting of moralising from observation has been necessary here but two distinct kinds of reason emerge, one to do with the close succession of children and the other with the rejection of motherhood altogether.

The close succession of children is held to lead to infanticide both because the mother cannot suckle and carry two children and because young children interfere with her food gathering duties.
In the former case the older child would be endangered should the new one be allowed to survive. I will give some accounts from different areas.

"Notwithstanding the early marriage of females, I have not observed that they have children at an earlier age than is common among Europeans. The number of children reared by each family is of course variable, but, in general, very limited, rarely exceeding four. If a mother have (sic) children in rapid succession, which, however, does not appear to be frequently the case, the young infant is killed by some other woman, who accompanies the mother on these occasions to a distance from the other natives ..... In extenuation of this horrible practice the women allege that they cannot suckle and carry two babies at once ....." (Schürmann, 1879:223-4, S.A.).

"In all of the tribes infanticide is practised. There is no difference made in respect of either sex. The usual reason given for killing the child is that there is another one still being suckled by the mother. It is only on very rare occasions that any child, except a mere infant, is killed. Among the Luritja tribe ..... a healthy child may be killed for the purpose of feeding a weaker and elder one, under the idea that the strength of the former will pass into and benefit the latter ..... Twins are usually destroyed at once as something uncanny ..... In the Binbinga and coastal tribes a child will be killed if it has been causing the mother much pain before birth" (Spencer and Gillen, 1904:608-9).
"Sometimes a mother kills her newborn babe because it has followed too closely on her others and she has not enough milk to feed it. This would be done without the knowledge of the father, who would be most angry if he knew it. If a baby dies when born, the father is suspicious of his wife, believing that she might have smothered it in the bush" (Warner, 1937:96, A.L.).

"If its birth followed too closely that of an older child, that is, within two or even three years, the mother would have had very little chance of rearing both children, rather, a strong risk of losing them. By smothering the new baby at birth before she had developed any affection for it, the mother's milk supply was renewed for the older child who was not weaned until he was about four or five years of age" (Hilliard, 1968:102, C.A.).

"If a woman has a child before a former one can take care of itself, it stands but a poor chance of its life ....." (Le Soef in Smyth, V.2, 1878:290, Vic.).

"Children that are weak or deformed, or illegitimate, and the child of any woman who has already two children alive, are put to death. No mother will venture to bring up more than two children, because she considers that the attention she would have to devote to them would interfere with what she regards as the duty to her husband of searching for roots etc." (Meyer in Woods, 1879:186).
"Thirteen years ago ..... every child which was born before the one which preceded it could walk was destroyed, because the mother was regarded as incapable of carrying two"
(Taplin, 1879:14, S.A.).

Gribble says "Infanticide is common among the aborigines, and sometimes there is what they consider good reason for this practice". This author gives two cases. In the first ".....a woman with a small child backwards in walking and not strong, had killed several children at birth ..... She could not carry two ..... The men allow their wives to do as they please with reference to the children at birth". In the second case a woman gave birth to a son "at once took a stone to kill it as she had a child still at the breast" (1932:40-41, N.S.W.).

Howitt describes the situation in South Australia as follows:

"the Kurnai, undoubtedly, were guilty of infanticide and the greatest risk to life through which the infant passed was probably during the first few hours of its young life. On speaking to a number of the Kurnai upon this subject, they gave me the following explanation. It was often difficult to carry about young children, particularly where there were several. Their wandering life rendered this very difficult. It sometimes happened that when a child was about to be born its father would say to his wife, 'We have too many children to carry about ..... best leave this one, when it is born, behind in the camp.' On this the new born child was left lying in the camp, and the family moved elsewhere. The infant
of course soon perished. The Kurnai drew this singular distinction, that 'they never knew an instance of parents killing their children, but only of leaving behind newborn infants.' ..... It may be that the feelings of affection arising from association and dependence have not in such a case been aroused, and the natural parental feelings seem to be overborne by what they conceive to be the exigencies of their circumstances" (1880:190).

Aspects of these quotations will be referred to in the following discussions.


Another aspect of this situation is the actual sacrifice of the newborn infant, or sometimes an older infant for the sake of its older sibling who is sickly. This is mentioned by Spencer and Gillen (above) for the Luritja. They report similarly of more southern groups "When older children are killed the object is to feed an older weaker child who gains strength from a younger one" (1899:52).

Hamilton reports a belief held in Arnhem Land that a foetus of opposite sex will cause its older sibling to grow thin and be susceptible to illness (1970a:28). This attribution of malevolence to a foetus echoes Spencer and Gillen's observations quoted above.
Several other authors report the neonate being roasted and fed to an older child who is weak or sickly. Stanbridge says that a newborn infant may be killed and eaten to strengthen an older child (in Smyth, V.I., 1876:52, Vic.). Howitt reports also that a baby "might be killed and cooked for its elder brother or sister to eat, in order to make him or her strong ...." (1904:749, S.A.). Hilliard says that in central Australia if an older child has died recently a new baby will also be killed (1968:102). This most forcibly confirms that it is the sentiment of attachment to the older child which here causes rejection of the new one. It also is evidence for an element of revenge in infanticide which is an aspect of the third category which will be dealt with next.

Some authors take the limited ability of mothers to feed and carry more than one suckling infant as a full and satisfying explanation of infanticide (e.g., Kryzwicki, 1934:130). However, there are reasons, both ethnographic and theoretical for finding this view inadequate.

Firstly a pragmatic rationale or one in terms of an adaptive response can never be a complete account of human behaviour. Human beings do not simply act in terms of short term material rewards. Among Australian Aborigines for instance in physically demanding environs there are accounts of "useless" people such as the very old and incapacitated being cared for at considerable cost (e.g., Kaberry, 1939:54). To kill or abort an infant because an older one has died (Hilliard, 1968:102) or so as to remain free for love affairs (Goodale, 1971:145) or because of a quarrel with a husband (Gribble, 1932:41) is not to obey the dictates of adaptation. If infanticide is to be seen as a response to over-population, as writers such as
Birdsell (1968) and Peterson (1975) have argued, it is necessary to translate the group needs to the individual women who are to kill their children. The assumption that if the women know that the population is increasing they will obediently dispose of their next infant or two is unacceptable.

It is true that a woman cannot carry more than one infant, and with long distances to travel both in the food quest and in the annual cycle of movement by the group, this must be the primary reason for infanticide which will thus be recognised as a necessity. However, recognition of the necessity of these actions in some situations means they can be called upon to solve other problems. Once infanticide is accepted, women can extend the range of occasions for its occurrence. The pragmatic rationale for infanticide does not apply to the killing of the first child or children which is a frequently reported situation. It must be noted that without lactation a woman would become pregnant again in a short time, so that if she wished to postpone the rearing of a child until a certain stage she might have to kill several infants.

**Rejection**

I shall here present evidence for the rejection of the first born, as well as reports that mothers killed the infant because it caused them pain.

The explorer Eyre's observations were as follows:

"Infanticide is very common, and appears to be practised solely to get rid of the trouble of rearing children, and to enable the woman to follow her husband about in his wanderings, which she
frequently could not do if encumbered with a child.

The first three of four are often killed" (Eyre, 1845:324, N.W.A., my emphasis).

Smith included two aspects of rejection "The nurses most difficult duty is to prevent the mother killing herself or baby. In her pain she beats herself with her fist". She continues, "It is customary for the women to kill their first child, as they do not wish the trouble of rearing them. Others take revenge for the sufferings they undergo on the child, by allowing it to bleed to death" (1880:6, 7, S.A.). Smith does not explain how the baby is made to bleed. Had such authors given details of the observations or information on which their accounts were based we could be much more sure of their worth. However, there are too many such reports to ignore, written as they presumably are by men, in this case a woman, of good will.

Howitt says of the children killed by being abandoned "This leaving behind ..... was because of the trouble it caused where a woman had other children, and it was almost always done as regards a girl's first child" (1904:750, S.A.). Stretton reports from Borroloola, Northern Territory,

"It is a common occurrence to kill the first-born, irrespective of sex. The fact that the child has been killed is not always known to the father, and he takes no trouble to enquire into the matter; in the mother extreme youthfulness is one of the reasons for killing the first-born. If the birth has been a painful one, the mother will herself
sometimes kill it; and if she be too weak, it is often killed by the attendants" (1893:231).

Smyth describes the situation of young mothers with their first child in a way which lends support to my argument. After a brief period of enjoyment, he says:

"All the cares of maternity fall heavily and suddenly upon her; and if she is a young mother and this her first-born, and the necessity arises for the tribe to travel, she contemplates with horror the pains and anxieties of a prolonged journey, during which she will have to carry and nourish her babe, as well as bear the burdens and perform the duties which her husband may impose on her" (V.1., 1876:47, Vic.).

Palmer says "Infanticide is not so common as supposed, though a girl's first child is often sacrificed" (1884:280, Qu.). Gason reported that "..... their first born is considered immature and not worth preserving ....." and that most women admit to having disposed of two to four offspring in this way (in Curr, V.2, 1886:46, S.A.). Schrivener says that it is an old custom to kill the first-born by strangling (in Curr, V.2, 1886:182, N.S.W.). Another of Curr's informants said that women commit infanticide because they are not allowed to rear children until they are 30 years old (Heagney in Curr, V.2, 1886:378). N.W. Thomas also says that first children are killed in some areas (1906a:177, N.S.W.). Kaberry's reports of the aborting of first pregnancies, and the overt reluctance to rear children when young indicates the same attitude (1937:107).
Thoneman's informant, Buludja, says she suffocated her first two children because she did not want them (1949:123). These reports gain support from my informants in Arnhem Land who expressed disapproval at girls having their first baby when they were very young, before their breasts "came down". It was felt to be a bad thing in a general way but no specific dangers were described. This infanticide or abortion of the first child could go some way to explaining why women do not rear children until some years after puberty, a fact that has hitherto been explained by the relative infertility of post-pubescent girls (Montagu, 1974:259ff; Meggitt, 1962:271).

The rest of the material on the rejection of motherhood could perhaps also be described as revenge on the infant for the pain it caused, or for the mother's or an older sibling's death. As it is first-born infants who cause most pain, these two motives would often be indistinguishable. Smith (above) recognises this when giving both primiparousity and pain as reasons for killing the infant.

Bennett reported that it was common for the women "when they experience much lingering suffering in labour, to threaten the life of the poor infant previous to birth; and when it takes place, keep their word by destroying it" (1834:122-2, N.S.W.). Roth also reports from Queensland "A mother may lawfully kill her child, within a few hours after birth, especially if pregnancy or confinement has caused her more than ordinary pain and trouble" (1906:6). He repeats this revenge motive for the Tully River and Brisbane River. Petrie says that in Queensland "In some instances
babies were killed at birth, and then eaten by the old women - for instance, if the mother died, for they blamed the child" (1936:36). Spencer and Gillen also give as one reason for infanticide that "a child will be killed if it has been causing the mother much pain" (1914:609)¹.

Meggitt's comment that "A prolonged labour is thought to indicate that the baby will be still-born...." (1962:276) probably indicates another aspect of this attitude. It may be believed that such a labour should result in a still-birth. Such a source of pain should not live. Rembarnga women gave as reasons for particular women practising infanticide that "the baby punished her" (i.e., a painful birth) and that the husband had beaten her. In both cases infanticide is seen as retaliatory.

This evidence indicates that women commit infanticide as their major means of controlling their reproductive capacities. It is often done for reasons other than necessity, frequently in fact to avoid motherhood for some years but also as an act of revenge on the infant or the spirit child or the person responsible for sending it. Some evidence for this common theme has been presented above.

¹ In the light of Myer's recent work (1974) in which he argued that birth among non-technologically developed people was relatively painless, it should be noted that the following authors reported that birth among Aborigines caused considerable suffering. Smith, 1880:6; Kaberry, 1939:56; Mountford and Harvey, 1941:157; de Vidas, 1947:118; Bennett, 1834:123. Others did report that births were not difficult, but it is apparent that any difference in this respect is a matter of degree. If they do suffer less than Whites, my argument would not be affected as it depends only on the fact that some suffering was often experienced. R. and C. Berndt (1964:126-7) affirm this view.
resentments will be more fully developed in the following chapters.

I have outlined in this chapter the evidence for women's independent attempts to control their own fecundity and in the following chapter I will proceed to present more detailed evidence about women's attitudes to children and something of the genesis of such attitudes.
CHAPTER TWO

THE AMBIVALENCE OF MOTHERS
A. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One I outlined the extent of attempts by Aboriginal women to control their reproductive rate. Contraceptive attempts, besides some limited avoidance of coitus, would have been largely ineffective. Abortion was practised widely but probably not frequently as the only known method was dangerous and painful. Infanticide thus was the one sure and safe method of avoiding unwanted offspring and seems to have been widely accepted if not approved.

I have presented evidence that infanticide occurred partly because a four year birth interval was necessary to ensure the survival of the older child and to enable the woman to collect food, but also because it was believed a girl should not raise a child when she was young. Further, infants born after a long and painful labour appear to have been killed, and in many cases women did not want to have a child for unspecified reasons. While it is difficult to assess women's attitudes to such things there is evidence that there existed an element of revenge on what was seen as a malevolent foetus. This is part of a complex of attitudes to children which includes a recognition that large numbers of children and short birth intervals are unnatural and disabling.

Aborigines believe that impregnation by a spirit child is an essential part of conception, though it does not occur until pregnancy is advanced. Death of an infant is not believed to kill this spirit child but merely causes it to return to the place it came from and await another rebirth. Warner, for instance, says "If a child should
die as a baby it would go back to the well, stay a while and then return to the same mother" (1937:22, A.L.). This view can be seen as ameliorating the seriousness with which infanticide is treated. Roth says "Infanticide is not considered in the light of any crime or offence, provided that it is done within the first day or two of a child's existence ..... though the practice is recognised it is usually done clandestinely" (1908:13). Thus it seems that while infanticide may be publicly disapproved, more in some areas than others, its occurrence is surrounded by a conspiracy of silence. Perhaps somewhat like traditional European women's views of men's adultery, the men in this case prefer not to know what the women are doing. Men deplore women's actions and punish them, but they recognise that infanticide cannot be eliminated.

It is apparent that in the vast majority of cases women abort and give birth away from the camp and with no men present or even aware of the event. Thus men's attitude would not directly affect the practice. Men generally refrain from interfering in "women's business" and probably reject knowledge of such things. De Vidas describes the usual birth situation: "the woman and her female attendants ..... move away from the main camp to a place further than a baby's crying distance. This ensures that no male or unauthorised person will be present at the birth" (1947:118). Mountford and Harvey say "men are forbidden to be present at any stage of the birth" (1942:158). A great many authors make similar observations (e.g., Bonney, 1884:125; Kaberry, 1939:56; Meggitt, 1962:175). Lee describes a parallel situation among the !Kung bushmen, where women give birth alone, or with one or two female companions, and if they say the child was born dead the men don't believe them.
"But the women play their cards very close to their chests, and very few cases of infanticide are attested" (quoted by Durand, 1972:371-2). This aptly describes the Australian situation also and explains the difficulties in quantifying the practice.

Infanticide has been frequently treated as a manifestation of either social or individual pathology. Writing histories of childhood, Payne (1916) and more recently de Mause (1974) describe the extent of infanticide at different periods of human history and imply that it is a measure of the inhumane treatment of children. Neither author considers infanticide to be a function of controls on fertility that are available to women in a society, such as contraceptive or abortive knowledge, or the permissibility of infanticide. In ancient Greece there was included in gynaecological writings a chapter on "How to Recognise a Newborn That is Worth Rearing" (Soranus, Gynecology, cited in de Mause, 1974:25). On the other hand the Royal Commissions into the declining birthrate in Australia in 1904 and 1905 expressed outrage that there were so many infants disposed of, and were concerned to reverse the growing emancipation of women which was evident in their reluctance to raise children (Pringle, 1973:24). In these two periods then, women had very different access to infanticide, and possibly abortion also, and clearly social acceptance showed parallel differences.

Despite the common view that infanticide is a symptom of mental disturbance, psychoanalysts have no general theory of infanticide and it has been paid little attention in the psychoanalytic
literature. Those authors who have dealt with it, generally see infanticide as one aspect of a neurotic destructiveness (Asch, 1966; Bloch, 1965; Rheingold, 1964). Little distinction is made between infanticide at birth and the killing of a child later, and there is no suggestion that the killing might be ever a result of conscious and rational judgement of the mother on the basis of an unwillingness to rear the child. Resnick made a useful differentiation between neonaticide (killing a newborn infant) and filicide (killing one's own child from a few days old), and found that only the latter kind of case showed a high level of psychosis and depression (quoted in Myers, 1974:171).

Against the view that rejecting an infant is pathological we must consider that abortion and infanticide are known in virtually all societies. Himes in his "Medical History of Contraception", says "it is clear that the desire to control conception is very old and quite universal" but that effective contraception is rare (1936: 56). He says "The widespread adoption of abortion and more especially of infanticide filled the need. These checks are immediate, practicable and certainly effective" (ibid, 52). While there are reports in the anthropological literature of women wanting as many children as they can bear, it seems likely that this is the result of an oppressive ideology. Among the Mbumb Kpau for instance "Childbirth is considered both painful and dangerous; in fact, the mortality rates for mothers and infants in childbirth are high. Yet no form of contraception is practised, for women wish to bear as many children as they can" (O'Loughlin, 1974:311). It is not their own interests which these women are pursuing, as O'Loughlin makes clear.
I have already indicated some of the conditions which allow Aboriginal women to foster their own interests in this matter. The major one is the privacy allowed to women with regards to pregnancy and childbirth. But there is more to the matter than that, both in terms of motivation and in terms of the social conditions which allow women this autonomy. The relationship between a mother and her child is characterised by ambivalent attitudes of various kinds. While a degree of ambivalence is certainly common to motherhood everywhere, the structure of the Aboriginal parent-child relationship is such that it is expressed in particularly extreme forms. I will describe behaviour related to child-rearing which indicates both attachment to and rejection of infants. The former is most clearly seen in the extreme indulgence of infants by mothers, and the latter in infanticide and cannibalism of infants. The framework for these attitudes will first be set with reference to the attachment theory as formulated by Bowlby and developed by Freeman.

Bowlby (1971, 1975) has developed a theoretical view of psychological development which places attachment and its corollary separation anxiety at the centre of the stage. Infants typically show strong attachment behaviour marked by recognition of and maintenance of proximity to a specific individual. This is directed towards whoever is the most familiar figure from about two months of age. Fear responses to strangers develop increasingly from eight months. Obvious signs of distress follow if the infant is separated from this person. Bowlby considers anxiety about separation from the attachment figure to be the major source of emotional disorders. After two and a half years the child is increasingly able to tolerate separations from the attachment figure and thus attains autonomy.
Bowlby views this attachment as a form of learning whereby an innate behaviour pattern is released by a key stimulus which later continues indefinitely to be the releaser for that response. If the behaviour is not elicited during the critical period, it cannot be learned later. That is, he sees this attachment formation by human infants as a form of imprinting with the same genetic basis as the imprinting of the young of many other species to the mother. The mother responds to certain releasing stimuli also and thus is motivated to care for her baby. Bowlby's cogent arguments are based on Freud's psycho-dynamics, on the observations of attachment in other species by ethologists and on his own and others' observations of young children. All are examined in the light of evolutionary principles—that is for their role in species' adaptation. Attachment behaviour is seen as a fundamental aspect of adaptation.

Freeman has developed Bowlby's comprehensive attachment theory to be of use to social anthropology:

1. The phenomenon of imprinting as described by Lorenz (1957) refers to the process whereby the young of a species acquire a schema for the recognition of adult con-specifics. Bowlby's use of the concept to refer to the development of attachment between particular individuals is somewhat different. I would argue that increased specificity of the releasing stimulus does not preclude the same phylogenetic basis for both processes. That is, evolutionary development has lengthened the sensitive period for imprinting as well as increased the sensitivity to specific characteristics. This allows recognition of individual caretakers rather than con-specifics only.

2. Bowlby has been criticised, sometimes violently, for this stress on the need of infants for their mothers. His views can be seen as supporting the forces which oppress women. I would point out that many of his critics exaggerate his views, but also his treatment of the negative effects on infants of broken attachments needs to be complemented by a detailed analysis of the positive effects of a widened circle of caretakers on, for instance, the growth of autonomy. While I accept Bowlby's central proposition, it leaves many questions unanswered.
"attachment inevitably leads to contention situations in which an infant becomes irritated, angered or enraged with his caretaker. Attachment, however, triumphs ... . It is one of the most important outcomes of attachment behaviour then that alternating moods of love and anger eventually lead to the co-existence of contradictory impulses and emotions towards the same individual. The primary bond, in other words, is always characterised by ambivalence. This ambivalence, moreover, once established, tends to continue throughout life" (1974:116).

Freeman asserts that this attitude is transferred to some degree to all subsequent relationships. That is, "each new relationship comes to develop, in the course of further interaction, its own ambivalent character ..... only by actively valuing amity are human beings able to live together like good kinsmen" (ibid, 117). This view allows for variation in these feelings to occur with different environmental factors. I would suggest that the effect of extreme indulgence of children is offset by an exaggerated level of amity. Two sets of processes are revealed. Firstly, the stress on obligations towards kin acts as a control on the expression of feelings which in children are otherwise allowed free reign. That is, allowing children, especially boys, to express their hostility towards their mother freely, necessitates a counterbalancing stress on cooperation with other kinsmen. Secondly, the demands on mothers, and to a lesser extent on all adults, which result from the indulgence of children, generates some hostility and resentment. This again is countered by the emphasis on the value of generosity and the whole range of duties towards kin and cooperation between sections of the community. In the rest of this chapter I will first give details of the indulgence of
children and the strength of attachment between mother and child. Then I will describe negative aspects of these relationships culminating in a description of necrophagy of infants following infanticide.

B. INDULGENCE

Europeans have a tradition of believing that the child must be trained to become a social being; without such training a child will remain (or become) totally anti-social. Aborigines believe, as evidenced in their behaviour, that children when young naturally develop and learn. It is in their nature to want to learn and as they grow they will want to know how to behave. It is often said of a young child "she doesn't know yet" but there is never punishment for what is considered wrong behaviour, and seldom any deliberate teaching of young children. An infant's wishes are assumed to be its real and urgent needs, so that if an infant cries for a sharp knife it is given it to play with, or if it kicks its mother she will ignore it or laugh.

This indulgent or laissez faire attitude is alarming to Europeans who feel that the child will be spoiled in the sense that a baker might spoil the bread by not preparing it properly, that is the child will not turn out right. But there is perhaps a deeper and more immediate feeling of alarm to do with the European adult's need to be in control of children. To allow children to express their real feelings would be dangerous. This could be one reason for the strikingly different reports that Aboriginal child-rearing inspired from early White observers. Aboriginal parents were sometimes said
to be extremely loving and indulgent and also were said to be extremely neglectful and cruel.

Although reports on child rearing often lack objectivity, in this case it seems likely that the observers see real ambivalence but characterise the situation in either positive or negative terms. Malinowski in "The Family Among the Australian Aborigines" (1963:238) is at pains to demonstrate the affectionate bonds that develop between mothers and fathers and their infants and indeed has established that they do. However, while he has no trouble in presenting a large number of observations of intense attachment, even he did not exclude reports of violent punishment of children. He cites reports of children and parents: "Not only did they not control them (although occasionally a child was beaten in a fit of anger) but they were indulged in every way" (ibid, 239). When angry a child will "take up his mimic spears, run a few yards, and then hurl them with all his strength at his mother" (ibid, 240). "If a small boy wishes to obtain something from his parents, he cries, bites and beats them, until he succeeds in his purpose" (ibid, 247). Malinowski's conclusion is that "The expression of the feelings in question amongst savages must obviously differ very little from our way of showing feelings" (ibid, 250). But the powerful impression made on Europeans is of parental acceptance of such attacks by children as mentioned above. I will illustrate in some detail the level of indulgence with which Aboriginal children are customarily treated.

The following accounts are typical:
"Of a proper training of the children they have no idea at all. They allow them to grow up wild. If the children are unruly, the mothers try to quiet them with fair words, or may scold them a little, or even slap them gently, but never take any extreme means. If children quarrel, and one mother ventures to strike the child of another ...... there is sure to arise a disturbance ......; ...... The children show no affection for their parents and sometimes leave them as early as at six years of age to rove about with others" (Schulze, 1890:237-8).

"Young children, though certainly reproved, are but rarely if ever slapped or beaten; this is especially the case with the boys ...... Patience, however, may sometimes be exhausted, and the child perhaps stunned by the blow" (Roth, 1906:6, my emphasis).

"Although both sexes are very fond of their living offspring, yet the mothers are very careless, often allowing their children to burn themselves so badly that there are few adults who have not a more or less disfiguring mark about them received during infancy" (Schürmann, 1879:224).

Bates says of the children at Ooldea:

"Children fight each other, and their mothers fight each other, but no children are punished. Little boys and girls, if their mother will not give them what they want, will fling handfuls full of sand at her eyes" (n.d. Section 3.6b, 17).

R. and C. Berndt made similar observations:
"The Ooldea children are indulged by their parents to an extreme degree. The good effects of any punishment are immediately nullified by indulgence. They do not like to see a child cry and will give it anything to make it stop. The following incident was observed. A man particularly prized a finely incised spear-thrower with which he would not part on any account, yet he gave it to a child to play with in order to stop it crying. The child obtained a sharply pointed stone and scratched the beautifully carved and polished surface. But the owner of the spear thrower merely continued without a pause the story he was relating" (1943:251).

Bates' description of sand being thrown in the mother's face is echoed for the Tiwi by Goodale who says that very young children are literally allowed to play with fire. She describes three children playing around a circle of adults.

"They repeatedly got into fights, but only when the wrangle became serious were they separated. The children received no words of reproach, nor was a hand laid on them, even when they eventually became "cheeky" and rolled about on their mothers' laps, kicking sand in the card players' faces and grabbing cards. Then Dennis, a strong willed kitjina (girl) "borrowed" a large hunting knife and began swinging it around jabbing at her much younger brother. One of the men took the knife away, whereupon Dennis went into a minor tantrum and the knife was given back to her" (1971:36).
Hamilton records incidents typifying the extent of indulgence of children at Maningrida. She says that sibling rivalry is either absent or thoroughly repressed; "instead these feelings are directed at the mother. Since there are no external controls on the child's behaviour at this time [18 months to 3 years] it is quite uninhibited in venting its anger, and its violence is stolidly ignored by its mother and others" (1970a:76). Hamilton describes a two year old scattering the cards during a game, and kicking and biting his mother (ibid, 76). The mother of a four year old boy asks everyone for money as he is screaming for a soft drink. When the money is finally procured it is found that the canteen is shut. The boy screams again. The mother "hoists him up by one arm, perches him on her shoulder and walks him home with him kicking her back" (ibid, 87).

Warner comments briefly, "To a European the children are almost intolerable in their demands on their parents and those around them" (1973:91). But he also tells of women "going through the most difficult privations and risking probable death to return to her children after she had been stolen by a man from another tribe" (ibid, 77). Meggitt describes the treatment of boys by their fathers. "Until they are initiated boys are indulged by their fathers to an extent rarely observed in our own society. Only on two occasions did I see a man strike a young son; and the mother who tries even mild and warranted castigation of the boy usually incurs her husband's displeasure" (1962:116). He describes extreme frustration which a father will tolerate without striking his son (ibid, 116-7). But of course a father does not need to put up with his young child's behaviour. He may proudly take his son to a discussion of ritual matters, "But, if the child becomes fretful, the father makes little attempt to pacify him and quickly returns to the camp to hand him over to his mother" (ibid, 116). Meggitt also describes the mother's attachment to her adult son, shown in her expression of grief when he is absent (ibid, 125). After his
initiation the boy "may still exercise claims over his mother for food and protection ...." (ibid, 126). White observed that "Aboriginal children, the boys in particular, are notably undisciplined, and left very much to their own devices until initiation of the boys and marriage of the girls brings them into the adult world with corresponding rights and duties. Even if they cause annoyance to adults they are seldom disciplined, but both from my own observation and from reports of other observers I conclude that boys are much less subject to the mother's discipline than girls" (1969:8). She further stated that boys' behaviour towards their mother is "uncooperative and often hostile" (ibid).

C. Berndt (1965) describes the indecisiveness that women showed when conducting women's secret ceremonies. They said they should go two miles from the main camp but didn't. They should have excluded children but didn't. They tried shouting and throwing stones at the children but they would not stay away. Berndt says:

"This uncertainty or indecisiveness on the woman's part is .... a part of a more general orientation marked by indulgence towards children, especially sons, and, formerly, by submissiveness towards men. Firmness in the first case and independence in the second are much less characteristic ...." (1965:247).

The obligation to indulge children would thus seem necessarily to involve the control of irritation, frustration or anger, at least on some occasions and more often on the part of women as they are almost continually responsible for the children when they are young. Aboriginal women do show considerable tolerance, and I am not suggesting that they are constantly seething with suppressed irritation. I shall further illustrate these points with a brief description of the experiences of young children in southern Arnhem Land, at Goinjimbi.
An infant up to six months old is seldom out of hearing of its mother and sleeps beside her at night, for at least a year. If someone else is holding a very young infant, its first whimper ensures that it is rushed to mother and given the breast. Babies are never left alone and seldom put down until a few months old. There is no real separation from the mother until the child is about two and in some children clinging is common until about four or even older. The mother's breast is always available and is used as a pacifier and even a plaything later. Thus there is no oral deprivation suffered by these infants, though they are increasingly expected to seek satisfaction of their own needs. However, despite this indulgence of wishes there is no belief that an infant or an older child should be protected from disturbances when asleep or awake. An infant having reached two months, is frequently picked up when asleep, is handed from one person to another, kissed long and greedily on the mouth, and pinched and patted by older children. Such physical disturbances while sleeping or breast feeding seldom lead to crying. Indeed, being handled seems to generate a reaction consisting of total physical relaxation and passivity.

Much anxiety is expressed if a baby cries for a long period. It will be rocked and walked and repeatedly offered the breast. One women, after the excessive crying and coughing of her four months old baby for several hours, reached a state of hysteria where she almost threw the baby away. Another gashed her head deeply in her

1. Hamilton explains this rough treatment as an expression of sibling rivalry. She says "[Older siblings] feelings to their rivals are disguised as affection, and while kissing and cuddling the baby they manage to push, pull and bother it sufficiently to make it cry" (1970a: 76a). While not contesting this finding, the frequency of this kind of behaviour from other than siblings attests to it having a wider motivational basis. Some hostility to indulged infants could be expected as a general phenomenon.
extreme anxiety when her little boy choked. Young mothers are not entirely trusted with their infants; they are watched and advised by older women, as for instance when a young mother was shouted at for laying her crying infant on the ground beside her. It is recognised that infants are a source of strain. If a woman has several children, and the older ones are sons she is subject to heavy demands, as the boys do few chores, but are increasingly demanding as they get older. There is also an indulgence of expressed and guessed wishes which enables the older child to pass an unwanted infant back to its mother with the cry "She wants you". It is unthinkable that anyone would refuse to take an infant who wanted them. Women also use babies in this way to enlist the father's help, but he will hold the infant only until he is tired of it and he is not often around. Often an older child who is caring for a young one is shouted at; "That baby wants tea, give him tea", or "that knife" or "your tucker" or "that cassette". There is much excitement when an infant begins to respond to interaction and can focus its eyes on some object. But after a few months of this intense attention, less and less notice is taken so that small children around the fire in the morning are never spoken to by adults and will often spend two hours crouching silently until given a piece of

1. Considering the long drawn out and constant verbal instruction which is required to teach children in our society about the ownership of objects, it is perhaps not surprising to find that ownership is not always recognised as the primary relationship between objects and people. That is, ownership may be hard to teach, because it is "unnatural". However it is also possible that the identification of things with people in "ownership" relations is a later developing concept in all human beings. While it is taught prematurely and with great effort in our society, its later development is frustrated among Aborigines. It is apparent that very young children in all societies find meaning in the actions of giving and receiving, rather than in owning. Only later do they perceive the power conferred by relations of ownership.
damper and tea. Occasional noisy demands for food continue and a child may become violent if there is a delay. Refusal only occurs when there is nothing available.

Hamilton describes how Anbara women expect infants, as they become more mobile to seek the breast themselves when they want it. She continues:

"The attitude which makes it the business of the child to obtain the breast is extended to solid foods ..... if the child felt hungry, it should get food for itself by crying or cajoling food from someone who had it. In their thinking, if a child did not demonstrate a need for food by crying or begging then it was not hungry, and if it was not hungry there was no point in feeding it" (1970a:56-7).

The following incidents at Goinjimbi illustrate the demands made on women. Oranges are a great luxury at Goinjimbi. When bagfuls arrive they are handed out. There is no attempt to distribute them evenly. One woman had missed getting any but was given a half piece some time later. As she began to put it to her mouth her small two and a half year old ZDD, who had already eaten an orange came up crying "Give me orange Gogok" and reached out and took it, and proceeded to suck it in front of her unprotesting "granny".

On another occasion a group of four women stopped on a trip to a ceremony and boiled tea and cooked beef in the ashes. They were just about to begin eating when the Goinjimbi truck came in sight. With shrieks of "Beef Aunty. Give me beef. Aunty, give me beef",...
a group of young men descended on the women and took the freshly prepared beef and damper, leaving only what was still cooking in the fire. As soon as the four young men were back on the truck it drove off. The women made no protest at their food being virtually taken from their hands, and there was no expression of gratitude by the men. But after the truck was gone the women grumbled a little saying the men should get their own beef.

Women would spend several hours making loaves of bread or damper in camp ovens on an open fire. Provision of wood and temperature control were constant problems. As soon as the bread was sufficiently cool the bulk would be sent to specific kinsmen. But this did not protect a woman from the demands of a young "son" or "grandson" a little later. She could hide her own portion but this is somewhat shameful behaviour; usually everything was consumed within an hour or two. An effective strategy developed by my camp mate was to give a section to me. I was less likely to be asked for food. The passivity of women in such situations, where there is apparently some strain on their generosity, can be partly understood when hearing boasts such as "X comes to me for beef" and "I always give them tucker"

The unashamed dependency displayed by young men on their mothers and "aunties" is something women are proud of, and they believe they can count on these young men to look after them, in some unspecified way.

The demands placed on women by indulgence of children may be differently interpreted. Underhill describes it thus, "A great part of the women's recreation seemed to consist in watching the children's efforts, laughing over them and teaching them. Daisy, the three year old, was never allowed to make the slightest exclamation of discomfort
without someone picking her up and fondling her" (1953:5). Sharp's description has a somewhat different emphasis:

"Both the care and the control of young children devolves chiefly upon the mother, in spite of her constant economic duties. She is the disciplinarian, the father avoiding this responsibility by pointing out that the child belongs to the mother "by blood". The mother, in contrast to the father, receives little of the confidence and affection of her own children of either sex, and it is rather her relations with her brother's children which appear emotionally more satisfactory, if less intimate. Older boys, before they reach puberty, seem prone to develop tantrums when crossed, and may even resort to throwing spears at their mother, though with little danger of doing serious harm." A footnote adds, "This is a socially recognised mode of behaviour. A man asked about the small spear in his collection will reply, jokingly, that it belongs to his small son, who uses it to throw at his mother" (1933:426, my emphasis).

Meggitt points out the unequal responsibility of parents with regard to their children's nurturance.

"Paternal and maternal neglect or harshness should be equally culpable and liable to reprimand by the children's maternal kin. In practice, however, the negligent father (who is indeed rare) receives little more than scoldings from his wife and diffuse censure from the rest of the camp. The negligent mother, on the other hand, is sure to be beaten by her husband and very probably by her own mother as well" (1962:93).
A final example is from the recent study of food collection on the Arnhem Land coast by Meehan. She emphasises the burden that children place on their mothers:

"Once a baby was born into the Anbara community, its mother almost never left it until it was six to nine months old, and sometimes much older, when it could be left with some close relative. I have already hinted at the way that small children dominated their mothers and influenced their foraging abilities. I need only reiterate here, how this total dependence drastically inhibited the mother's ability to procure food. Gidjingali women were very much aware of the problem, frequently complaining about having "too many kid" and blaming Maningrida for their unwanted fecundity saying that "before" (i.e. before the arrival of the European culture), Aboriginal women had borne fewer children and could go hunting more often" (1975:191).

Peterson also observed that childlessness is an advantage for women (1970:14). Thus it can be seen that the indulgence demanded of women towards their children adds to the burden that rearing of children already places on them.

It is of interest to briefly consider the effect of these nurturance patterns on children before examining the mother's attitude further. Hamilton's view of children's behaviour at eighteen months stresses the negative effects of their careless indulgent treatment. She says that children's behaviour is marked by withdrawal and fear and that they suffer from separation anxiety. "Children between six and eighteen months of age appear passive,
dependent creatures, prevented from using the skills [especially of independent movement] they are forced so early to acquire ...." (1970a:60-2). And further, "They learn then that only near their mothers are they safe; and their mothers reinforce this by threats of evil spirits lurking dangerously close" (ibid, 73). There follows the description of the distress that weaning causes to both mother and child if another sibling is born.

My observations at Goinjimbi support the view that Aboriginal children are timid during the early toddling stage. In terms of Bowlby's views of infant development this is to be expected, and is especially noticeable in an open camp where the child cannot be out of sight of the others. If, as Hamilton would agree, the usual birth interval was considerably longer in pre-contact times, this period would have seen the growth of autonomy at the child's own pace. That is, in the traditional situation, no sibling would have replaced the toddler until it was about four years old, so that its timidness would gradually dissipate.

I have shown that normally Aboriginal children are not separated from their mothers. Whiting (1958) has argued that long mother-child exclusiveness leads to stronger attachments which then have to be broken with harsh initiation rites. This conflicts with Bowlby's view which would predict that such children would suffer less separation anxiety because the previous attachment is not threatened. The growth of autonomy (Bowlby, 1975:366) should be facilitated where there is no separation anxiety. My observations of four and five year olds fishing alone and searching for plant foods in the bush while always keeping a companion in sight; staying with other kin
in camps many miles distant from the mother; and going off with older children for hours in the bush, testifies to an adequate development of psychological autonomy at this age. However the encouragement of dependent behaviour in boys, even into adulthood, does result in a strong affectional tie between mother and son and it is this which the initiation rites are directed to severing.

Before giving evidence about rejection of motherhood I should stress that this does not apply to children already born. Evidence of parental mourning is relevant here. While mourning for infants shows less ritualisation than that for adults there seem to be equally strong expressions of grief. Bennett reported in 1834 of Victoria:

"Although addicted to infanticide, they display, in other instances, an extraordinary degree of affection for their dead offspring, evidenced by an act that almost exceeds credibility, ..... deceased children, from the earliest age to even six or seven years, being placed in a bag, made of Kangaroo skin, and slung upon the back of the mother, who, besides this additional burden, carries her usual netbul, or culy for provisions, etc. They carry them thus for ten or twelve months, sleeping upon the mass of mortal remains, which serves them for a pillow, apparently unmindful of the horrid foetor which emanates from such a putrefying substance" (1834:125-6).

There are other reports of this practice (e.g., Elkin, 1974:356-7).
Meggitt describes the mourning for children as involving only those countrymen who are present at the time of the death. Women of the matriline bury the corpse near the parent's dwelling. The parents move away to avoid the attention of the ghost.

"The countrywomen of the dead child then sit in a group in the general camp, where they may wail for about six to eight hours as they embrace each other. Women of the matriline of the child who are its close mothers cut off their hair; and they and their own mothers gouge their scalps open with sharp stones or digging sticks, so that the blood streams down their faces and shoulders. The elder sisters and the m.b.d. of the child should try to prevent the women from injuring themselves too severely. Nearby, the child's father and brothers sit together, silently and mournfully" (1962:318).

The mourning ritual continues for some hours:

"During the next few months individual kinswoman may keen at night whenever they think of the departed child. Relatives do not carry out any inquest or attempt to avenge the death. Infant mortality-rates are so high that people tend to regard death in childhood as something that is almost normal. The relatives soon forget that the child ever existed, and they gradually drift back to their old campsites. Within a year or two, a fieldworker collecting genealogies will have little chance of including that child in his records" (ibid, 319).

Unfortunately Meggitt does not make it clear if young babies are mourned in this way though the implication is that they are. One
may also wonder whether the mother's own feelings match those of others and whether she forgets so rapidly and completely. It would seem that the circle of the young child's bonds is smaller but that the intensity of attachment is comparable with others.

Hiatt analyses mortuary rites within a wider theoretical framework. He sees the desire to prolong physical relations with the deceased as a basic theme. He reports from Arnhem Land:

"A fact of considerable significance is that the body of a small child is neither buried nor placed on a tree platform. Instead, the entrails are removed, the corpse is wrapped in paper bark and the bundle placed on a small elevated structure situated near the camping place of the parents. From time to time the mother may take the bundle from the platform and nurse it; or she may sleep with it on the platform. The bark around the body is changed regularly until the process of dissolution has run its course. The remains are carried around by the parents for several years and finally placed in a hollow-log coffin" (n.d.,3)

The bodies of older children and adults are not retained in this way and Hiatt's view is that this is because such retention would involve too much inconvenience and unpleasantness. That is, the desire to retain contact with the deceased is the same in each case; the practical problems of treating a large body in this way explains the different practices. My informants also said that infants were retained in the camp. They are buried for two weeks and then taken out and the bones cleaned. "That's easy job with young ones." Mothers carry the bones of the infants then for a long time.
The strength of attachment that occurs between mothers and children can be further demonstrated by the following account.

"One woman at Forrest River carried her mother, who was blind and old, part of the way on a journey to her horde country. Even the presence of a mother's sister in the camp as a second wife of the father does not seem to lead to a partial supplanting of the mother in the affection of her children" (Kaberry, 1939:54).

Kaberry's report indicates that despite the popular view that "primitives" share the burdens of nurturing children and children enjoy multiple mothers, the child knows its own mother and is more attached to her than to other 'mothers'. Meggitt says that the girl's tuition and discipline largely fall to her mother. "Although the mother's co-wives should also help in these matters, the mother rarely welcomes their interference" (1962:127).

It is clear that when children are commonly breast fed for at least four years, there would be a distinct role for the child's own mother. That is, with demand feeding of the kind described above, the new-born infant spends every minute of its life close to its mother, and this situation is only slightly and gradually modified after some months. Until the baby is able to walk at about one year old, the mother's breast is never far away and is, for another year at least, considered the prime pacifier in cases

1. Margaret Mead (1928) is largely responsible for the widespread belief that motherhood is shared widely in "primitive" societies. While the level of co-operation between women appears high, there is no clear evidence for ascertaining how much nurturance is provided by other women in such societies.
of any distress. This of course implies that the mother develops a very close relationship with the infant, even though a casual observer will see infants and young children held and carried by a number of other people. Further, this spreading of responsibility for the child to others occurs much more in the sedentary camp situation than during the days gathering. There, the mother has to carry and care for her own child. Those others for whom the child is a play thing and a distraction while sitting in the camp are not, in my observation, willing to curtail their fishing or hunting for the sake of helping an overburdened mother. Nor do they feel any obligation to do so.

Hamilton says that at Maningrida children between twelve and eighteen months demand to go everywhere with their mothers. The child's response to being left is uncontrollable weeping. Hamilton says:

"This phase is rarely reached (I observed it once only) as public opinion is solidly against a mother who attempts to leave her crying child, and no matter what she is already carrying or where she is going she will return to carry the child with her. For this reason the incidence of others caring for the child is considerably lower at this age than it is at the under six months age ...." (1970:61).

This is consonant with Meehan's observation of the total dependence of young children. Warner asserts that a sister will help to suckle a child if a woman has children too close together (1937:96). But such a solution could be only an occasional occurrence. It is
possible, though difficult, for a non parturiant woman to suckle, but there seems little likelihood that she would want to, and there would seldom be a woman of a suitable age and situation available.

I have attempted to demonstrate that the relationship between an Aboriginal mother and her child is characterised by a high level of indulgence of the child's wishes, including tolerance of expressions of hostility directed at the mother especially by sons. Strong attachment to children is expressed particularly in mourning practices. Mothers also evince possessiveness. This completes the discussion of the positive side of the ambivalence of mothers and I will now discuss the expression of negative feelings.

C. REJECTION OF MOTHERHOOD

In this section I will develop the suggestion made in Chapter One that Aboriginal women considerably qualify their acceptance of motherhood. I must first take issue with the views of several writers on Aboriginal women on the subject of the advantages to women of having children. Kaberry says:

"We must now recognise the social conditioning of the motives for child-bearing ..... In the Aboriginal community, the advantages are of an economic, affective, kinship, territorial, and possibly ritual order..... So far from reducing a woman

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1. I use this phrase for the rejection not only of a first child, but also of some subsequent ones. That is, I am indicating a rejection of unlimited motherhood, not a refusal ever to become a mother. I use the stronger phrase to indicate that there is an active rejection of child-rearing in a variety of situations.
to a position of inferiority, children are one means by which she becomes a person of consequence, economically and socially, as defined within that culture" (1939:158).

Similar views of the status attached to motherhood are expressed by Goodale for the Tiwi, when she says that in the past "it was only by becoming a mother that a woman gained any real status in the society" (1971:146). She further states,

"With the birth of her first child a young wife becomes an equal among the other women of the camp ..... Some women are, however, barren, and although they gain some status with age, in all respects this status is limited. The women I knew who had never had children of their own were, with rare exceptions, social nonentities" (ibid, 148, 9).

I agree with Kaberry that we must recognise the social conditioning of the motives for child-bearing. But she implies that women are "conditioned" into accepting child-bearing because of the rewards involved. I would prefer the opposite argument; that women are either neutral or favourably disposed towards the idea of bearing children, but observations of the burdens which they impose on the mother makes them think twice. The status which may accrue to them as the result of child-birth may weigh on the other side of the balance, but it seems to me that this is exaggerated. My observations do not support the view that Aboriginal women can gain status only through bearing children.

1. There is some misuse of the term conditioning; Kaberry is describing the rational recognition of the advantages to the adult woman, not the shaping of attitudes by reinforcing of responses.
The conclusions of Goodale and Kaberry are puzzling in the light of the evidence they both give of traditional methods of abortion. Goodale, as mentioned above, sees the frequency of abortion as related to post contact conflicts (1971:145). Of course there is no statistical evidence available to support this claim. But there is a good deal of evidence that Aboriginal women, like women everywhere, often found their fecundity a problem. That is they were not willing to raise all the children they conceived, and expressed this reluctance overtly. Kaberry herself gives a good deal of evidence of this, and I will quote her in full as the attitudes she describes seem to me to be generally applicable.

"Apparently, however, children are not necessarily desired, as was made clear in the statements of numerous women. They disliked the prospect of child-bearing; its pain and trouble, and the burden of carrying the baby about afterwards. There were few children in the camps and many of the women confessed to having committed abortion to avoid the contingency" (1939:107).

She remarks, "It is significant that even before there was much white contact, the early ethnologists commented on the small size of families (five being generally the largest) and on the frequent recourse to infanticide" (ibid, 108). One of the burdens is that until the child is able to crawl, sexual intercourse is forbidden between the mother and her husband; and this, together with the fact that a child is rarely out of its mother's arms, limits her opportunities for a casual affair and ensures a certain amount of domestic peace" (ibid, 155).
Kaberry quotes Stanner to the effect that "a permanent union following betrothal does not receive full public sanction until after the birth of children" (Stanner, 1934:15-16). Kaberry continues, "But the same would not apply to the tribes I visited, since as far as I could ascertain there was no distinction made between a childless marriage and one that had been prolific" (ibid, 156). She further remarks that there are no punitive sanctions to a woman's failure to bear children (ibid).

In the light of the reluctance to bear children which Kaberry observed, her statement that "children are one of the means by which she becomes a person of consequence ....." seems a little puzzling. Women are apparently deliberately rejecting the means of becoming "persons of consequence". Before discussing whether bearing children really does gain status for a woman, or whether they are a handicap to other means of gaining status, or even whether status is what Aboriginal women wish to gain, I will present further evidence that Aboriginal women considerably qualify their acceptance of motherhood, or rather their acceptance of the children they conceive. That is, the burdens which I have described as attendant upon motherhood are recognised by Aboriginal women. This evidence relates to the late recognition of pregnancy, the acceptance of barrenness and the dislike of large families.

The first piece of evidence is that women do not admit they are pregnant for some time. Goodale remarks "..... I strongly doubt that women ever see or think about their unborn children to any significant degree" (1971:333). Hamilton says "Anbara women do not publicly recognise their pregnancy until it is well advanced."
The norm appeared to be about five months ...." There are some women who maintain they are not pregnant after this and Hamilton says of these "This seems most often to be with unwanted children. The women may attempt to conceal their pregnancy with the intention of either procuring an abortion or killing the child at birth although none ever admitted actually doing so" (1970a:27 and f.n.).

Recent evidence from Akerman confirms that there is considerable delay in the recognition of pregnancy by Aboriginal girls in the Kimberleys. He says "..... many girls and women appear to be unaware that they are pregnant until the 12th - 20th week has elapsed and the more overt physical signs appear" (1977:59). Besides some points of fact which Ackerman treats a little carelessly (morning sickness usually begins by four weeks though it may last for up to eighteen weeks; swelling breasts occurs regularly after the first four weeks), his interpretation of the evidence seems mistaken.

The conclusion of Hamilton based on information from old women in central Australia sheds a different light on the material. She says "The cultural refusal to acknowledge pregnancy provides women with a situation in which their own decisions regarding any particular pregnancy can be made without interference" (1977:34). In a situation of an open camp, it may be difficult to imagine that such secrecy could be maintained effectively. However, as discussed in Chapter One, care is taken to grant privacy and avoid discussing personal matters in public. This is especially the case with "womens business", ensuring that even should an individual notice
A woman's pregnancy it will not be remarked on. A second indication that Aboriginal women do not have an unqualified liking for motherhood comes from observations that barrenness is not uncommon, is accepted and may be recognised as an advantage. Hamilton says that the barren woman is not a natural calamity (1970:20). R. and C. Berndt agree with Kaberry that bearing of children is not a condition of marriage (1964:177). Rembarnga women are somewhat puzzled by the childless condition of a number of women and give various tentative explanations, including the taking of contraceptive medicines. A woman who has the most obvious high status among the group is one who has never borne children. Reid (pers. comm.) made a similar observation at Yirrkala. The women with least status, and in one case negative status, are those who have large families. Other women express pity for them. I would assert that this situation is the direct result of more leisure and the ability to gain and control more resources, particularly food, on the part of childless women. There is overt recognition of this fact by women and the disadvantages of childlessness are only recognised by implication in the intermittent attempt of childless women to stress their classificatory relationship with their sisters' children. I witnessed several instances where mothers clearly resented such behaviour from their sisters.

Thirdly, women who produce large numbers of children gain no

1. It is true that there are rare tales of pregnancies remaining unrecognised, even by the gestating woman, until the birth occurs, but such events astonish all, and the explanation is hardly likely to affect my argument which depends on the fact that the vast majority of women know they are pregnant within two months of conception.
admiration or respect on that account. It seems that if anything they lose both status and power. The Rembarnga women see large families, especially when the children are produced in close succession, as unnatural and abnormal. As indicated above, there were usually no offers of assistance by other women in situations where the mother was overburdened, such as out on hunting trips. There was puzzlement and disapproval and a measure of disgust expressed about the young women who had babies in rapid succession. Krzywicki reports that a special name is given to a woman who has many children (1934:135). Haddon for the Torres Strait Islands indicates that large families are shameful and bring ridicule on the parents. He says "To the native mind a litter of babies indicates loose morality on the part of the mother. "Mother much shamed. She all same dog""(1908:110-1). Sharp says that Cape York tribes he worked with also considered multiple births to be bestial (1940:493). The disapproval of short birth intervals is attested by R. and C. Berndt, who say that women are ridiculed if they become pregnant within a few months of bearing a child (1964:127). At Yirrkala four years is regarded as the proper time between births. In a survey conducted by Reid no woman expressed a wish for more children than she actually had (pers. comm.). Himes, in his history of contraception, reports similarly that in Fiji women who have large numbers of children in quick succession are shamed and ridiculed (1936:24). This situation is quite possibly a common one though the acceptable number of children is particularly low among Aborigines.

Meggitt implies a somewhat contrary view saying that Walbiri desire large families. But it is probable that this is the view of

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1. See Chapter Five.
the men and the older women, that is those who are the least burdened by children. He also says that only a mild stigma of laziness attaches to those couples who are childless (1962:96). This latter comment indicates the same situation as described above; barrenness is accepted and children are not a condition of a marriage being accepted.

The statements from Meggitt (1962:278) and Smith (1880:6) that the midwife's duty is to stop the mother committing infanticide implies that women are recognised as sometimes not wishing to raise children. Hamilton's Anbara informants recognised the advantages of having no children saying that women without children stay attractive much longer (1970:25, f.n.). Tiwi women give as a reason for aborting that the baby of a girl who is too young may be too weak to live, but as reported above, Goodale says that young women also abort so as to continue their love lives. Her young women informants claimed to have induced several abortions and were prepared to do so again.

Considering the painful methods by which Tiwi women abort, and considering their knowledge of possible fatality if the placenta is not discharged, the apparent casualness of these girls' rejection of pregnancy is suspect. The motive to abort must surely stem from more than the desire to continue with amorous adventures.

R. and C. Berndt take a somewhat different view. They say of infanticide:
"But although it does take place occasionally - not usually because a child is not wanted, but because of bad seasons and shortage of food, especially in desert areas - it is, on the whole, rare. It is one thing to carry out contraceptive measures or abortion before a child is born, but not so easy to dispose of a baby once it has a personality of its own and its parents have grown to love it" (1964:124).

This last point seems to refer to the killing of a child sometime after birth. But infanticide means the killing of an infant at or immediately after birth, so that little attachment would have taken place. Furthermore these authors give evidence that women are reluctant to bear children, though they say this is more evident where there is an unhappy history of contact with Europeans:

"Fertility rites are not necessarily associated with an emphasis on childbearing. In parts of western Arnhem Land which have had a fair amount of outside influence, a number of young women have been reluctant to bear children, considering them a handicap in sweetheart relationships. For reasons other than this, women may not want to have children at all, or no more than two or three" (ibid).

Underhill mentions a striking aspect of child-birth among the Illura of the Northern Territory. She says that women can not be attended by their own mother but that "The latter covers her face with ashes and wails as if for a death" (1953:4). This implies that birth is considered a time of danger; fear is felt on behalf of the young mother. Fear of child-birth is a further reason for rejecting motherhood.
As a corollary to the dislike of large or quickly produced families, Aboriginal women openly recognise the problems that young mothers face. Berndt says that:

"..... while men insist that they want children but 'can't make the women produce if they don't want to,' some women comment that child-bearing restrains their extra-marital licence: 'It's all right for the men to talk but they haven't the responsibilities of pregnancy, and giving birth to the child, and looking after it'" (1951:94).

Reid was advised by older Yirkalla women not to have children because they were too much trouble (pers. comm.). In view of the indulgent attitude which is demanded of mothers, both in suckling young infants constantly, fulfilling the wishes of toddlers, and tolerating the attacks of older ones, these negative feelings are understandable. My informants told me that some young mothers go "crazy" and are liable to endanger the baby. On one occasion a young mother became tired and anxious over her six months old infant who had been crying a lot for two days. Card games had kept the other women busy and the young mother had not been feeling well. She picked up the baby and walked off into the bush. Much consternation, anxiety and comments on the mental instability of young mothers followed and later the women rallied to help the agitated mother. One comment was "She might fall down and kill that baby". The great joy and interest in infants displayed by men and women alike does not blind them to the emotional and physical difficulties they cause.
Aboriginal women since European contact have frequently been in trouble with the authorities for either infanticide or for the death of infants. Two recent reports from nurses working with Aboriginal women indicate that there is now an acceptance of infant mortality as a solution to unwanted births, and that children's illness is also accepted as a natural phenomenon. Margery Clarke, who has worked in northern Australia indicates that a woman who has rejected a child will allow it to die (pers. comm.). A central Australian nurse, Sandra Stacey, described how the problems of teaching Aboriginal women practices to ensure the health of their infants stemmed from the acceptance by the women of the high level of infant mortality and a rejection of the white nurses advice as she was seen by the Aborigines as ignorant of Aboriginal ways, and lacking in understanding of the situation, particularly the obligation to feed certain kinsmen (Stacey, 1978). These two reports are supported by the views of Hamilton (1977:32) and Grey (pers. comm.) who say that Aboriginal women complain that whites make it hard for the children to die. This is not a new thing. Taplin reported that he influenced some Aborigines to keep a particular child. Its subsequent death, which was accompanied by extreme grief, indicates that the Aborigines have suffered this sort of interference for many years (Taplin, 1879:14-15). The desire to use modern contraceptives, often frustrated by technical or social barriers, is further evidence of this awareness that babies are at best a contingent good. Several of the young women I knew wanted to have a tubal ligation after one baby.
D. NECROPHAGY

In the next section I shall be concerned with cannibalism following infanticide. To provide a necessary background, I shall first make some general remarks on necrophagy among the Australian Aborigines.

There are no accounts of killing for the purpose of procuring human flesh for consumption. Indeed, reliable observers explicitly deny that this could happen. The type of cannibalism most frequently reported occurs after a sudden death, either of an enemy or a kinsman. Howitt makes a distinction between the eating of slain enemies for revenge and the eating of members of the same tribe for ceremonial reasons as a part of the burial rites. He describes the preserving of the kidney fat when a man is killed by another tribe. When it is given to the relatives of the deceased they are so gratified that they do not pursue revenge (1904:449). Enemies are also reported as eaten among the Wotjobaluk, Jajaurung, Wudthourung and the Kurnai (ibid, 750-756). Curr's conclusion on the basis of a number of reports is that "Many tribes, it is true, only resorted to such unnatural food on rare occasions, merely eating small portions of the fat of a slaughtered foe in token of triumph and satisfied revenge" (1886, V.1:77). There are several other apparently reliable reports of ritual eating of enemies (Bulmer in Curr, 1887:545; Richards, 1926:251, N.Qu.; MacKenzie, 1852:127, Vic.).

More frequently cannibalism is described as part of mortuary rites. Roth discusses the motives for eating the flesh of a dead kinsman:
"The practice is found indulged in by perhaps only the few immediate relatives to practically the entire camp, while the flesh eaten may be limited to that of virile men only, or again, male and female, young and old, may be partaken of. The natives will admit that their feelings in the matter are prompted by sentiments akin to love and affection, by hunger, by ideas of sanitation, by a sense of punishment and spite, and by fear" (1907:367).

He describes the details of the ceremony surrounding the eating of the body and adds "The sentiment which prompted this eating of the deceased was a double one: the survivors knew where the dead actually were and so could not be frightened by their spirits, while the disposal of the corpse in this manner prevented its going bad and stinking" (ibid, 400).

While Roth's observations seem reliable and his speculations interesting, he lacks a sophisticated view of motivation. In particular he underestimates the emotional quality of cannibalism. Thus he speaks of hunger, fear, love and affection merely as alternatives. In my view the dominant motivation in this type of cannibalism has to do with sentiments aroused by the death itself. Hiatt has argued convincingly that mortuary cannibalism in the Blyth River area occurs in cases of sudden death as a response to "the excruciating realization of permanent loss" (n.d., 5)¹. I would

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¹ Maddock's (1969a) enquiry into necrophagy is largely concerned with the problem of explaining the distribution of the flesh. His suggestions as to why the dead should be eaten at all are not necessarily incompatible with Hiatt's views. One difference is between Maddock's explanation of behaviour in terms of its cognitive function and Hiatt's in terms of its emotional function. But this is an oversimplification of a matter which requires more attention than I can give it here.
take this point further by suggesting that cannibalism gains its effectiveness in this context partly from the fact that it is normally proscribed. The horror of eating the flesh of other humans seems to be a very general one, though prohibitions against it vary in range and form. It is the strength of the taboo which is the source of the emotionality of the act and it is the emotional content that offers an avenue of relief to a grieving kinsman. It seems that in extreme grief people often do shocking things to assuage their overburdened emotions.

Many reports support Hiatt's view by indicating that cannibalism is an expression of attachment; the reluctance to part with a kinsman is somehow relieved by ingesting his flesh and it is also a kindness to him to avoid the putrefaction of his flesh. Thus Westgarth says "they appear, either from fancied duty or inclination, or a mixture of both feelings, even to prefer the flesh of their own friends and relations who have died in the course of nature" (1848:74). Howitt also reports "they eat him because they knew him and were fond of him, and they now knew where he was, and his flesh would not stink" (1904:753).

Davies gives the following account from fairly extensive observations: "they never put anyone to death merely for the love of human flesh; but the customs of their country and their race from time immemorial, render it incumbent upon them, and a sacred duty, to devour the dead bodies of their relatives and friends" (quoted in Lang, 1847:429).
Dawson says the eating of the flesh of a person killed by violence is a mark of respect (1881:63-4). Gason reports that the Dieri eat the fat off the body of a kinsman so that the departed will be forgotten and not wept for continually (in Curr, V.2, 1886:63). And from Arnhem Land, R. and C. Berndt say that "Usually the flesh of a middle aged or young person is eaten, as well as of babies, in order to retain the presence of the deceased's spirit and make the partaker strong" (1951:46). Others whose observations support the view that kinsmen are eaten as part of mortuary rites are Rudder (1889:40), Howitt (1904:449ff and 750ff), MacGlashan (in Curr, 1887,V.3:21), Elkin (1938:345) and Spencer and Gillen (1904:548).1

An observation of a somewhat different, but supporting nature is Goodale's report from the Tiwi that "in the old days, the ambaru (spouse) used to copulate with the deceased in the grave .... It may well be that the body of the deceased is considered to be extremely taboo, but that part of the expression of grief - which is full of self-punishment and highly emotional - is the deliberate disregard of this taboo" (1971:268).

There is a good deal of evidence of strong emotion, both excitement and shame, surrounding cannibalism. Several authors indicate that Aboriginal informants were to some extent unwilling to treat

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1. Regional variation seems to be slight though reports from the more central regions indicate that informants, though attributing cannibalism to their neighbours, denied that they practiced it themselves and were not observed to do so (Spencer and Gillen, 1927:494-5; Hilliard, 1968:106-7; Meggitt, 1962:36, 43).
the practice as one for investigation. Hiatt dismisses the possibility that the attitude of whites has led to reticence about cannibalism, for he says "I was given unreserved accounts of numerous matters which would have been expected to give as much if not more offence to whites ..... The eating of human flesh ..... is regarded by the natives themselves as an aberration" (n.d., 4, fn.). The emotive nature of cannibalism is also attested by the reaction to it by observers.

It is difficult to say whether all cannibalism is highly charged with emotion or whether it is killing humans for food which inspires a horror which generalizes to any eating of human flesh. The ethnographic material seems to support the former view in that among Aborigines the act of eating the flesh of humans is surrounded by powerful and emotional rituals. Davis describes cannibalism leading to their "exciting themselves to a pitch of madness" (Davis in Smyth, V.2, 1878:311). Thomson describes the situation thus:

"The eating of human flesh is regarded as a terrible thing ..... But by means of the appropriate ritual the danger may not only be averted, but it may even become a source of power making a man specially brave, and giving special prowess in hunting. Cannibalism here is purely a matter of ritual....." (1933:511).

There are a number of reports of the eating of children when they die (e.g., Stretton, 1893:240; Lang, 1847:429). Lang describes the mother of a child as "..... under the belief and conviction that she was discharging the bounden duty of a parent towards her child
by devouring its remains" (ibid, 435). Roth reports from Queensland:

"Thus in the Boulia district, especially with children who die suddenly from no lingering illness, portions of the corpse may be eaten by the parents and by their blood brothers and sisters only: the reason assigned is that "putting them along hole" would make them think too much about their beloved little ones, though unfortunately this is apparently contradicted by the fact that if the child has been ailing a long time previously and becomes emaciated, etc., it will be buried" (1897:166).

There is no contradiction in parents being more ready to accept the death of a child that has been ailing for some time, and indeed this supports Hiatt's views. This is a more probable explanation than the condition of the body, for the burial rather than consumption of children that die after a long illness.

E. CANNIBALISM FOLLOWING INFANTICIDE

The above descriptions concern individuals old enough at the time of death to have bonds of affection and loyalty with other members of the community. The situation is quite different in the case of infanticide or stillbirth. There is no expression of grief, no mortuary ceremony and men are apparently rarely involved.

Let me now present some descriptions of cannibalism following infanticide. Beveridge says that infants are often killed and eaten by their own mothers (in Smyth, 1876:52). Smyth reports evidence
from Protectors of Aborigines and others of infanticide and the
eating of infants (1876:53). Petrie says that old women sometimes
kill and eat newborn infants. One reason for this is the mother's
death in child-birth (1932:36). Roth provides the fullest account:

"The corpse of a very young child was roasted whole, and eaten
by old women only. New born babies might be killed and eaten,
only by the old women, immediately after birth, especially
if this process had given the mother much pain or trouble:
it was usually the midwife who screwed the infant's neck
round, breaking it by holding the jaw and back of the head
between the two hands and so twisting it round. Similarly,
if the mother died in child-birth, the child was deemed
guilty of having killed the mother, and was invariably
immediately killed and eaten by the old women" (1907:402).

From south east Australia Howitt reports as follows:

"In the Wotjobaluk tribe infants were killed in the old times,
no difference being made between boys and girls. If a couple
had a child, either boy or girl, say ten years old, and a baby
was then born to them, it might be killed and cooked for its
elder brother or sister to eat, in order to make him or her
strong by feeding on the muscle of the infant. The mother
killed the infant by striking its head against the shoulder
of its elder brother or sister" (1904:749).

Howitt goes on to state that among the Mukjarawaint, "The grandparents
had to decide whether a child was to be kept alive or not. If not,
then either the grandfather or the father killed it, by striking it against the mother's knee, and then knocking it on the head. Then the child was roasted and eaten by the grandparents, their brothers and grandchildren, but its parents did not eat of it" (ibid). Further, he says that "In all the tribes of the Wotjo nation, and also the Tatathi and other tribes on the Murray River frontage, when a child was weak and sickly they used to kill its infant brother or sister, and feed it with the flesh to make it strong" (Howitt, ibid, 750). Other reports of infanticide followed by cannibalism may be found in Mathews (1904:219), MacKenzie (1852:117), Bates (n.d., 13), Lamond, Eglinton and Mowbray (all in Curr, V.1., 1886:322, 346, 403). Stanbridge (in Smyth, 1876:52) reports that "Newborn babes are killed by their parents, and eaten by them and their children". This is to strengthen the older child. C. Strehlow (1907:1026) also says that the flesh of infants is given to older children to make them strong. Spencer and Gillen (1899:475) write "In the Luritcha tribe also young children are sometimes killed and eaten, and it is not an infrequent custom, when a child is in weak health, to kill a younger and healthy one and then to feed the weakling on its flesh, the idea being that this will give to the weak child the strength of the stronger one".

It seems that in these cases the motives include the recognition of the value of the flesh for its own sake. The reports that old women deliberately kill infants for cannibal purposes (Roth, Petrie) carry the same implication. Others report infant cannibalism as the result of famine conditions (Howitt, 1904:749; Heagney in Curr, V.2, 1886:378).
Roheim makes a surprising distinction between male and female motives for infant cannibalism. He says "The men appear to practise infanticide and cannibalism because of moral principles, and the women because of hunger" (1974:71). And further:

"How can we explain the fact that the mother who is generally so good and nonresisting in the treatment of her children is also capable of killing them? The answer evidently lies in the "unorganised" character of their primitive psyche. Opposite and contradictory emotions and trends do not balance each other and result in compromise formations. Instead each trend is permitted complete sway at the moment of its ascendency. For the most part, however, the parents continue to be protective, projecting their cannibalistic and libidinal propensities onto the demons and thus enabling society to continue" (ibid, 73).

This account is unsatisfactory partly because Roheim over-emphasises cannibalism as a motive for infanticide. He does not distinguish between feelings towards newborn infants and those towards older children, and he does not demonstrate that the Aboriginal psyche is "unorganised". Neither does he give any reason for this supposed emotional imbalance in Aboriginal society.

It is difficult to accept that the desire to eat the flesh of the infant as suggested in a number of accounts could be the sole determining factor in killing it. While there are well authenticated cases of humans eating the flesh of their fellows in preference to starving, it is also apparent that powerful psychological barriers
have to be overcome. It is not against reason to do so. But it is contrary to what we know of human nature to assume that in times of hardship people will readily prey on their kinsmen. Least of all can we imagine hunger leading to the reversal of the nurturant behaviour characteristic of parenthood and the primary bond. However, as discussed above, infanticide which occurs at birth does entail a reversal of the nurturant response. Such infants are not the subject of attachment because they have, I would argue, already been rejected before birth and are killed at birth. Thus it is reasonable to suppose that they can be defined as simply meat. Eating an infant who has been killed at birth should thus be understood as an extension of the act of infanticide.

R. and C. Berndt have suggested that, where infanticide is followed by the eating of the infant, "the idea behind the action is the hope that the child will be born again ...." (1964:403). Similarly Spencer and Gillen write "They believe that the spirit part of the child goes back at once to the particular spot from whence it came, and can be born again ...." (1899:51-2). Such beliefs appear to be widespread, but they can hardly constitute a sufficient motive. I regard them as a rationalisation for actions performed for undisclosed reasons.

I have shown that only women are present during parturition; that only women practice infanticide; and that usually women and sometimes older children eat the victims of infanticide. I shall now suggest that infant cannibalism is the quintessential expression of female ambivalence towards children and, more generally, of women's place in the social structure.
A basic premise in my argument is that Aboriginal women exercise power over their own reproduction. Besides the fact that birth is seen by both men and women as "women's business", there is evidence that women emphasise physiological causes of reproduction and their own part in the process. Hamilton observed that in giving reasons for the increased birth rate at Maningrida, "women stress their own actions as cause, while men are more likely to stress male intervention in the natural environment" (1970:26). That is, men claim to control such matters through ritual.

With this in mind, it is possible to suggest three aspects of the motivation pattern underlying infant cannibalism. Firstly, the cannibalism of newborn infants can be seen as expressing unconscious resentment of infants. I have described the constant burden that children create for women. If, as stated by Roth, it is old women who usually eat infants, we might infer that one strand of their motivation is revenge. This will also apply to infant necrophagy by younger women; sibling rivalry and the caretaker role of girls in a situation where infants are not disciplined, ensure that all women will harbour some resentment of infants.

Secondly, and at a more nearly conscious level, the act expresses and confirms the power of women over birth and babies. If the infant should not have come to that woman (because of her youth, another suckling infant, etc.) the women will not allow it to remain and they will re-incorporate it. Again there is an element of revenge on the spirit child or foetus for wrong impregnation. But more significantly it is a confirmation of the fact that babies are "women's business". Women alone have the right to create and destroy
infants without men having any say in the matter, or even any knowledge of it. Unlike the products of men's labour, to which women have very limited rights, but like their own produce, some of which they must supply men with, babies are women's products which men usually appropriate over time. Infant cannibalism is an unequivocal assertion of the ability of women to retain control of their own reproduction.

Finally, this form of cannibalism can be seen as women imitating mortuary cannibalism in an area of "women's business". This is an aspect of the broader phenomenon of the reflection in women's rituals of men's ritual practices.

Infants are simultaneously manifestations of the power of women and instruments of their oppression. In killing and ingesting their flesh, but especially in asserting their right to do so secretly and without men's knowledge, women assert their identity and power. By breaking the prohibition on the consumption of human flesh by eating newborn infants, by incorporating the products of their own bodies, women revenge themselves on infants for their demands, assert their power over reproduction (vis-a-vis spirit children and men) and indulge in secret and powerful ritual practices.
CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIALIZATION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY
I will begin by showing how the indulgence of children described in the previous chapter is modified for girls by the demands on their labour and also by the institution of brother-sister avoidance. Secondly, I will argue that puberty rites for girls in many areas amount to a direct attack on their sexuality. Thirdly, I will discuss institutionalised rape, ceremonial sexual licence and wife lending. Finally, I will argue that, although these various experiences are instances of the direct oppression of women, their subjugation is far from total.

A. CHILDHOOD

Shaming

In this section I will rely largely on my own field observations not only in order to further illustrate the indulgence of children, but to emphasise its limits. At Goinjimbi, as elsewhere in Australia, children are encouraged to ask for what they want. Between the ages of two and ten they vigorously and sometimes violently demand food from their own mother. Older boys continue to demand food from their mother, FZ or MM, real or classificatory\(^1\), and are never refused, unless there is nothing available. In that case, the child and older boys will be ignored or told to "go and ask X". Girls once having reached the age of about ten are expected to prepare tea, beef and bread themselves, so they no longer can demand that others fulfil their needs.

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1. In a camp consisting of 40 people a boy would have an average of two and a half females in each kin category. Only some will be of an age and in a position to supply him with food.
Nurturance in infancy with the breast always available is not broken by any sudden reversal. Mothers simply begin to avoid complying with infant's wishes; they begin to call a child greedy who wants to eat all the time or eat all of what is available. The gradual non-compliance by the mother is met often with screams, kicks or slaps which she ignores or laughs at. There is no suggestion that the child should not be angry and violent. Most frequently though, the mother eventually lets the child have the breast or gives it some tucker or beef or whatever is being yelled for. However as the child grows older the adults will be more likely to laugh at the expression of strong emotion. This occurs at the stage of development when self-consciousness makes the child embarrassed by too much attention especially if it is disapproving. Thus children are gradually shamed out of showing greed.

The development of sensitivity to being 'shamed' occurs progressively from about three years, when children begin to show 'shyness' and avoid calling attention to themselves if several people are present. It seems probable that this sensitivity to adult disapproval develops much more easily among children who have been indulged previously. The child has built up no defenses against disapproval. But, while children are shamed out of yelling and throwing things when wanting food, they are encouraged to ask for it; asking for food or any other thing is not considered shameful. "Give me tucker" or "Give me tobacco" are common phrases among adults spoken in matter-of-fact tones with the same lack of effect as "Pass the salt". A fairly common response is "Nothing" meaning "I have none" but among adults the necessity to be generous, and to show no possessiveness ensures that such requests are fulfilled if possible. In
particular, women must continue to nurture their sons, real and classificatory.

The small size of local groups ensures that children grow up in intimate contact with a group of 30-50 people. Moreover the people live their daily domestic lives in the open in view of the rest of the camp and largely in the same or one or two other camps most of their lives. Techniques are developed for the granting of privacy; people do not stare for instance, and they do not question the activities of others. Groups returning from a trip are ignored until they choose to display their spoils or tell of their adventures. No one gossips about others in the camp except when conflict is near the surface. Children are ignored with the rest and, except when girls are needed for chores, they are not interfered with. From about three years onwards they learn to defecate privately, and achieve the ability of becoming virtually invisible when relieving themselves. Despite the familiarity with the daily lives of others in the camp, individuals have very different levels of intimacy with different people which range from the familiarity of the parent-child relationship to the brother-sister avoidance relationship which exists at Goinjimbi as elsewhere in Arnhem Land (see below, p. 119). Thus girls grow up developing relationships of familiarity with some adults but not others. For instance a child will not develop a relationship of familiarity with its mother's brother simply because of the mother's fear of and avoidance of her brother. Thus the

1. There will be much greater variation in the number camped together at any one time. However this figure is a rough indication of the number of people who are known intimately.
sanction of the "stranger", the non-familiar towards whom the child feels shy, exists even in this densely interacting relatively small group. A child of four or older who is screaming or hitting his/her mother will stop dead when told "Look there; someone looking at you".

Working

One aspect of indulgence is continued, with demands for food being made as a right in certain circumstances, especially by boys. Girls though begin to have to help provide the food by fetching and carrying, making fire and very soon cooking. All children begin catching and collecting food when quite young. Boys are encouraged and praised and also eat their catch. In contrast the girl will be encouraged to give anything of any reasonable size to her father to eat. She will usually eat only the very tiny fish that she catches. Later she may be given a piece that her father has left, if she is too young for food taboos to apply.

Girls are today constantly asked to carry water, boil tea, take the baby, wash clothes, fetch wood and cook damper or beef. Boys have only the mildest demands made of them even when young. There is no ritual reason preventing them from doing chores before they begin initiation (which may be as young as ten years). It is simply that it is demeaning for boys to work for women – especially at chores. At initiation young boys are not asked to fetch or carry anything, as that thing would be Juk (dangerous) to at least their sisters,

1. Meggitt describes a girl's duties and says "As her knowledge and strength increase, she becomes a valuable domestic assistant to her mother and takes over many of the more time-consuming activities, such as carrying water and caring for the infants" (1962:128).
real and classificatory, and at certain times to their mothers and all young girls. Young boys are sometimes told to do chores but only when no girl is present. Younger girls do chores when no older ones are available. The girls who are expected to do most work for "old people" are girls over about twelve years especially if they are unmarried and have no children. These girls would have been already married in the pre-contact situation, and in all areas of Australia they would be fully productive members of the group.

Girls sometimes refuse to do the work, usually by going away, or pretending deafness, but they will be discussed, disapproved and made to feel ashamed if they do this often enough to be described as lazy. Slowness to obey or "deafness" are the defences girls often use against these demands. But if young girls sleep in, or stay out of reach for too long they will be criticized for letting "old people" work which is unquestionably a bad thing. Work itself is not a virtuous activity but working for "old people" is. Girls avoid chores only temporarily by staying out of sight; there is no appeal for someone else to have a turn.

When a girl is young, mothers and other female kin make her "work for old people"; later a husband demands that she work for him; then infants and older sons must be provided for. It is not the amount of work that I am referring to as onerous, though in some cases it certainly is, but the critical importance of fulfilling the demands of infant and husband in particular, and the care she must take not to offend brothers. Women have very few opportunities to avoid these demands, and must not appear to do so. The relaxation and light-heartedness apparent when women are away from camp on
fishing expeditions and during the women's ceremony are direct
evidence of the pressure she is usually under. One of the sources
of discipline of girls then is the unquestioned belief that women
work for men and that young girls work for older women. Girls are
thus coerced, mainly by moral pressure, into recognising that they
must provide certain services for older women and men.

For boys there are a number of contrasts. Meggitt describes
boys from five to six years spending most of their time wandering
in the bush discovering the best foods (1962:116). But they return
home for meals (ibid, 125). Meggitt asserts that a boy develops
a strong affection for his mother and I would suggest that it stems
in a large part from his being able to depend on her providing him
with food. This is supported by the fact that the feeling "carries
over to a large extent to the mother's sisters" (ibid, 125). I am
not implying that it is simply "cupboard love" but that the most
important emotional bonds grow out of dependency and are expressed
in terms of the giving and receiving of food. After initiation
"The youth now moves to the bachelors' camp and only occasionally
eats and sleeps with his parents. He may still exercise claims over
his mother for food and protection, but she has little to do with
his education and discipline. As yet she has few claims over his
services; he considers it beneath his dignity as a male to assist
her with domestic tasks, and the game he catches is generally consumed
in the bachelors' camp" (Meggitt, 1962).

Sharp's (1933:426) observation quoted above of the attacks by
boys on their mothers also indicates the different relationships
of boys and girls with their mothers. Kaberry remarks, "A son,
though he is separated from his mother during periods of initiation, cherishes a strong affection for her during his lifetime. He gives her food and cares for her in old age" (1939:54). It appears then that the hostility which a son is allowed or even encouraged to display towards his mother in childhood is replaced by an especially strong bond of affection in later years.

Sharp, Meggitt and Kaberry are not alone in their observations. Stanner says that there is a difference made between the behaviour mothers will accept from boys and girls. He asserts that there seems to be

"something like a formal transfer point in the relations between the sexes as a child grows: the practice of encouraging little boys between 6 and 8 years or so to throw stones at their mothers and show external signs of hostility to them, and of the mothers appearing both to welcome and to regret this behaviour" (in Reay, 1963:344).

I would agree substantially except for the words "formal transfer". There is no real difference between the sexes in their treatment before six, and little girls also throw things and hit. The implication is, I would argue, that the same relationships with adults develop in both sexes until this age. Girls then must work, boys must begin to be men. The change in attitude is largely centred around brother-sister avoidance or the learning of other avoidance relationships. Also the mother must continue to supply her son with food despite the hostility he shows her. The attitude to males in general that a mother already has is strongly charged with
ambivalent feeling. Her dependence on some men to protect her from attacks from others ensures that her son, a protector, will be of more overtly emotional significance to her than her daughter, despite the close day-to-day relationship with the latter. Pride in her son's aggressiveness, and a wish to encourage it so that he won't turn his back if someone gives his mother cheek, vie with her upset that he is attacking her. She does both welcome and regret his behaviour.

Avoidance

The most powerful sexually differentiating experience a child has in Arnhem Land is of the brother-sister avoidance syndrome first described by Warner (1937:53, etc.)\(^1\). This avoidance has been discussed in the literature and the question of the source of a brother's fury with his sister when she is sworn at has been discussed. Brothers attack their sisters with spears, sometimes causing serious wounds, because they hear someone swear at her or use her name of even her subsection name. A boy is likely to attack his sister in this way from her infancy, long before she knows the direct cause, let alone the accepted justification; it is this factor which I am arguing, is a dominant one in the socialization of girls and boys, especially of their sexual attitudes.

A series of articles attempted to account for the brother's reaction. Hiatt says "Informants acting for my benefit the part of a brother who has just heard bad language directed at his sister would groan and say ..... 'I have been speared through the ear'". Hiatt

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1. Roth gives evidence of brother-sister avoidance on the Tully River, N.E. Queensland (1908:2).
concludes "a man has been taught from childhood that it is shameful even to think about his sister's sexuality, and now it is suddenly and dramatically forced upon his attention" (1966c:154). See also Hiatt (1964); Makarius (1966); Maddock (1970) for somewhat different explanations. In their discussions, these authors pay no attention to the major effects of the brother's anger, which is to frighten women.

I shall describe brother-sister avoidance as children become aware of it and the consequences for a girl of being under threat from her brother - real or classificatory. It is the whole range of brother-sister avoidance behaviours which are the source of most rules of propriety. It is her brother or "brothers" who must not suspect that a girl or woman is going to relieve herself\(^1\). A sister must avoid sitting or walking close to her brother; she has to avoid doing anything that would cause anyone to shout or swear at her; she cannot touch anything her brother has handled. To a young girl who has a brother a few years older, avoidance may be first impressed dramatically. An eight year old girl sat down near her visiting eighteen year old "brother" near the fire. He turned suddenly and shouted furiously "Get away from me rubbish" (*biangduyu*, probably equivalent to *wakinu* (Warner, 1937:66) and *ririgmin* (Hiatt, 1964:127)). This is unheard of behaviour in other contexts. The trauma this little girl suffered was evident in her long period of whimpering.

One girl of ten was sitting on the toilet\(^2\) when her "brother"

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1. See Cowlishaw (1976:63) for details of the extent to which women will go to disguise their purpose when going to relieve themselves. They will wait for hours sometimes, or take a tomahawk as if going to get wood, or invite a friend to go for a walk if they have a "brother" anywhere in sight.

2. A seldom used tin shack in the centre of the camp.
(25 years) opened the door. He at once ran to get his spears but could not find any. He then threatened his little "sisters" of three and five years old. The older one disappeared into the bush. The small girls were snatched up and taken away by older women and the brother calmed down after some hours.

A fourteen year old girl who had been working all day swore at further demands from her "granny" saying in English "Why you always fuckin' sitting down playing cards while I work for you all day". The older woman's brother who was among the card players, on hearing his sister sworn at rushed to get his spear to spear all his sisters. All the women scattered and his daughter tried to take his spear saying "Don't kill Aunty". All waited for him to calm down which he did after about two hours. The swearing, it was explained to me was not only "fuckin" but "sitting down" as it means sitting on your "arse" (referring to genitals). The subsection name as well as the proper name of a man's sister is also considered swearing and will cause the same furious response as will any direct reference to her in his presence. Finally, the acute embarrassment of a sixteen year old boy having to pass his fourteen year old sister on the path, and her embarrassment as evidenced in her sideways gait and downturned eyes, show that these avoidance rules are effectively internalized by puberty. It is frequently stated that a brother does not like or can't like his sister after he is about twelve. This is the way young people explain the change in the relationship, and the boys say it is the old people who tell them this. It is an insult to say to a man that he likes his sister.

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1. The nature of his fury might be questioned. There is certainly a strong emotional expression of anger and shame evident in these cases. But how far it is a need to hurt or frighten women or a case of protecting his pride is unclear. Women, after their fear has passed, consider the displays of anger somewhat ridiculous.
Young girls become aware of the dangers emanating from brothers long before they know anything of the reasons for this. Stories are told of incidents when brothers attacked sisters, and little children are told "Shhh. Don't swear at her. Look, brother is there". Young boys and girls are thus made frightened about offending a girl's brothers long before they have any means of differentiating which behaviours are forbidden in which company. Actual attacks must be made with spears because a brother cannot touch his sister with his hand. Women cannot retaliate but can only run away.

This brother-sister avoidance only exists as the major avoidance relationship in limited areas of the continent. It may thus be asked whether there is an analogous mechanism involved in the process of socialization in other areas. Unfortunately there is little detailed description of other avoidance relationships that would allow a similar analysis of the effect on young girls. There are clearly degrees of avoidance. While sisters and brothers among the Walbiri enjoy a relaxed familiarity, nonetheless they should not swear at each other or indulge in any horseplay (Meggitt, 1962:134). But it is the mothers-in-law who are in the salient avoidance category throughout most of Australia. Meggitt describes this avoidance relationship. A boy will begin to avoid his "mothers-in-law" even before his seclusion for circumcision:

"Once he is circumcised, the lad cannot approach, speak to, or deliberately look at any "m.m.b.d." He rarely refers to the women in conversation and then only by using their subsection name or the term gadjin (shame) ....."
No matter how old a man is none of these restrictions is ever relaxed. A man who inadvertently comes face-to-face with a "m.m.b.d." must turn and run away, even if he is a grey-bearded elder and she is an infant just able to walk. If the man thus encounters his own wife's mother, he later gives his wife a piece of meat to take to her to expunge the shame he feels; but he need not do so where other "m.m.b.d." are concerned.

The ban on intercourse with mothers-in-law is one of the strongest taboos operating in Walbiri society, and I have never seen any of the accompanying rules broken" (1962:153, my emphasis).

Meggitt like all other authors tells us nothing of any sanctions against the girls and women in these situations. While there may be less intensity of particular avoidance relationships in other areas, there seems to have been some avoidance everywhere, in some areas in a very elaborated form as expressed in the avoidance languages (see, e.g., Dixon, 1972). I am not concerned here with other contrasts between different avoidance rules but only with the processes of socialization which occur as children learn whatever avoidance relationships exist in the particular group. The important similarities are that avoidance rules must be learned by all members of the group and by girls at early ages. Girls are taught to be careful not to embarrass certain men but the reverse does not occur. Only after they reach puberty must boys practice avoidance stringently. Even if there is no punishment for children breaking avoidance rules, girls are themselves subject to avoidance from a very young age in their role as mother-in-law or sister. This ensures that shame and
fear will be generated on account of these rules. Thus the brother-sister avoidance relationship in Arnhem Land has a place in the socialization of young girls that is similar to that of mother-in-law avoidance in that both emphasise the wariness which girls must develop towards men.

I do not wish to dismiss the differences between these forms of avoidance. Their significance could be further explored by seeking parallel contrasts in other aspects of social organisation, particularly marriage rules and kinship structures. But the overwhelming stress from the viewpoint of a growing girl is that there are certain men who will be deeply offended by certain kinds of contact with her. Whether this is expressed by these men in terms of throwing a spear or running away, this fact will be impressed on her as a major determinant of day-to-day interpersonal relationships. It is men's ears, or pride, or dignity which is being protected by this avoidance, not women's. Yet women must cooperate in this protection. In Arnhem Land they are forced to by threat or actuality of physical violence. In the mother-in-law avoidance areas it is not clear what direct sanctions exist against a girl or woman if she does not protect her son-in-law by avoiding him. However it is clear that in the daily camp life women do cooperate. There is only one observation of women using the avoidance rule to protect one woman from attack (Meggitt, 1962:241). It seems arguable that one consequence of the existence of these avoidance rules is to convince a young girl of the necessity of protecting herself from certain men as well as those men from her.

Rembarnga girls are surrounded by a series of dangers besides those caused directly by their brothers. There are extensive food
taboos. They have to be careful of water. At ceremony times girls must not laugh aloud and play about. When her brother is in the ceremony a girl has various other rules of behaviour imposed. She should avoid almost all meat and fish. She should not drink water except when the sun is high. She must not tend the fire. Two incisions are made in her calves when her brother is circumcised. All this makes a young girl's behaviour careful and tentative and highly aware of men, for most girls will have brothers, real or classificatory, in camp. Boys are warned of various dangers and rules, but they have fewer prohibitions until initiation when they must observe the avoidance rules. Boys also have none of the chores described above which make a young girl a humble servant when required (which may be for only short periods), from a very young age until she can pass on some tasks to younger girls. This will be increasingly possible when she has borne children.

The description so far has been of the major themes of the socialization of pre-pubescent girls, and has been largely based on my field work and recent literature. In the following section I will be examining the puberty rites of girls and it is from the older literature that most of the evidence is gathered. This is because these rites seem to have been abandoned soon after contact in most areas.

B. PUBERTY

Girls' puberty rites vary from brief seclusion at menarche to introcision with ritual plural intercourse. Twyman, in a review of the literature on genital operations says, "We inferred from the
available literature that the severity of the operation varies, not with geographical region but rather from tribe to tribe irrespective of the area of the continent" (1960:159). In fact, the Map (p. 132) shows that there is some geographical regularity, with the most severe operations occurring in central Australia.

I will describe the range of rituals that are associated with girls' puberty, beginning with the mildest which are the most widely practised. The severest rituals will be dealt with in some detail.

Menarche

In all areas there seems to have been some ritual associated with the girl's development. Cicatrization and the boring of the nasal septum appeared to have no meaning apart from adornment (Kaberry, 1939:77; Berndts, 1964:153), although the scarving of a girl is sometimes part of her brother's or other male kin's initiation (Piddington, 1932:75; Berndts, 1964:156).

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1. A curious feature of some reports from south east and north Australia is the removal of the top joints of a girl's fingers (e.g., Curr, V.3, 1887:154, etc.; Howitt, 1904:747). Basedow says that in the north west of Australia girls have the first two joints of either the first or the small finger removed. The Daly River tribes tie a ligature of cobwebs around the joint and, deprived of circulation, it drops off. Otherwise the parents of the child bites it off (1925:253-4). Stretton reports that among the N.T. tribes, "the first joint of the index finger of the left hand is taken off .... but in the case of women only; this is supposed to facilitate the getting of yams ....." (1893:248). Petrie says that the practice was to indicate that they were fishing or coast women (1932:57, Qu.). Some say the operation took place at birth (Birt, 1911:64, N.S.W.), while others say it indicated marriage (Oakes, n.d., N.S.W.) and that only some women were so mutilated (White, 1970, N.S.W.). With such sketchy accounts no generalisations can be made about the exact nature of the practice. However, it may be noted as another form of sexual differentiation and, like defloration and introcision, to have been discontinued soon after contact.
A widespread practice is seclusion at menarche and smoking described here by Mathews for the Wuddy-wurra tribe of the Murray River.

"At the first sign of the menstrual flux, the girl is taken charge of by an elderly female, who is not her mother, and is removed into the adjacent bush. They are accompanied by some young matrons who help the old woman in her duties. After painting the novitiate, her arms are decorated with strings cut from the skin of the ring-tail opossum, with the fur on. These strings are bound round the upper arm about midway between the shoulder and the elbow and also round the thick part of the forearm. The strings are not wound tightly on the arm, but like any other bandage which closely fits the limb bound, they cause the arm to swell after wearing them for some time.

The old dame, assisted by those who are with her, builds a fire by laying wood upon the ground and applying fire until it is well ignited. Green bushes are then laid on top of the fire, and on top of this covering of bushes earth and sand are thrown to prevent the wood from blazing up, and to augment the issue of smoke. Two of the women present help the novice to get on top of this smouldering heap. When she has remained in the smoke for a considerable time, the old woman hands the girl a yamstick with which she jumps off her smoking pedestal.

In the meantime, a hut or shelter has been erected of boughs, into which the novice is put by herself and she sleeps there all night - the other women sleeping a few yards away. Next
day the smoking ceremony is repeated in the same manner, morning and afternoon. This procedure is continued until the novitiate is cleansed. The bandages are then removed from the girl's arms and she is painted as before. A girdle manufactured from the fur of animals is now put round her waist, from which depends a narrow apron, ngurraty, made of emu feathers, covering her pudendae. When the novice has passed through this ordeal she is called ngurrandurragurk, an initiated woman, and may be claimed in marriage by the man to whom she was assigned from her childhood" (1904:335-6).

Mathews describes similar smoking ceremonies for tribes on the Murray and Ovens Rivers (1904:335). A report from Green (in Smyth, 1876:65) confirms Mathews' observations. There is no mention of defloration in these areas of south east Australia. Piddington's description of puberty ritual among the Karadjeri of north east Australia is as follows:

"Though girls are married and may have sexual intercourse with their husbands before puberty, the first ritual which they go through is associated with their first menstruation, when they go into the bush for the entire period.....

While in the bush a woman sits on a hole in the ground all day, wearing no clothing. Several women go with her and build a shelter of boughs over her head. At night she emerges from this shelter and sleeps outside.

During her seclusion a woman eats very little - an excess of food would make her sick. After menstruation she goes back.
to her husband, but she does not go close to him at first. They sleep with a fire between them for one night" (1932:83).

Roth reports a similar seclusion during a girl's first three menstrual periods on the north western coast of the Cape York Peninsula. A girl who may have been living with her husband for some years is taken from his camp and sits all day covered in sand up to her waist. At night she returns to the camp. On the fifth and last night she is decorated with shells, strings, feathers and paint. Roth found similar benign puberty rites on the east coast of Cape York and in some more southerly coastal regions (1903:24-5).

Stanner, writing of the Daly River tribes, contrasts boys' and girls' experiences. For boys:

"initiation is no affair of the moment. For perhaps fifteen years it is a rod which disciplines the very routine of daily life ....."

Puberty in women is marked by less elaborate ritual. At the onset of menstruation the girl is isolated outside the dirawur. Strict conventions of behaviour are imposed on her, the three most important being the same as for a boy about to undergo circumcision - the complete avoidance of water except for drinking, no speech or association with the other sex, and the assumption of a subdued, grave, submissive demeanor. The period ended, the girl undergoes a ritual washing, and then rites of reaggregation are carried out. Special emphasis is laid upon the resumption of social relationship with men who are neda, or "brother" to her. Complete avoidance from these during her
menstruation is most rigidly observed. During subsequent periods the avoidance is reimposed, but somewhat less rigidly" (1933:13-14).

The seclusion from the main camp, squatting over a hole and being smoked are common features which recur in descriptions of girls' menarcheal rites. Mention is also made of food taboos, special decorations and ritual washing. Subsequent menstruation may be only marked by a woman sleeping on the other side of the fire from her husband (McConnel, 1934:317, N.Qu.; Seligman, 1904:206, N.E.Qu.; R. and C. Berndt, 1964:153-4; Mountford and Harvey, 1941:161, S.A.).

Defloration and Introcision

The three further features which are often described as a part of a girl's initiation are defloration with finger or an instrument, introcision and ritual plural intercourse. Introcision is the term, apparently coined by Roth, to describe the genital operation performed on girls in some areas. He confused its usage by extending it to include the male genital operation. Introcision of women appears to have been an extended defloration; the use of a knife resulted in cutting of the perineum, but this cutting may not have been the primary aim. The ritual surrounding these events does vary in detail but nowhere is it extensive or elaborated.

1. It was asserted by some observers, chiefly N. von Miklucho-Maclay, that Aborigines performed ovariotomy to produce prostitutes who could never become pregnant. While one or two others accepted this and produced some supporting observations, others denied that it could occur. It seems likely that, as with nipple removal, the observation of an abnormal individual led to such fanciful explanations. For an account of these observations see Himes, 1936:40-1.
Ritual defloration of young girls is reported from north, central and South Australia, as well as east Queensland. Gason says of the Dieri, South Australia "at puberty no girl without exception is a virgin, it being a national custom to take her virginity at that age by force. The modus operandi being not by the natural means, but by binding the fingers round with human hair and using them to force the passage" (1894:169).

Lommel describes the initiation of girls among the Wunambul of north west Australia "The crude defloration is performed by an elder man of the same marriage group as the girl. He, so I was told, wraps round his finger some thread spun from kangaroo hair, and executes the defloration with it" (1950:160).

Basedow (1925) gives a detailed account of the various aspects of initiation for girls among the tribes of the north west. After a night of dancing the girl is lead away and told to squat on the ground. The men surround her and perform some ritual consisting of chanting and touching the girl with the flat wooden tjuringa. This is intended to dispel the pain and reduce the loss of blood during the operation. The girl then lies on her back with her head on the lap of one of the men.

"The instruments if any, which are used for the operation vary according to locality. In the central areas (Aluridja, Wongapitcha, Kukata), an ordinary stone-knife with resin shaft is used. The Victorian desert tribes employ cylindro-conical stones from six to eight inches long, and from one and a half to two inches in diameter. Among the tribes of
AREAS OF DEFLORATION, INTROCISION AND MULTIPLE RAPE AT PUBERTY
Key to Map p. 132.

The tribal group referred to in the ethnography has in several cases been deduced from the area or from a different spelling using the information in Tindale's *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, 1947. The original place name or spelling is bracketed.

<table>
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<td>(Ooldea, Berndt, 1944:230)</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>KUKATJA</td>
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<td>ARANDA</td>
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<td>WARAMANGA</td>
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<td>PORT DARWIN TRIBES</td>
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<td>ILIAURA</td>
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15. Jaroinga (Yaroinga, Roth, 1897:174-5)

16. Kalkadunga (Kalkadoon, Roth, 1897:174-5)

17. Pitapita (Pitta-Pitta, Mjöberg, 1918:529)
   (Pittapitta^, Roth, 1897:174)

18. Julaolinja (Ulaolinya and Glenormistin Tribes, Roth, 1897:174-5)

19. Jeljendi (Birdsville, Roth, 1897:175)

20. Dieri (Gason, 1894:169)


22. North Kimberleys (Basedow, 1925:256)

23. S.E. Kimberleys (Kaberry, 1939:234)
   (by women)

24. Duwal and Duwala (Murngin, Warner, 1937:76)
   (by husband alone)

25. Willman (Wheelman, Hassell, 1936:686)
   (with smooth stick by women)

   (Mathews, 1900b:80, reports defloration with fingers generally for some Northern Territory tribes)

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1. Roth's description of "tearing the vaginal orifice" with fingers only, but followed by plural rape is very similar to the descriptions which include the use of a stick or knife. It seemed appropriate to include it here. It is the most easterly report of introcision.
Negative reports are few. In the following tribes either details of a smoking ritual at puberty is given or else it is reported that no ceremony occurs.

Larakia (Basedow, 1927)

Wogait (Basedow, 1927)

Pintubi (Roheim, 1933:234-5)

Pitjantjara (Roheim, 1933:234-5)

Walbiri (Meggitt, 1962)

Bandjalang, N.S.W. (Calley, 1955:12,13)

Torres Straits (Seligman, 1904)
the northern Kimberly districts of Western Australia no real instrument is used at all, but the operator winds the index and middle fingers of his right hand together with a long piece of fur-string; and this device answers the same purpose as the above-named instruments" (1925:255-6).

Basedow reports that the reason given for this practice is the desire to offer the girl's pudicity to one of her spirit husbands.

Roth (1897) gives the most detailed account of girls' initiation in various areas of south west Queensland. I will present his material and that of other observers in full here though the accounts of plural intercourse are the topic of a later section.

"Among the Ulaolinya, as well as those tribes around Glenormiston, any ordinary corroboree is held during the day-time, and the young woman who has been fixed upon (at full development of puberty of course) is decoyed by some old woman to come outside the main body of the camp for the purpose of collecting pappa seeds, etc. She is stealthily followed by two or three men who, suddenly pouncing upon her, seize her by the wrists while other bucks, till now in ambush, come rushing upon the scene: she at once realises her position, and, despite all shrieks and intreaties (sic), is thrown on her back on to the ground, the old chaperone clearing away to a distance. Four "bucks" hold one on each limb, while another presses upon her stomach so as to compel her to draw her legs up: her thighs are now drawn apart and her eyes covered so as to prevent her seeing the individual, probably a very old man, who is beckoned up from some hiding-place to come and operate directly everything is
ready. This he does by slitting up a portion of the perineum with a stone-knife, and sweeping his three fingers round inside the vaginal orifice. Before this ceremony the woman was a *wa-pa-ri*: she is now a *ka-na-ri*, her attainment of full puberty having been publically celebrated. She is next compelled to undergo copulation with all the bucks present; again the same night, and a third time, on the following morning. In the first interval she is ornamented..... the pattern being worked in bands of charcoal and feather-down of red and white, the latter being stuck on with the blood, etc., obtained from her lacerated vagina. Subsequently to the multi-copulation, the semen is collected into a koolamon, mixed with water, and drunk as medicine: should there be no sick fellows in the camp, it is preserved in the vessel until required ..... 

Among the Yaroinga, three men under the leadership of one of her future husband's brothers catch the young woman, at the period of suitable physical development and throw her down ..... where she is held in position. The actual operator, sitting astride the woman's chest and neck cuts with a stone knife into the perineum downwards and forwards, turning the implement slightly upwards at the close of the incision. The haemorrhage is staunched with emu-feathers plugged into the wound. She is next of all feather-decorated ..... in red, white, and bluish-green colours - the last mentioned pigment being obtained from some form of copper ore. On the completion of this ornamentation she is temporarily on loan to her future husband's friends and others in camp, but there would appear to be no subsequent collection of the semen, as in the other districts .....
..... With the Kalkadoon tribe there is no special corroboree, etc. but the young woman ..... is just seized upon and cut, and publicly proclaimed an e-ra-ji ..... 

At Birdsville etc. a wooden stick of very hard wood about two feet long, with a representation of the extremity of a life sized penis rudely carved at the top, and thinned all the way down to the handle ..... is used for the purpose of tearing down the hymen and posterior vaginal wall" (1897:174-5).

According to Roth the Aborigines say that the purpose of the operation is to enlarge the vaginal orifice "not only for the convenience of the escaping progeny, as the men will allege, but also for the progenitor, as the women will say" (ibid). He also says that the perineum itself is actually lacerated and more or less ruptured with the stone knife. These are the tribes in the central south west of Queensland. Those to the north and east as reported by McConnell (1934:317) and Seligman (1904:205-6), as well as those cited earlier from Roth, do not practise defloration or introcision. Mathews gives the following description of girls' puberty rites in the Northern Territory:

"When the girls arrive at puberty the vaginal orifice is enlarged, the process varying in different tracts of the country. In some districts it is accomplished by a man inserting his fingers and using sufficient force to stretch the parts. A smooth stick prepared for the purpose, or a smooth stone of the requisite size and shape found in a water course, are also used for this operation. Over a very large geographical area the enlargement is effected by lacerating,
or cutting slightly into, the perineum with a stone knife. The mutilation, whether by forcible rupture or cutting, does not affect the uterus or ovaries in any way, and there is no apparent diminution of the women's child-bearing power. No woman is allowed to marry until this operation, in one form or another, has taken place" (1900a:76).

From central Australia, Spencer and Gillen's information conveys a similar picture:

"the operation ..... is usually conducted when the girl has reached the age of fourteen or fifteen. In the northern Arunta and Ilpirra the man to whom the girl has been allotted speaks to his unkulla men (father's sister's sons), and they, attended by other men who are unawa, - that is, lawful husbands of the girl, and an old ipmunna (mother's mother's brother), - take the girl out into the bush. The last-named then performs the operation with a stone knife, after having previously touched the lips of the vulva with a Churinga, so as to prevent excessive bleeding. Afterwards the ipmunna, unkulla, and unawa in the order here named, have intercourse with her. The ipmunna man then decorates her with fur-string, rat-tails, etc., and takes her to the camp of her allotted husband, to whom she then belongs, though he may most likely send her back again to the same men" (1904:134).

Some variations of the personnel involved are then described, for the Illiaura and the Kaitish and, the authors continue:
"In the Warramunga tribe the girl is taken to the selected spot near to the camp by an elder sister, who says to her, "Come with me, you and I walk along corroboree." Three tribal brothers who are *kulla-kulla* (lawful husbands) to her, the actual husband being in the middle, lie down full length side by side on the ground. The elder sister places the girl across them and the operation is performed by an old man who is *wankilli* (father's sister's son) to the girl, in the presence of all of the men and women who are in the camp ....." (ibid).

Finally Rohelm gives an account which shows close agreement with those of Roth, Mathews, and Spencer and Gillen. He uses information from the latter and from Strehlow as well as his own observations:

"When a girl arrives at marriageable age among the Arunta her future husband asks some of his *ankalla* and the other *noa* to take her out into the bush. They perform the operation called *atnaaraltakama* (vagina, aralta, hole, kama, to cut), that is, they enlarge the vagina with a stone knife, an operation that corresponds to the *para araltakama* of the men. A man who is *ipmana* to the girl first touches the labia with a *namatuna* in order to prevent a too great loss of blood. When the operation has been performed the *ipmana*, the *ankalla*, and the *noa* have access to her in the order named. The ceremony is often performed in connection with an ordinary corroboree. When it is over the women's head is decorated by the *ipmana* man with *alpita* and her body is painted all over with a mixture of fat and red ochre."
Among the southern Aranda the operation is performed by a man who is nimmera to the woman — that is, of the same class as the father of her future husband. The matter is discussed in camp in the presence of the women. The father-in-law walks up from behind, touches the woman on the shoulder, and tells her to follow him. The men who have access to her are the nimmera, ankalla, and last of all the noa.

In the Luritja tribe the operator is a tamu (paternal grandfather), and she has intercourse with the tamu, watchira (cousins) and kuri (husbands).

According to Strehlow, the explanation given by the Aranda is that the incision facilitates delivery. It is performed after the first menstruation. The girl is taken into the bush by her own brother, and then an ipmanna or chimia performs the operation, assisted by the ankalla and noa. Before this operation the girl is a kwara manta (girl closed), after it an arakutya (woman).

A few days after the operation the man who has made the incision goes the girl's camp. He lifts her and embraces her, and orders her always to be faithful to her husband. Then he has intercourse with her. The next night one of the ankalla follows, then it is the turn of her noa before she is finally handed over to her real husband. While Spencer says that among the Luritja the father's father is the operator, according to Strehlow the incision is made by the mother's father (kumarbi), aided by the grandmother's brother (altali), and it is also these men who have intercourse with the girl.

The western tribes, such as Pindupi and Pitchentara, have no equivalent to this ritual. Sometimes the husband may use a stone
knife, but he usually deflorates the girl (if she is still a virgin) with his penis. A Matuntara husband must have intercourse immediately after the operation, while the vagina is still bleeding. Then the wound will heal quickly. According to Ilpaltalaka, the order of intercourse is chimia, ankalla, noa, and the reason for performing the ceremony is that the entrance would be too tight" (1933:234-5).

Roheim gives myths explaining introcision as a means of facilitating intromission. Reference is also made to the taming effect of rape. A group of boys

"found two sisters. They immediately had intercourse with the elder sister, but they could not cohabit with the younger, for she was "too tight" ..... they decided to open the younger girl. After the operation they all had intercourse with her, and made her nguanga (quiet) ..... 

This myth shows the essential psychological factor of the ritual. From the point of view of the native male, there are only two kinds of women - those who grant his desires and those who refuse to do so, i.e. ..... "wild" ones and "quiet" ones ..... The ritual applies a shock treatment to the undeveloped sexuality of the female in order to break her resistance" (1933, 235-236).

Similar rites are described by Mjöberg (1918:529) also for the Pittapitta tribe, one of those studied by Roth. Winterbotham (1951: 465) has a second-hand report of "mutilation of the vulva" from Queensland. R. and C. Berndt (1944:228) report similarly for the Great Victorian Desert. For the Northern Territory Foelsche
(1894:194) reports the occurrence of introcision.

Discussion

Little has been written about the significance of girls' puberty rites. Strehlow asserts that introcision probably has no initiatory significance (1971:392). Twyman differs, asserting that while genital operations are part of a general pattern of mutilations the religious nature of the operations on girls is indicated by the sexual intercourse that follows (1960:214). While there certainly does seem to be mystical power associated with sexual intercourse it adds little to our understanding of puberty rites to call them religious because of the presence of sexual intercourse. It seems more reasonable to see the rites as an indication to women of their role as men's sexual objects and as shared assets in a man's world where the ethic of generosity must prevail. This is why a man's wife must be tamed and shared before he is given his full rights over her sexuality. This is well attested in Howitt's report that an elopement is preceded by the eloper informing certain other

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1. It has been suggested by Desmond Morris (1968:73) that defloration has a role in "pair bond" formation; because rupture of the hymen can be painful a girl only yields when strongly attracted to a particular male (Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance would support Morris's view.). There seems to be little support for Morris's version of this theory as girls seem to require social restraint if their defloration is to be delayed until puberty. Hiatt prefers to say "The premium on virginity could then be seen in broader perspective as an aspect of a widespread (if not universal) male preference for sole access to the sexual partner" (1972:45). Apart from an amendment that women also prefer not to share their sexual partners, I would agree with Hiatt. That is, men's ideological hegemony in many societies ensures that female virginity is highly valued. As Hiatt puts it, it is widely stressed that the gift of a wife "should come in a hymenial wrapping" (ibid). This gives a man a means of achieving first access to his wife. But Aborigines place emphasis on generosity and eschew ownership. Thus they forego this particular weapon with which to maintain domination. The reason for this is tied up with the whole social formation of which the generosity ethic is one part.
young men of his intention so that they could take advantage of their right of access before the couple left (1904:276).

It is noteworthy that there are few recent reports of deflowering and introcision. Warner reported for Arnhem Land that there is a minor defloration ceremony which is performed occasionally. A husband simply takes his wife to the bush and inserts his finger, tied with opossum string, into her vagina (1937:76). R. and C. Berndt assert that in western South Australia "The custom of defloration appears still to be flourishing" (1944:230). However, it is not clear if the introcision operation described is still being performed. Meggitt refers to Spencer and Gillen's and Roth's reports of manual defloration and vaginal introcision but stated that the Walbiri themselves deny that ritual defloration and vaginal introcision are, or have been, Walbiri customs. Some of the men told me that they were aware that neighbouring tribesmen, such as the Warramunga, performed the operations; but, they said, Walbiri men have no need to do so. As they take young (that is, pre-pubescent) girls to "grow up" as wives and copulate with them without delay, they simply rely on the act of coitus to achieve this end. I discussed the matter privately with a number of informants as to whether or not a girl's pubic hair was singed as a part of the rite. Another who mentions singeing of pubic hair at girls' puberty rites is Peterson (1970b:214). Meggitt makes mention of this practice by women in the same area during mourning ceremonies for their son, husband and brother-in-law (1962:320). Goodale reports that a husband singes his own and his deceased wife's pubic hair (1971:268).

1. These authors report conflict between informants as to whether or not a girl's pubic hair was singed as a part of the rite. Another who mentions singeing of pubic hair at girls' puberty rites is Peterson (1970b:214). Meggitt makes mention of this practice by women in the same area during mourning ceremonies for their son, husband and brother-in-law (1962:320). Goodale reports that a husband singes his own and his deceased wife's pubic hair (1971:268).

2. This explanation in fact parallels mine; I see marrying pre-pubescent girls and forcibly deflowering or introcising girls as functionally equivalent, though not physically equivalent.
men whose wives were from about eight to ten years old, and each man confirmed the statement" (1962:269-70).

Calley says of the Bandjalang (N.S.W.) that they do not practise mutilation of the genital organs or defloration. Like the Walbiri they said "The men can open them up just as well" (1955, Pt.2:13). My Rembarnga informants believed that the Alawa and other neighbouring tribes had an equivalent to circumcision for young girls. They said that a boomerang was used to make the hole bigger.

The sudden abandoning of girls' puberty rites after contact is no doubt partly to do with the minimal elaboration of the surrounding ritual. This may indicate that the practice was not firmly embedded in the traditional social structure. As with necrophagy there may have been some uneasiness about the practice traditionally. Thus sensitivity to white attitudes coupled with the increased freedom of women to avoid the rituals can go at least some way to explaining their demise.

Roheim sees women's attitudes expressed in the ceremonies. In discussing the female with regard to genital sexuality he says that women are always dominated by fear of the father's aggression. "This typically female attitude of sexuality is embodied ..... in the so-called initiation ceremonies of women ..... " (1933:234).

There is a flaw in Roheim's views which stems from his psycho-analytic approach. He is primarily seeking psycho-dynamics rather than social dynamics and thus ignores the power relations between the sexes as an independent variable. That the initiation ceremonies
which women undergo could be seen as an embodiment of their own
desires seems very questionable. How did the ceremonies come to
express women's attitudes? Do they not rather express men's
attitudes to women, to sexuality, and to the place women should
occupy? It seems that these ceremonies are very clearly an expression
of male interests.

However in the Kimberleys Kaberry found that women perform the
initiation rites of girls, including introcision:

"the old woman would feel the vulva of the young girl and then
break the hymen ..... In a later rite, the girl would be painted
with red ochre and the old woman, probably her mother's mother,
would lacerate the vaginal orifice, singing as she did so ..... The rite must be performed secretly away from the men or else
it has injurious after-effects on the girl. The men, too, sicken
if they heard songs which are dara:gu and also gunbu. Like sub-
incision introcision is looked on by the natives as a preparation
for marriage: it is carried out under the direction of the old
women: it has its taboos and mythical sanctions: it has its
ritual which sacralizes the operation and at the same time,
according to the women, allows of its performance with a
minimum of danger to the girl" (Kaberry, 1939:236).

Kaberry says that most of the 23 tribes she studied practise similar
rites. But among all the tribes she describes, the girl's puberty
rites are performed by women alone. No men may be present. If my
view that these rites serve to indicate women's place as pawns in
men's game is valid, how is it that in the Kimberleys it is women
who perform the operations? Again I would assert that it is the male ideology which is being served by the operation. Women are not training their daughters to follow a female pattern of initiation, but are preparing them for their marriages. This is one of a number of examples which will be detailed of women cooperating in their own subordination. As White says "Moreover women's own myths and rituals reflect and reinforce the female subservient role. Male dominance is therefore validated by both the men's and women's religious life" (1975:140).

A final point concerns the relationship between the rites, the age of marriage and the stage at which copulation occurs. The operation is more extreme where girls marry late. Where they marry young and are copulated with early there is no need to "shock their undeveloped sexuality". As shown on the map, it is the central areas of the continent that had introcision rites, commonly followed by institutionalized plural rape. These are also the areas where girls marry after puberty. In northern Arnhem Land, and among the Tiwi, girls marry as young as eight years, and there are no initiation operations or plural intercourse. While this correlation of late marriage with harsh initiation cannot be exactly demonstrated, the functional equivalence of early marriage and pre-pubescent copulation on the one hand, and introcision and institutionalized rape on the other is reasonable on the most general psychological principles. It should be added here that even in those areas where copulation is not supposed to occur until after puberty, such as among the Tiwi (Goodale, 1971:45), there can be no guarantee of this. This point will be explored further in the discussion of coercive sexual practices.
C. INSTITUTIONALIZED RAPE

Reference has been made in the preceding section to what has been called "ritual plural intercourse". This is the Berndts' term for what others might call gang rape. I intend to use the term "institutionalized rape" and to extend the discussion by first examining attitudes to non-institutionalized rape in Aboriginal society and then considering the range of contexts in which institutionalized rape occurs. There is a range of situations apart from marriage described in the literature where men are given "access" to women or a woman, and other occasions where the woman must take part in ceremonial sexual licence and be lent. These various situations will be described from the most painful and humiliating for the girl to the least.

There is a danger that because of the nature of the material which I am presenting women will appear as passive victims of pervasive male violence. This is certainly not my intention. I wish to establish first that women are oppressed sexually contrary to the views of several authors on the subject. Then I will show the ways in which this oppression is unsuccessful in subjugating women.

Illegal Rape

Rape as an act committed by individuals is probably of rare occurrence among Australian Aborigines. R. and C. Berndt

1. It should be noted that the Aranda do not apparently make these distinctions as Roheim reports that "The term used to describe this first intercourse or rape is mbanja ..... the term refers to those instances of coitus in which force was applied by the male" (1974:228-9).
imply that force does occur when sexual attraction is not mutual, but "its disadvantages are obvious" (1964:160). Roth describes the punishment for rape:

"Extreme variations are to be noted in the light with which rape is regarded. On the Bloomfield, the offence is recognised and punished by death, speared by the husband's or mother's brother, or friends collectively: occasionally the offender may be spared his life, though severely maimed, when happening to have powerful friends. At Cape Bedford, the ravisher is speared (but not unto death), or cut with a wommera, the punishment being inflicted by the woman's betrothed or actual husband. On the Tully River, the condition of affairs is such that rape is not interfered with, unless the actual or betrothed husband chooses to consider himself aggrieved" (1906:9).

We should observe caution about taking these reports too literally. The last only is Roth's own observation. It is clear that adultery rather than rape could be referred to and without an indication of whether the woman herself complained and was being avenged there is no certainty as to who was offended. The only other reference which seems clearly to refer to individual rape is where a term is given for "a man who lies in wait for a woman, either with or without her consent, and not caring whether she is Noa to him or not" (Howitt, 1904:187).
Punitive Rape

Strehlow says "I doubt whether the normal aboriginal male has ever been guilty of rape in the sense of forcing a female who was not prepared\(^1\) for the sexual act" (1971:537). He also says, quoting Spencer and Gillen, that a woman who has committed incest is "handed over to all men in camp as their common property for a time" (ibid, 504).

Strehlow's view then does not deny that this sexual punishment occurs; he is saying that it is an institution of punishment and thus something different from the kind of situation where rape is a crime committed privately and illegally. On this argument, calling such sexual punishment rape would be equivalent to calling an official flogging an assault. However the argument does not stand up to scrutiny. The nature of the actions is sexual and thus they have distinct and far-reaching implications that are not present if one thinks of a formal chastisement. Rape, defined as sexual intercourse against the will of the victim, is in fact committed in such cases. The use of the term "ritual plural intercourse" obscures the fact that violence is done to the girls.

The situations which can warrant punishment by rape are resistance of a husband's sexual demands, adultery, incest or infidelity, and the violation of men's ceremonial secrets. Doyle reports:

"The punishment for adultery was that when a woman was *taramu*, that is shifty, wanton, adulterous, the husband complained to

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1. Presumably this refers to the girls knowing what is about to occur.
his kindred, who carried the matter before the headman, and if the charge was found to be true, her punishment was to be taken without the camp, and to be handed over to all comers for that night, and her cries were not heeded" (in Howitt, 1904:207-8, Kamilaroi, N.S.W.).

Of course we know now that the manner of deciding a woman's guilt is unlikely to have been thus, but this is not to dismiss the whole report which otherwise contains a number of accurate observations. Among the Wotjobaluk, marriage was not accompanied by access to the bride by anyone other than her husband. Howitt says "only in the case of misconduct of a wife did she become common to others" (1904:245). Howitt further reports of the same area:

"When a man ran off with the wife of another, the husband, accompanied by all the men at the camp, married and single, who were not related to her, pursued the fugitives. If caught, the man would be severely beaten by the pursuers, and the women either speared, perhaps in the legs, or be given to the men who had followed her to be common to them for a time" (ibid, 247).

Among the Yuin also when an elopement occurs, "The girl, when caught, became for the time common to all the men who pursued her, that is, who might have lawfully become her husband" (ibid, 264).

1. There was no such judicial process presided over by a headman in Aboriginal society. For the manner of punishment of transgressors see Meggitt (1962:58) and Hiatt (1965:127ff).
From north Queensland Roth reports:

"For infidelity, the husband or his brothers may publicly ridicule, maim, or even kill the wife .... Should the wife run away with her lover, it is the husband, or more often, his blood- and group- brothers who bring her back: she may be violated lawfully by any of these assistants on the homeward journey, in addition to any chastisement to be subsequently inflicted upon her by her spouse ...." (1906:6).

He further reports that on the Tully River older men can "tamper" with young girls and "quite young children (are) actually handed over to the old men with a view to their being "broken in"" (ibid, 9). This taming motive is also reported by C. Strehlow for the Aranda of central Australia:

"If a young wife becomes obstinate and refuses to live with her husband, the man calls his arkalla together and the ebmanna of his wife who had intercourse with her, as before mentioned when she was sub-incised, and requests them to overcome her obstinacy. They take her to the bush and have intercourse with her. If she goes back he takes her back but if she remains obstinate he puts her away and casts her off and marries another" (1907:1244).

He adds that this is a rare occurrence (ibid). Spencer and Gillen say that this punishment is used when a woman commits incest (1927:351). Among the Kular of the Kimberleys, Kaberry says that
"if a man were dissatisfied with his wife, he would send her to the old men ...." (1935:424). As she does not state the purpose, rape is probably implied. Further, "If a man is wanted for some offence he may send his wife to the avenging party and thus avert punishment" (ibid). The wife here must accept being given as a temporary gift in expiation of her husband's crime. Kaberry mentions elsewhere that a promiscuous woman is given a special term and is regarded with contempt (1939:151).

There is a certain irony in the fact that women are, in some of the cases mentioned, punished for sexual crimes by sexual punishments. It is quite clear that the sexual intercourse which is prescribed and that which is proscribed is defined by the husband and kinsmen who use kinship ideology to justify their definitions.

So far I have described cases where sexual punishment is used for sexual offences. A similar punishment is sometimes meted out if a woman violates men's secrets. Spencer and Gillen for instance report for the Arunta:

"a woman, being very thirsty, ventured into the water-hole to drink and saw the sacred pool and the ceremonial stone. She was detected in the act, and after a great deal of what the natives call "growling" at her, it was decided to punish her by making her for the time being common property to all the men - a punishment which is not infrequently inflicted after the committal of some serious offence, as an alternative to that of being put to death. In consequence of this, men of all classes had intercourse with her, and when this was over she was returned to her proper Anua man" (1927:168).
From Cape York, Sharp describes a similar situation, among the Yir Yoront, "A woman found by the head men to have violated the secrecy of the totemic ceremonies is punished by beating, and some of the men are given an opportunity to copulate with her" (1934:41). Piddington reports from central Australia that if a woman sees one of the sacred objects, a man can point out her offence and ask her husband if he can have sexual intercourse with her in order to expiate the offence. "If either [husband or wife] refuses they are both killed" (1932:85). Elsewhere Roheim says that if an Aranda women sees a man's blood flowing from the veins the men must either kill her or a big group of men must have intercourse with her. In both cases they reassert their manhood which is in danger if their blood is seen by a woman (1945:171).

Meggitt writes of the Walbiri from a little further south "Moreover in the old days, a woman who trespassed would have been killed; nowadays, the men are likely to thrash her with boomerangs and perhaps rape her" (1962:53). Peterson says that at the fire ceremony among the Walbiri:

"In the past there was group copulation with a promiscuous girl immediately prior to the singeing of the pubic hair; there is some indication that this may have taken place in this ceremony. I was not well enough known to the people to establish this for certain" (1970b:214, f.n.).

This could be another case of sexual punishment or it may refer to the use of sex for ritual purposes, further instances of which will be described below.
Kaberry gives an example of a man blackmailing his mother-in-law into having intercourse with him by showing her a sacred object. She says "The Djaru admitted that men sometimes used the gunari to compel women to have intercourse. Of course the risk run is very great, and if discovered would result in death" (1939:229). Meggitt also suggests that medicine men might use the threat of sorcery to compel a woman to have sexual intercourse with them, but that this was unfavourably regarded (1964:72).

The reports of widows being made available to the men for a time after their husband's death seem to imply an element of punishment. Roth says that cruelty was shown to a widow because it was said that her jealousy had stopped her husband enjoying other women and food (1908:8). She may have been blamed for his death also (Berndt, 1964:285). Widows being made common property is mentioned by Smith (1880:13), Howitt (1904:252), and Spencer and Gillen (1904:136).

R. and C. Berndt conclude "sexual relations may be used as a means of social control, to punish a woman for "too much running around" by forcing her to be intimate with a number of men, one after another'' (1964:160). This description hardly does justice to the situation. Intimacy is not an appropriate term for a woman's experience of multiple rape. The main feature of the situation is that women's bodies are abused in a physically humiliating and probably painful manner. Perhaps it is difficult to ascertain the degree of psychological humiliation. It might be argued that women are less affected by forced plural intercourse when it is a known continuing institution; this is probably true. While cultural
variation would probably be minor with respect to the physical pain involved, the psychological effect would depend a good deal on the meaning given to such acts in a particular society. However this is a deceptively simple assertion. Some clarification can be achieved by separating two aspects of the effect that can be expected. Firstly there is the level at which the work of Brownmiller is directed. She has made the provocative statement that rape is "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (1975:15). That is, women are being told in no uncertain terms that they are inferior to men and that men can do as they want with them. Institutionalized rape for punishment would seem to fulfil this function most effectively. But there is another question which Brownmiller does not take up and that is whether the traumatic impact of rape on the psyche of the individual girl or woman will be of a similar order in varied social environments. As a working hypothesis I will assume that where plural rape is institutionalized, as in some areas of Aboriginal Australia, girls probably do not suffer the sexually and psychologically debilitating effects which are often the result of rape in Western Societies.

Rape in Marriage

We have seen that in central and south east Australia, the practice of female initiation commonly included "access" by certain kin categories, and that this institutionalized plural rape sometimes followed immediately on the actual cutting of the girl's hymen with a stone knife. Typical is this description of Roth. Among the Pitta-Pitta of east Queensland, after a forceful defloration "Other men come forward from all directions, and the struggling victim has to submit in rotation to promiscuous coition with all the "bucks"
present ..... At this ceremony, any male of any other paedomatronym than the women's, except a blood relative, is permitted to have connection" (Roth, 1897:174).

In this section I want to consider whether there are any other occasions when sexual coercion may occur in marriage. The following accounts indicate that this is unlikely in northern Australia. Goodale's description of the girl's "initiation" into her sexual duties among the Tiwi is probably typical of northern Arnhem Land and shows a marked contrast both in sexual terms and in lack of ritual with the situation to be described in other parts of Australia. She says that sexual instruction is a gradual process. The husband

"begins by deflowering her with his finger, and perhaps only after a year does he have actual intercourse with her. Sexual intercourse is considered by the Tiwi to be the direct and only cause of breast formation, growth of pubic and auxiliary hair, menarche and subsequent menstrual periods. Only the husband has the right to copulate with his young wife, and it is not common that a girl will form extra marital relationships before her puberty" (1971:45).

Sharp's description for north Queensland is similarly of a gradual assumption of marriage and he says there is no ritual marking puberty for girls (1933:427). Kaberry also says for the Kimberleys, "Full sexual intercourse was not allowed until after puberty" (1939:94).
On the other hand there are some reports of plural rape at marriage in south east Australia and Queensland, without the accompanying operation of defloration or introcision. This is probably what Collins is referring to when he says that there are several known instances of young girls being much and shamefully abused by the males in N.S.W. (1798:563). The Victorian Parliamentary report of 1859 reported that compulsory cohabitation was enforced for a time on a girl by a number of men (1859:32). Willshire says that after initiation women are "at the mercy of all who may get hold of them" (in Malinowski, 1963:97, similarly Oldfield, ibid, 99). Howitt reports that among some tribes the *jus primus nootis* includes all the men present at the camp (1885:804; S.E.A). Gason and Williams describe plural intercourse as the major feature of girls' puberty rites (in Howitt, 1904:664, 667). Roth describes a similar occurrence if a bride resists her husband "she is dragged by him to his camp and the marriage consummated, after which any of her husband's group mates who have rendered assistance may claim the temporary loan of her" (1908:7). And in the case of abduction "if successful those who have rendered help will be rewarded with a promiscuous sexual orgie at the expense of the captive bride" (ibid, 11). In one group he further reports that a man "may satisfy his desires by force if necessary, irrespective of any age, unless the girl is already married, when he can do so by getting her husband's permission" (ibid, 12). This last statement refers to those "blood-sisters" to whom he has a right.

1. It is of course not always clear when coercion has been used. In this case for instance girls might agree that these events are a necessary part of their initiation. But it is clear from the accounts that force is used, and this is sufficient basis for designating it as rape.
There is also, as in one of the cases reported by Roth the possibility of a new young wife being raped by her husband. The ideal among the Tiwi as described by Goodale, of a gradual initiation into sexual intercourse, seems to be the stated rule in most of northern Australia. Warner (1937:158), Kaberry (1939:94) and Roheim (1933:230) assert that a man won't have intercourse with his wife until she reaches puberty. McConnel reports that men take quite young girls under their charge "to prevent interference from other suitors", but she asserts that a husband does not copulate with his wife until she reaches puberty. There are some suggestions that this ideal or rule may not always be observed. For one thing it conflicts with the other belief reported for example from the Tiwi by Goodale that copulation is the cause of menstruation (1971:45). Also Meggitt reports that Walbiri men copulate with their pre-pubescent wives (1962:270). Thirdly, in a society where copulation in childhood seems to be generally accepted (e.g., Kaberry, 1939:66), it is hard to imagine much force behind any such rule, and nowhere is there a suggestion that there are any sanctions against copulating with a pre-pubescent wife.

In fact the most general understanding of human sexuality would lead one to guess that some men would be impatient in this situation especially young men who have had to wait years beyond their sexual maturity for a regular sexual partner. This is the source of the belief, stated firmly by my Rembarnga informants, young and old, that old husbands are better. This exact reason was given by two older women: a young man cannot sleep beside a girl and leave her alone; he can't wait. Younger women said young men were "cheeky" and "rough", always excepting the particular young man the informant
was married to herself! These expressions may be euphemisms for
greater sexual demands made by young men. However it is clear from
teasing and joking comments that women do recognise the superior
sexual attractions of younger men.

R. and C. Berndt also say that old men are considered better
than young ones because they are less jealous (1964:169). But
elsewhere these authors beg the question I am asking by simply
asserting that

"It is not at all demoralising or socially out of place,
from the natives aspect, for a young girl of nine years
or so to go to her husband and live with him as his wife, and
at the same time assume her sexual responsibilities. It
should be remembered that the girl rarely goes unwillingly,
nor is she raped; she has already been prepared for adult
coitus by boys of about her own age; and by going to her
husband she is safely provided for, and to some extent
sexually protected" (1951:92).

Apart from the questions about what "safely provided for" means
in this context, and what it is that a girl is sexually protected
from, this statement is unsatisfactory in dismissing the possibility
that a girl may indeed sometimes be raped in this situation. The
fact that she may have "been prepared" by boys of her own age,
does not mean that she is ready to copulate with a mature man.

Discussing the sexual relations between young girls and their
mature and often old husbands the same authors take a character-
istically Panglossian view:
"She wants to feel the size of an adult penis that completely fills her vagina, as well as the strength behind a physically mature man's ejaculation and bodily pressure. The man, on the other hand, enjoys forcing his way into a young girl's vagina" (1951:92).

While the latter view, that men commonly enjoy forcing their way into a young girl's vagina, is borne out by general information on male sexuality, there is absolutely no support from other quarters for the view that young girls enjoy being the partners in this activity. I would not deny that it may sometimes be so, especially in cases where the girl has had earlier sexual experience. However without details of the sex or age of the informant it is too easy to suspect that this is a male view of the matter, and that if some girls do enjoy coitus with an adult male, it is more often the case that they have no opportunity to air their views on the matter. There are reports of girls resisting their husbands, and we have seen that this resistance is one reason for sexual punishment. There is the further question of what level of coercion is considered rape; it may be that girls commonly behave as suggested by White where she says "I suspect that the women's myths reflect an attitude on the part of the woman best summed up in the old proverb, 'If rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it' " (1975:124). But as is widely attested, this is not as easy as it sounds. I am concerned here to counter the view that girls were always content, not to argue that they never were. If they did not want coitus, or marriage, there was little opportunity for them to object because of their youth. The situation is the same as with marriage in any patriarchal society. While marriage legitimizes the sexual relationship between the
partners, the superior power which men wield, both physical and social, ensures that their desires will usually prevail.

Another occasion when plural rape occurs in the context of marriage is when a woman is abducted. Small (1898:46) and Davis (in Smyth, V.2, 1878:316) asserted that a stolen woman becomes common property for one night. Howitt described mock abductions followed by serial copulation with individual women (1904:193). It seems that Howitt is unclear about whether the abduction was in fact arranged; if it was, the arrangement was not made with the woman.

D. CEREMONIAL LICENCE

Ceremonial licence usually refers to copulation which takes place in a ceremonial context. I will be dealing with all occasions where sexual action is a part of magic, ritual or ceremony. But while the term ceremonial licence is apt from the men's point of view, it does not reflect the woman's part in these events. Men are using women licentiously for various purposes such as for hospitality, to confirm alliances or to increase the efficacy of ceremonies. Thus there is only a fine line between some of the material to be described here and the situation of rape discussed in the previous section.

Several authors describe the large ceremonies at which ceremonial licence occurs. There is little concern among these writers as to whether the women have any independence in these matters. It is apparent from a number of the examples that they must usually
cooperate. Other examples show that men are obliged to participate also. But it is apparent that the whole operation is under the direction of the men. We may speculate about whether women did object covertly being used in this way or whether they usually enjoyed this orgiastic sexuality. Unfortunately evidence of subversive actions of women are rare. There are one or two reports of the women making independent choices about their sexual behaviour and men complying with them, indicating that women are not complete sycophants.

The use of sex for purely magical purposes is most clearly depicted by Howitt in his description of the exchange of wives which was ordered to counter the Aoura Australis (1904:277). He also says that wives were exchanged to avert a threatened calamity such as when a great sickness was said to be coming down the Murray River (ibid, 195).

There are several different situations to which the term ritual copulation can be applied. In these cases the sexual actions of the men symbolise acceptance and trust. Spencer and Gillen say that women go with messengers for a purpose.

"In the case of the Urabunna tribe it is usual to send as messengers, when summoning distant groups, a man and a woman, or sometimes two pairs, who are Piraungaru [lawful sexual partner], to each other. The men carry as evidence of their mission bunches of cockatoo feathers and nose bones. After the men have delivered their message and talked matters over with the strangers, they take the women out a short distance
from the camp, where they leave them. If the members of the

group which they are visiting decide to comply with their
request, all men irrespective of class have access to the
women; but if it be decided not to comply with the request,
then the latter are not visited. In much the same way, when
a party of men intent on vengeance comes near to the strange
camp of which they intend to kill some member, the use of
women may be offered to them. If they be accepted, then
their quarrel is at an end, as the acceptance of this favour
is a sign of friendship. To accept the favour and then not
to comply with the desire of the people offering it, would
be a gross breach of tribal custom" (1899:97-8).

Howitt says that among the Dieri, South Australia, women take
important messages to neighbouring tribes. As they are accompanied
by men in their marriage class (though not their husbands), it is
not shown that the women rather than the men are responsible for the
messages. The women are expected to be "free with their favours"
and if the mission is successful there is a period of sexual
licence (1904:682). Similar reports are made by Basedow (1925:254)
and in the Victorian Parliamentary report of 1858 (p. 4).

T.G.H. Strehlow gives a somewhat different example of the ritual
use of sex "The young men selected for the warlike expedition, during
the night prior to their departure, were permitted to have sexual
intercourse with women who were otherwise strictly forbidden to them,
for instance women who belonged to the same class as their sisters or
their mothers-in-law" (1971:265).
Ceremonial licence, the copulation which takes place as a part of large ceremonies, is described by Spencer and Gillen thus:

"Every day two or three women are told off to attend at the corroborée ground, and, with the exception of men who stand in the relation to them of actual father, brother, or sons, they are, for the time being, common property to all the men present on the corroborée ground" (1899:97).

They say further:

"In the case of the women who attend the corroborée it is supposed to be the duty of every man at different times to send his wife to the ground, and the most striking feature in regard to it is that the first man who has access to her is the very one to whom, under normal conditions, she is most strictly tabu ..... as young and old men alike have to do so at some time or other, it is impossible to regard it as a right which is forcibly taken by strong men from weaker ones" (ibid, 98-9).

These authors describe similar ceremonial licence elsewhere and say "The idea is that sexual intercourse assists in some way in the proper performance of the ceremony, causing everything to work smoothly and preventing the decorations from falling off" (1904:137). Davis describes the practices at great corroborées. A woman will set up a small fire 300 feet or so away from the dance ring and from
time to time a young man will join her, have intercourse and return to the dance (in Smyth, V.2, 1878:319).

Much of Howitt's discussion of marriage is directed to showing that a form of group marriage existed. He uses the term noa to mean potential spouse, that is, those in the correct marriage class Tippa-malku means spouse and pirrauru husband or pirrauru wife apparently refers to those with whom a sexual relationship is legitimate at certain times, particularly brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law (1904:177ff). He asserts that the pirrauru relationship is a group marriage by which "a man is privileged to obtain a number of wives from his noas in common with other men of his group, while a woman's wish can only be given effect to by the consent of her Tippa-malku husband. On the other hand, however, she cannot refuse to receive a Pirrauru husband when he is assigned to her by the ceremony referred to" (1904:187).

Spencer and Gillen stress the constraints on the men as well as the women "There are certain occasions upon which, according to tribal custom he is bound to lend her to other men. Everything in this is regulated by custom" (1904:133). They describe the lending of wives during ceremonies and as part of the acceptance of messages (ibid, 138-9) and continue:

"It is only, of course, in connection with the performance of ceremonies or the sending out of messengers that this kind of

1. Davis wrote in Latin because, he says, these matters will only be of interest to ethnographers. What he means, of course, is that non-scholars should not be allowed to indulge their interest
irregular intercourse is allowed; under ordinary circumstances, for a man to have intercourse with a woman who does not belong to his group of lawful wives, would be a very grave offence and liable to punishment by death. When strangers visit a distant group they are usually offered the use of lubras, but these must belong to the group equivalent to the one from which, in each case, the man's own lubra comes in his own tribe" (ibid, 140).

Spencer and Gillen then continue to describe the rules of "group marriage" the existence of which they later repudiated. Roheim's view of ceremonial sexual licence stresses the enjoyment had by women. The following passage follows a description of one of the great ceremonies, the Itata:

"If a woman happens to fall in love with a man who belongs to the wrong class they can marry if the love affair originated at an Itata ..... The importance of these celebrations is undoubtedly very great in the life of a woman. The Itata means romance and public life, legalized licence and adventure. It means all these things also in the life of a man, yet relatively it occupies a more conspicuous part in the life of a woman because it is the only collective or public celebration in which she has her share" (1933:209-10).

1. The sections of earlier works which describe group marriage were omitted from their 1927 book. The substance of their observations did not alter. It was only necessary to alter the meaning of "noa" from wife to legitimate sexual partner for the behavioural observation to become a description of wife-lending.
He asserts that the ceremonial licence described by Spencer and Gillen is a different kind of licence, more like prostitution as the women have no choice (ibid, 212). He does not deny that this kind of situation occurs and makes no kind of general statement about the matter of choice. He stresses the general sexual excitement that accompanies these ceremonies, which appears to make the question of choice of a particular partner, by the women or man a secondary question. One point of an orgy is to reduce the significance of individual sexual preferences, so I would argue that women's choices in this context have limited significance. Roheim's view of the place of these ceremonies in the lives of the women is summed up when he is talking of the old women's part in them:

"For the old women the Itata means returning memories of happy days. The lovers of her prime, now old men but still heroes in her eyes, may claim her to revive old memories for a night. But at any rate she still shares in the amorous excitement of the group and finds pleasure in the dance and song. In other words, it is the principal sublimation of the primal scene situation afforded to them by society. Hence its character of legalized licence of semi-incestuous unions that are half-condoned, of old ties revived and of ceremonial prostitution" (1933:226).

Roheim concentrates on women's choices, their love magic and the advantages they take of opportunities for sexual adventure. In another context he says:
"Although it always takes persuasion of some sort for the woman to enter married life, this persuasion is not always a matter of brute force. Indeed, if one reads the description of the marriage ceremony as given by Spencer and Strehlow, the element of brute force seems to be completely absent" (ibid, 238).

I have recorded above the introcision operation and institutionalized rape which Spencer and Gillen and Strehlow both observed. As in his explanation of women's initiation rites, Roheim is not interested in the wider framework of the power relations between men and women within which these events take place. While I do not question the validity of his findings, his interpretation depends on seeing social events as expressing the psychological states of all those involved. My view is that power structures place significant constraints on the extent to which this is so.

R. and C. Berndt describe the situation thus:

"To create an atmosphere of goodwill and generally to obtain enjoyment sexual licence and erotic play are allowed to take place during the 'jama:lak'. This is carried out quite blatantly before either husband or wife, indeed one party "pushes" the other to take part. As with legalized pre- and extra-marital licence, the association is normally between men and women who call each other 'ma:mam (classificatory spouse). When the camp is large, with an influx of "stranger" groups, the choice is wide, and is mostly made by a husband for his

\[1\] A secular ceremony held for diversion during large ceremonial gatherings (R. and C. Berndt, 1951:142).
wife. But women are allowed to take the initiative with or without their husband's consent; public opinion would soon squash any demonstrations of jealousy. It is often conventional for the wife, when told by her husband to get up and "go 'jama:lek" towards a particular 'ma:mam, to act shyly and pretend that she might offend her husband if she took him at his word. However, after a little pushing she goes only too willingly; for she likes variety in sexual intercourse, and this is an excellent opportunity to choose a desirable 'ma:mam who may not have been accessible under the extra-marital relationship. Young girls disport themselves with evident enjoyment, while the men to whom they give their attention usually behave shyly, particularly if they are strangers not used to such public demonstrations" (1951:142-3).

This somewhat lyrical account leaves little room for the expression of conflict or jealousy. However, as there is no information about those that are not chosen, yet perhaps must watch a young wife disport herself, or observe a husband being seduced, one is led to suspect that the description may be incomplete.

Kaberry's general statement about ceremonial licence makes it clear that she does not regard it as conflicting with women's or men's desires "The ceremonial licence which occurs after some of the corroborees is, together with its other functions, another means by which mutual passion may be indulged" (1939:253).

But Kaberry's conclusion is that "We cannot assert that the general sexual licence that follows a corroboree subordinates and degrades
the woman any more than it does the man; and in love making the woman sometimes takes the initiative" (1939:153).

There are two misconceptions here it seems to me. Firstly, the issue is not one of degradation which has overtones of missionary attitudes, but whether women's wishes (conscious or not) are systematically subordinated to men's. Secondly, though I would argue that psychological states are relevant to any enquiry of this kind, the fact is that men and women are not in structurally equivalent positions. Thus even if one were able to show that the sexes felt themselves to be equally sexually satisfied, the structural superiority of men over women is still a basic feature of the ceremonies, and this ensures that women's desires will in general be subordinated to those of men.

Warner also implies that women enjoy these liaisons. He says "Although intercourse is not to be consumated between the ceremonial partners until the last night of the ceremony, and then only for ceremonial purposes, there are a considerable number of clandestine meetings between these mates before that time" (1937:307). However Warner's detailed depiction of the way distant tribal brothers arrange to exchange their wives leaves no doubt that the exchange is between men. These men also exchange gifts after ascertaining their relationship (ibid, 306). The following description indicates that individuals may not always be eager to participate. On the final occasion,

"one woman may have sexual relations with several men because there is always a lack of women in the group attending the ceremony. If a woman shows dislike for her ceremonial partner
and refuses to join him, she is told she will be ill and make her husband and ceremonial mate ill, and she is forced to comply with her husband's demand. If a man refuses, the woman sends word that Muit will make him ill, and that she too will be sick" (ibid, 307).

Warner was told by the men that "sometimes we kill that woman by magic, and throw spears at them if they wont do it" (ibid, 308). Thus it can be seen that women and sometimes men object to taking part in this ceremonial copulation, but they will be forced to do so. It is necessary to "make everybody clean" (ibid, 307).

Rose objects to the designation "ritual" for such promiscuous sexual relations as occur at large ceremonial gatherings. "It is the writer's view that to call such sexual relations "ritual" is merely to give them a name without furthering our understanding of them". He proceeds to give an explanation which also does not achieve that object. The argument seems merely to state that as sexual group promiscuity could not occur when Aborigines live in individual polygamous family units, therefore it occurs when there are large assemblages. I must give the full quotation where he advances this extraordinary view.

"What we find in Aboriginal society are two conflicting tendencies: on the one hand there is the movement for the individual polygynous/gerontocratic family unit to split away from the group or horde, and exist independently - even in isolation - for months at a time. On the other hand there is the tendency for the groups to come together for weeks
or sometimes months when ceremonies would be performed. For a large assemblage of Aborigines to live in a restricted locality for any period presupposes an abundance of foodstuffs, while contrariwise, the material conditions leading to the splitting up of the group into individual polygynous family units are presumably less bountiful. Clearly, sexual group promiscuity is hardly likely to occur under the latter conditions because groups of men and women do not live in close proximity to each other. The obverse of this coin, is that when material conditions are conducive and food is in abundance large numbers of males and females tend to congregate together and sexual promiscuity occurs between groups of men and women. At these times the polygynous/gerontocratic family unit would tend to dissolve. To call this "ritual" promiscuity is to obscure the issue because under one set of material conditions promiscuity can occur, while under another - perhaps we can call it the "normal" - set of material conditions, when the polygynous/gerontocratic family unit is reconstituted, promiscuity cannot occur or can only occur on a very reduced scale" (1960:176, f.n.).

It is implied that to describe the material conditions which enable promiscuity to occur is a sufficient explanation of its occurrence. But of course promiscuity does not always occur when it could. The reason for the designation "ritual" here is that it is stated to be a part of the ceremony and is believed to add to its efficacy. The observation that these large gatherings do require particular material conditions is important, but has no especial relevance to the explanation of the existence of promiscuous coition as a part of the ceremony.
There is evidence that incest rules are disregarded at ceremonies (Spencer and Gillen, 1899:96-7, 1904:138-9) and at defloration (Roth, 1897:174). T.G.H. Strehlow describes the encouragement of incestuous relations at ceremonies. He writes "The moral code was relaxed during festival gatherings; but orgies of this kind led to severe fights later on" (1971:493). He further says that married people were permitted considerable sexual licence at major ceremonial gatherings. Irregularities were actively encouraged even across strictly forbidden kin-group classes (ibid, 521). Erotic and irreverent dances were performed to stir the passions after which women followed men to the bush and had intercourse. Minor marital infidelities were permitted and even encouraged (ibid, 643). Malinowski in his detailed survey of the information available on this topic in 1912 says "A very important and striking feature of ceremonial licence in general, is that the sexual intercourse, which takes place on that occasion, is not subject to class rules" (1963:106). He was at pains to show that such licence and the custom of wife-lending within certain specified kinship categories, did not imply a previous state of primitive promiscuity as others were asserting.

"We may remark about the sexual features of social life in Australia in general, that far from bearing any character of indiscriminate promiscuity on the whole, they are, on the contrary, subject to strict regulations, restrictions and rules .... The principle of class exogamy is maintained in the majority of cases: so the Pirrauru relation is subject to class rule, as is also wife-lending, wife exchange, and the rare cases of licence among unmarried girls and widows.
But the licence occurring during religious, totemic, and other ceremonies is, as we have seen above, not subject to the class rule. Even the most prohibited and tabooed degree - that between a man and his mother-in-law - is violated by custom" (ibid, 123).

It seems probable that where incest prohibitions are violated, the acts are seen as ritually powerful. It is men who control these rituals and, as with the majority of accounts of Aboriginal ritual life, we have very little information about women's independent view of them.

E. WIFE LENDING

I will now complete this enquiry into sexual relations by examining what amounts to a residual category; occasions when wives are lent by their husbands other than in the contexts discussed above. Authors who intended to demonstrate that group marriage existed (e.g., Howitt), really showed that legitimate sexual partners other than spouses were recognised. As virtually all women are married, all legitimate extra-marital sexual unions could be described as wife-lending. I wish to determine the extent of this practice, as well as the differential constraints on men and women in the area known as wife-lending. Unfortunately the concerns of ethnographers with kinship ideology and marriage rules limited their interest in recording behavioural details necessary for an analysis of how far women could choose their sexual partners.

Thomas argued convincingly in 1906 that the sharing of women was an extension of the generosity ethic. As some incest prohibitions applied to these relationships too, they could not be designated as
promiscuous. The right of access at initiation "cannot be a survival from a time when no marriage regulations were known, for the simple reason that the custom itself bears unmistakeable traces of regulations of a comparatively advanced type (1906:146). He adds, "it is impossible to base an argument for primitive promiscuity on a state of things which is admittedly not primitive unless we have good prima facie grounds for regarding the custom as a survival. There is nothing in the present case to show that it is not a magical rite" (ibid). From the point of view of the men it would seem to me important to recognise that sharing of the wife even before being given full rights to her, and at other times during marriage, limits the development of possessiveness. As will be described below possessiveness as evidenced in the expression of jealousy is by no means done away with. However these practices of enforced sharing of wives could be seen as a public affirmation of the generosity ethic which pervades so much of Aboriginal life. The fact that women are the objects of generosity between men is another facet of this pattern.

Roth describes the marital state as follows "The husband has the right to loan, exchange, sell or divorce his wife, who has no reciprocal powers: he can kill her if he likes, though for such an outrage he may be called to account by her relatives" (1906:6). He further writes "to a friend, the native invariably shows every hospitality, the sincerest expression of which is the temporary loan of his wife" (ibid, 8). In another article the same author says "For, according to his mood, a husband here may or may not object to his wife having intercourse with any of his group- or blood-brothers, she being certainly punished were she to suffer the
embraces of a member of any other exogamous group; on the other hand, during her husband's absence she can without fear of any consequences, regularly sleep with any of his blood brothers" (1908:12).

Roth's quaint expressions such as "suffer the embraces of" are no doubt reflections of his somewhat Victorian notion of female sexuality rather than a description of Aboriginal women. It is clear that Roth's observations indicate that a man could and should lend his wife in contexts other than those specified above.

Kaberry reports wife exchange at intertribal gatherings and at circumcision. She also describes a wife being loaned as expiation for husband's guilt. Further, "A medicine man may also send his wife to avenge a death" (Kaberry, 1935:424). She also says "The husband would appear to possess the right to send his wife to the group of men who are intent on putting him to death for some breach of tribal law. They have intercourse with her, and return home without taking further steps against him. Some of the women seemed to regard this particular practice with dislike and disgust" (1939:152).

Roheim says of the central Australian people, that the right of a man to marry any women of his marriage class, his noa, extends to potential sexual rights, whether or not he or they are already married.

"His exercise of this right depends largely upon the temperament and the fighting abilities of the woman's husband. The husband may allow his wife to go with her seducer, or he may duel with
her seducer .... If the husband's wish is to keep his wife, he may fight off his rival and then punish his wife to prevent a recurrence of the incident" (1974:226).

Roheim gives an illustrative incident wherein a young woman claims that her cross-cousin attempted to rape her. Her noa (potential husband) is jealous, disbelieves and punishes her. Her husband believes and avenges her. But Roheim gives no indication of the woman being anything but a passive victim of these passions (ibid, 226-7).

Meggitt describes the temporary exchange of wives among the Walbiri:

"Normally, the exchange is arranged by close brothers who frequently hunt and camp together, and it is meant to last a month or two at most. The men discuss the matter privately and informally, then announce their decision to their wives. If the wives selected, or their co-wives, object greatly, the matter is dropped. A man should not force his wife into the situation, although sometimes he grumbles at her until she agrees. Usually, however the women co-operate willingly, as they can in this way please their husbands and enjoy themselves. Children conceived during this period belong to their mothers' husbands" (1962:104)¹.

It is likely that the situation that Meggitt describes is the most usual one with women willingly complying with their husband's arrangements. It is also possible that women may instigate the

¹. Hamilton (pers. comm.) has described similar arrangements in the Western Desert.
arrangement. However again it seems probable that the pressure on wives to accede to their husband's wishes means that there is a constant bias against women's wishes being fulfilled and in favour of men's wishes being fulfilled. I am assuming that these wishes are at times in conflict.

It is relevant to mention here the widespread acceptance of a certain amount of adultery (e.g., Kaberry, 1939:151; Sharp, 1933:429; Meggitt, 1962:97; Hart and Pilling, 1960:37). It is also stated that husbands should not show jealousy. Hiatt observed that the ethic of generosity can cause a husband much suffering, as he is

"torn between a desire to insist on his exclusive sexual right and a wish to be unselfish. Each attitude accorded with a different part of the same value system in which there was both disapproval of adultery and approval of generosity ..... a study of actual cases revealed that the resolution might be made either way ..... 

They admired a close relative who was not jealous but thought it wrong to upset one who was" (1965:109).

An imaginary occasion is described by one of Hiatt's male informants where a man's wife is having an affair with his younger brother. The two lovers are concerned about upsetting the older brother, but appeal to him to overcome his jealousy which he manages to do after a struggle (ibid). Thus men as well as women are constrained to cooperate with the arrangements made to reduce the strains of gerontocracy on wifeless men.
Thus while men may have had no more individual freedom than women on these occasions, it is clear that the wider category of wife-lending gives men the dominant role. Men are seen as lending their wives, even if obliged to do so. There is no suggestion that husband-lending occurs, though Kaberry reports on women's independent use of love magic and occasions when men rather than women feel themselves to be coerced sexually (1939:265). There is no reason to suppose that women usually disliked the practice, but there is no sense in which it can be called women's practice.

It is useful to separate three aspects of meaning attached to sexual behaviour in the several contexts described. Firstly, coitus is seen to facilitate the effectiveness of some rituals for the benefit of the whole society. Also it can serve particular purposes such as warding off danger. Secondly, sexual access to wives has great symbolic significance in the relationships between men. Thirdly, and most importantly, sex is used by men to initiate and punish women. This can be seen as a powerful statement of the subordinate position of women in Aboriginal society. But this statement is also contained in the other two uses to which sex is put, for in each case it is the male ideology in ritual practices and in reciprocity between men which is being acted out.

A final comment on the institution of wife-lending concerns the implications for black-white relations. Stanner asserts that the association between black women and white men was not resented by Aboriginal men except when satisfactory payment was not made, or when the woman was prevented from returning when she wanted to. He bases this view on the more general observation that "In all
river tribes there are definite social mechanisms (such as madarma, which permits a man to improve his economic position by prostituting his wife) which facilitate such intercourse with white men. The Marithel and Moiil offer their women with great freedom" (1933:28).

I do not wish to go into this question in detail here. Clearly the different meanings attached to these kinds of activities by the two cultures had disastrous consequences both for individuals and as a powerful ideological tool used by the whites. However there is one aspect of the situation which should be noted in the context of this thesis. One element in the Aboriginal's men's initial willingness to lend his wife to a European would surely be as Stanner asserts, his desire to gain something from it. I would suggest that a major advantage he would expect would be to earn the gratitude of the white man. Given European attitudes to marriage and fidelity it is not surprising that he in fact was despised for his actions. But given these same attitudes, Aboriginal women who contracted relationships of some duration with whites, stood to gain a good deal, especially in the cattle station situation. Not only would she be used to assist her lover (and sometimes husband) in his enterprises, so gaining a certain amount of status and power, but she would be able easily to fulfil the duty to provide food for dependent relatives using her mate's resources. At the same time she would escape the daily demands on her labour and constraints of avoidance. Stanner's view is that Aboriginal women were eager for liaisons with white men because of "cupboard love plus an easier life plus real income plus

1. Marriages between black and white were forbidden in the Northern Territory when one of my informants contracted such a relationship. Several visits by the "Welfare" were made during which she assured them that she did not want to marry the man. The real worry of the officials though concerned the half-caste children that such liaisons produced, and they attempted to terminate such relationships on that account.
a real power over white and black men" (pers. comm.). It would seem from my women informants that they found it easy to maintain affection for a man who made few demands and enabled them to fulfil the obligations of an Aboriginal kinship network.

F. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In infancy children are indulged to a remarkable degree and this I would argue, has two main consequences. Firstly, Aborigines remain reluctant to either give or obey orders. That is, the independence of action that is a feature of the lives of young children is retained throughout life. I am not attempting to establish a causal direction between these things; it is sufficient here to point out that they are related. Secondly, infants are particularly sensitive to the discipline of conformity. This includes shaming which occurs when the conventions, the moral values and the socially accepted behaviour of all kinds are transgressed. Also the adoption of the fears of both natural and supernatural dangers will be more complete in a situation where a child is never corrected for other reasons. I am arguing that the process of socialization is facilitated among Aborigines because of the indulgence of children's overt wishes by adults.

For a young girl the learning of avoidance relationships has particular repercussions. She learns that certain men are offended by her very presence. This is a major factor in convincing women of the superiority of men. Girls become producers in childhood, supplying the needs of others. They learn the skills and satisfactions of collecting and catching food but also the moral necessity of
supplying certain male kinsmen with the fruits of their labour. The particular recipients change from father to husband to son, but there will always be men dependent on the staple foods a woman collects. Boys on the other hand can be independent in hunting meat, can eat their own catch and yet they are encouraged to remain dependent on the women who feed them, for in return they protect these women. The men's duties as suppliers of meat are much more limited than women's duties as suppliers of staple foods. Regularity of supply is not expected and the duties of hunting extend over a shorter period of the men's lives.

The experience by which a girl is introduced to her sexual duties range from the Tiwi situation where she is married before puberty and her sexual initiation should be gradual and gentle, to central Australia where introcision with multiple rape occurs. In so far as these customs serve to control girls and women, marriage at a very young age can be seen to fulfil the same function as puberty rites. Boy's initiation, at least in the sub-incision areas was as painful as introcision if not more so. The differences are clear. Boys are initiated into the men's secret life by men. Women are initiated into their sexual relationship with men by men usually, and their sexuality is subsequently used to punish them if they transgress. Their sexuality is used as a part of men's

1. In specifying this function I am not intending to offer an explanation of the existence of these practices. Another function which may be identified is that of ameliorating the anxieties of men with regard to women's sexuality. The evidence that Aboriginal men regard women as sexually greedy and insatiable are consequences rather than causes of the dominance of men over women.

2. I say their sexuality rather than their bodies, for there is no doubt that in interpersonal relations the sexual responses of girls and women are not ignored. The attempt is to control them.
ceremonies and as an expression of fraternal trust. The girl is "told" that her sexuality is for the use of certain men; her own wishes are unimportant. The control of female sexuality, however, is not totally secured by these means.

In the emphasis on the unimportance of the girl's sexuality and of her general availability to men, the girls may very well learn the lesson better than intended. She may not be inclined to take demands of fidelity very seriously. She is free of the preciousness about her own sexuality that women in our own society suffer from. It is the other extreme of the situation among some mediterranean peoples for instance where, by emphasising the girl's loyalty to the family honour, she has to carry part of the burden of the protection of that honour by protecting her own virginity (Schneider, 1971). Nothing could be further from the situation of an Aboriginal girl where her own sexual desires are treated as an unimportant ingredient in the situation of men exchanging and sharing women. Again, in marriage, a woman's individual wishes are not of significance; she is often one of a number of wives. It will thus be easier for her to conceive of her presence as not of great significance. As she does not have to climb down off a pedestal, it will be easier for her to run away. She makes no great psychological investment in the marriage, at first anyway, so she is freer of its demands. Women's position in the marriage system is the subject of my next chapter.

We can now look again at the motivation underlying infanticide. A woman's brothers are the source of the demand that she control her sexual and emotional behaviour. Her husband is the source of demands on her labour and sexuality. By killing her infant she denies them
her reproductive powers. She denied her brother a niece to bestow or her husband a son to follow him in his ceremonial life. This is a major example of Aboriginal women's autonomy that allows her a certain amount of subversive activity. Other areas of autonomy will be discussed below.

But women's control over the children they produce and rear diminishes progressively from the birth of the infant onwards. I have shown that the ideology of indulgence is itself a source of oppression of women. The fact that a woman has the responsibility of caring for the child does not imply that she has control of it. In teaching her daughter who to call "husband" she ensures that the girl will at least initially accept the husband to whom she is promised. In teaching her daughter to work for "old people" she ensures that the girl will continue to supply her husband's needs. In teaching her daughter to be afraid of her "brothers" or "sons-in-law" she ensures that the girl will behave in a way that supports male hegemony. As for her son, a woman is constrained by her need for his support, and the support of all those men for whom she provides food, to be diligent about providing this food. But her son's immediate concerns in becoming a man are to reject the world of women, even to the extent of physical attack on his mother, and to concentrate on the ritual activities which will assure his place in the world of men and so enable him to acquire a wife. Both daughter and son then are progressively inducted into the system of reciprocity between men, the daughter by taking her place as an object of exchange, and the son by becoming a participant in the system of exchange. Thus women retain control of neither their sons nor their daughters. The creation of strong ties of affection to them may serve
to protect a mother against the attacks of other men in the case of her son and against abandonment in old age in the case of her daughter, but this is gained at the cost of supplying them with their needs, in the case of the son for many years.

Stanner writes as follows:

"The entire psychic relationship of the sexes is one of great social significance; there is much distrust, hostility and insinuation of misconduct between them; jealousy, suspicion of infidelity and endless quarrelling with and over women, strike a constant strident note in dirawur life; and the working of social mechanisms which function to subordinate women socially ... tend to produce psychic unrest ....

Men generally attribute a series of undesirable qualities to women. They are held to be faithless, untrustworthy, sexually insatiable, and to talk too much. In the temporary unions mentioned above women may be dismissed at the whim of the man, and women are invariably blamed for whatever adultery and elopement take place" (1933:16).

In Roheim's view such as assessment is realistic. He says "Women are on the whole more greedy and selfish than the men .... The stronger development of the super-ego is always on the side of the male ...." (1933:208). But so, apparently, is the anxiety.
Ceremonial licence could be seen as both satisfying men's sexual desires and allaying their anxieties about women's power. Despite men's dominance it is possible to glimpse a measure of uncertainty in sex relations. By arousing women in orgiastic ceremony and by demanding their cooperation for ritual efficacy the men do not risk being refused. The same is true for the other occasions when, for other social purposes it is incumbent on women to cooperate sexually in expiation of guilt, inter-group messages and in wife-lending.

All cut their sexual coat according to the social cloth, so that the question is not whether men are also unfree, nor primarily whether women enjoy being lent. Sometimes they may and just as well. To argue that women are oppressed by an ideology is not to imply that they reject it. The important thing is that their sexual attitudes, their sexual behaviour and even their sexual desires are subordinated to a system in which men are dominant.
CHAPTER FOUR

MARRIAGE AND ITS VICISSITUDES
In this chapter I shall be concerned with the subordination of female interests in the context of marital relationships and also with the strategies of resistance available to women. I will discuss how men obtain wives, concentrating on the practice of bestowal. Second I will examine the relationship between co-wives. Next, I will review the data on the stability of marital relations. Fourth I will describe the economic role of wives and finally I will investigate the nature and limits of control exercised by men over women. Before dealing with these matters I need to make some general remarks about polygyny.

The marriage system of Aborigines is one of gerontocratic polygyny. That is, older men can often have more than one, and sometimes several wives, while young men have none. Warner believed that polygyny depends on an unequal sex ratio, which he thought resulted from a higher mortality rate for men (Warner, 1937:158). Rose (1960) showed that it is the delayed marriage of men and the early marriage of girls which enables men to have more than one wife. The substantial literature on marriage arrangements delineating the rules and describing their application and modification according to circumstances, demonstrates that they are conducted almost exclusively in terms of the arrangements between men (e.g., Elkin, 1938:155ff; R. and C. Berndt, 1964:47ff). Thus anthropological interest in this case reflects Aboriginal androcentric ideology. The active role of women themselves has received little theoretical attention, apart from some work on women's own participation in the men's exchange system. Hamilton (1970b) for instance found women to have systematically different views from men about who had the right to bestow a girl. Rather than show the influence that women
occasionally wield in men's exchange system, I want to show the ways in which women resist this system, as well as the ways they are constrained to cooperate with it.

A. BESTOWAL: BECOMING A WIFE

A girl is promised to a man, usually already an adult, soon after or even before birth. He is then her "promise husband"¹. She will go to him when she is considered of the right age if nothing happens to upset the arrangement. In some cases the system is more properly called mother-in-law bestowal as a man is promised, as wives, the daughters of a particular woman, and this arrangement is made before that woman is adult. The future husband must then wait for her to grow up, for her daughter(s) to be born, and for them to reach the age for marriage. In the meantime he must provide food for his mother-in-law². In such long term arrangements there are many opportunities for upsets to occur³.

In general there is no marriage ceremony to speak of, the girl simply joins her husband at his fire or builds a separate fire for them both (Vict. Parlt. Report, 1858:53; Roth, 1903:59; Berndt, 1964:169; Meggitt, 1962:269; Stanner, 1933:14)⁴. This occurs when she is considered ready, usually before puberty and sometimes as

1. The Rembarnga women I worked with used this English term "promise" as a noun meaning future spouse, as in "He will get that promise soon" or "He was my promise".
2. It is not clear from the literature whether this is a symbolic or substantial supply of food. Even if the latter, it would not be a dependable daily supply (see below section D).
3. See Hiatt (1965) for details of complications and disputes concerning marriage arrangements.
4. Some authors describe a minor ritual at marriage (Kaberry, 1939:94; Berndt, 1945:116). The Kua exchange described by Stanner is more an elaboration of mother-in-law gifts (1933:17).
young as eight years old (Meggitt, 1962:270). Her husband is then said to "grow her up" referring to his caring for and teaching her. The Berndts say that "a girl is taken to her betrothed husband's camp from time to time, in some cases from babyhood on" (1964:169). The lack of ceremony can thus be seen as an affirmation that the husband is simply receiving what is his; the girl is going to her proper place. But giving her into her husband's care at such a young age of course ensures that she makes no objection to the marriage. In central Australia, girls marry somewhat later, sometimes after puberty and here also, besides the introcision ritual, there is some ceremonial recognition of marriage (Spencer and Gillen, 1899:95; Strehlow, 1947:89-90) although Roheim suggests it may be more in theory than fact (Roheim, 1933:239).

It is clear that there is no provision in any of these arrangements for a girl to show preferences. Men do have choices though they are narrowly circumscribed by kinship rules and as a result of too few girls being available for the number of men wanting wives. A man who already has one wife or more, sometimes magnanimously allows an unmarried younger brother take another wife to whom he is entitled. While men can make only a limited number of moves in the marriage game, it is the women who are moved. Once a woman is given into her husband's care she is his and his rights over her are virtually unlimited. Of course his awareness of the possibility that she might run away or may fail to bring him enough food from her daily gathering activities means that it is in his best interests to gain her affection and loyalty.

A young wife will return to her mother's camp frequently (Meggitt, 1962:128), but if she does not want to return to her
husband she will, as far as possible, be forced to. The only overt support other women can give in such cases is inaction; that is they can just leave the girl alone to stay in the camp she chooses. If the young wife moves away from her kin, as will often happen as the groups disperse, she will not have this protection.

Having moved to her husband's camp a girl is then supposed to work for him. Her daily gathering activities will only change to the extent of cooking her spoils for her husband, and perhaps his older wife, instead of her father. Her husband continues to supply his wife's mother with a portion of his catch. His own portion will be cooked by his wife rather than his mother. He has a duty to supply meat to certain women including his wife and children, but not as a regular daily task. As a girl's first husband will often be as old as her father, or at least considerably older than she is, it seems that he will be identified more as a senior authoritative nurturing or fatherly figure than as a companion. As Goodale says "it is not this age equivalence of her husband and father alone that is implied in the statement "He took me like a daughter", but rather a reflection of the roles assumed by the young wife and elderly husband" (1971:44).

I do not suggest that old men are usually physically distasteful to young girls. But women's stated liking for old husbands probably reflects the gerontocratic ideology of the whole society rather than women's sexual or marital preferences. Old husbands are said to be superior for reasons that indicate the fears women have about men. As discussed above, women assert that young husbands are jealous and rough. Also as she could not have a young husband anyway, these
opinions must be seen partly as rationalisations on the part of women. The young men who are more exciting are said to be more possessive and sexually demanding. Women are here concurring in the older men's view that young men are not ready to have wives, and more important, in the view that old men have the legitimate claim on the young women.

Hiatt provides evidence that girls sometimes rebel. He says "Not all women accepted the passive role imposed on them by the method of bestowal. Occasionally disputes arose because a woman refused to marry a man to whom she had been promised, especially if he was many years her senior" (1965:101).

Such rebellion was evident during my field work when Rembarnga women were putting pressure on two young girls to join their "promise" husbands. The girls were twelve and fourteen years old respectively, and especially the older one was very reluctant to go to her husband. The girl's labour was useful to the older women but the latter clearly felt anxious about the trouble which might stem from the girls remaining unmarried. The younger girl's mother was anxious that her brother, the girl's MB, would make trouble. The fourteen year old girl had already lived for a short time with her "promise" husband who was about 45, and she had taken advantage of the considerable mobility between communities¹ to move away from him. But her period of residence with him seemed particularly to ensure his claim on her. It was feared that he might attack any one in the camp should the girl not be delivered to him. Again it was the mother who was most anxious that the girl should go to her husband, but also the M"Z" who had brought up the girl from childhood (the

¹ See Cowlishaw (1977) for details of this latter day nomadism.
mother had eloped), and other 'sisters' were of the same mind. The women's fears were sufficiently strong for the girl to be physically forced to remain with her husband, though she subsequently left him again.

Apart from bestowal there are three other ways in which women become wives; by elopement, inheritance and abduction. Elopement, the only avenue by which a woman can exercise choice of a husband, will be dealt with in detail below. Inheritance of an older brother's wife or wives by a younger "brother" is common because of the often extreme disparity of ages between a girl and her first husband. A wife is usually inherited by a man's real or classificatory brother. As with bestowal arrangements the decision is made in accordance with a number of considerations, the main one being the rights of various claimants in terms of kinship and the network of obligations already existing. The woman's own wishes are not publicly recognised as a factor affecting her inheritance though as she becomes widowed at increasingly later ages, she will be increasingly able to influence the decision about who has rights to her. That is, she is increasingly able to wield influence in the men's system of exchange of women.

Another widespread though perhaps less frequent way that a woman might become a wife is as a result of being abducted (Warner, 1937:77; Kaberry, 1939:111; Rose, 1960:423; Meggitt, 1962:38; Spencer and Gillen, 1927:466). The latter two authors assert that abduction
only occurred between tribes and was rare. Where abduction did occur the rights of the woman among her captors initially would be minimal, primarily because she would lack ties of affection to people in the camp. She would not be outside the ubiquitous kinship system and would be allotted to a man in the correct category. There is no reason to believe that after the capture and possibly plural rape, she would be treated worse than other wives. As her position in the kinship system was consolidated she would become less vulnerable.

Women support bestowal, gerontocracy and the marriage system in general. I would suggest that one immediate reason that older women affirm the importance of young girls remaining with their husbands and stress the superiority of old men as husbands, is to relieve themselves of the burdens of caring for these old people. In the bands Peterson (1970) describes it appears that the daughter and son-in-law must remain bound to the needs of the old father of the girl unless he has or can find a young girl to marry. In a society where mobility is important and highly valued in itself, the care of the relatively immobile must cause considerable curtailment of the activities of those responsible for them. The only opportunity to avoid the burden of more dependents is to impose the burden on others, particularly young girls.

The influence of women in the bestowal of young girls involves conflicts that result in her denying responsibility for the arrangements. Hiatt's finding was that a woman and her brothers had a joint right to bestow her daughters in marriage (1965:41). Hamilton conducted an enquiry into Gidjingali women's view of the bestowal
of girls in marriage. She found that women have a systematically
different view of the matter from men. Her conclusion was that
"not one woman nominated herself alone as the bestower of her
daughter, and furthermore none would admit that a mother could
or should bestow her own daughter" (1970b:18). It seems clear
that women can, by using techniques of suggestion and persuasion
have some influence on particular marriage arrangements. That they
refuse the public responsibility is in harmony with the way the
political process is conducted in Aboriginal society. That is, the
enquiry into who has the right to bestow a girl is misguided, not
simply because it is not clearly one individual's nor kin-category's
responsibility (which is partly, but only partly true as both Hiatt
and Hamilton realise) but because such an enquiry does not make sense
in emic terms. It is my contention that men as well as women commonly
will not claim individual responsibility for a decision, though this
may be more true of women than men. Hamilton says that it is the
strength of the mother-daughter tie which is being protected when
women reject responsibility for arranging their daughters' marriages.
She says that individual men don't want the responsibility because
of the potential for conflict inherent in the marriage arrangements

My enquiries of Goinjimbi women as to who had responsibility for
a particular bestowal led to explanations of who would be upset if
the marriage did not occur. In the case of young children it is
clear that bestowals are a matter of current politics between men,
with some hope of future confirmation. An obligation could be

1. Hamilton does not discuss the fact that a woman could not mention
her brother and would thus have difficulty in specifying his
responsibility. Unless she took account of this and other avoid-
ances, the results may be biased.
fulfilled or created by a promise of bestowal. This of course implies that someone is seen as responsible for giving the girl, and it is in this sense that the marriage system is the exchange of women between men. That is, there is a difference between the decision making process whereby a particular bestowal is made and the obligations created by the bestowal. Whoever the people are who can influence the decision about who gets a particular girl, the obligation will be to the mother's brother or some other male kinsman. This matter is pre-determined in terms of kin categories.

The fact that a woman can influence particular bestowals does not imply that she can pursue women's interests. Women's interests in the marriage system are never defined as opposed to men's interests, so that there is no meaningful framework within which women's interests could be pursued. A woman may assist her daughter but all this can effect in terms of women's wider interests is some limit to men's hegemony. And she is as likely to be supporting her son's interests against those of other women's sons, for she depends on her male kinsmen for protection and support.

B. POLYGYNY: SHARING A HUSBAND

In this section I will not be concerned with the form, extent or reasons for polygyny. The literature on this topic is discussed in Appendix 2. I will consider the relationship between co-wives. Table 1 shows that in most areas more than half the women share a husband, and a substantial minority in some cases has more than one co-wife. In all but one case more than half the men are monogamously married. I think it important to stress that more
<table>
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<th>Location</th>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Yuendumu, Ibid, 1967</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>Desert Groups, 1956-62, Ibid, 293</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Haasts Bluff, Ibid, 1962</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Haasts Bluff, Ibid, 1967</td>
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<td>17</td>
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1. As far as I can ascertain these figures are all census data; that is they record the situation at a given moment. They do not show how many husbands a woman has over her lifetime, nor how many wives a man has over his.

2. Kaberry says she recorded 174 unions but gives details of only 172.

3. These figures include marriages with more than 5 wives.

4. There appears to be an error in Long's calculations. He gives these figures as 75 and 138 respectively.
women than men in a polygynous society are involved in polygynous marriages.

Those authors who have discussed co-wives have generally stressed the necessity for help with child rearing, the economic advantages or the social support a woman gains from the polygynous situation. R. and C. Berndt for instance say "Often the second wife will be a sister of the first, and the latter will find in her an ally and an accomplice in extra-marital liaisons as well as a partner in sharing work and food collecting" (1951:95).

McConnell similarly argues that:

"The sharing of the burden of pregnancy, child-rearing and food gathering, etc., is one of the benefits derived from the practice of polygamy. In aboriginal society this custom is not only a practical advantage, but is often an economic necessity. A woman left to her own devices cannot possibly be a mate to her husband, bear, rear and carry babies and young children, collect food and firewood and prepare the daily meal" (1934:326-7).

McConnell somewhat exaggerates the burdens, especially in view of the usual spacing of children which has been described in Chapter One. I have argued that the heaviest burden a woman bears is not due to overwork itself, but is a result of the obligations to fulfil various duties to her male kinsmen and her husband and children. More important though is the erroneous assumption that it is only a co-wife who can alleviate the problems. While I would agree that
a mother of a child under four has considerable burdens, the help she can expect is as likely to come from her mother as anywhere, and should a sister help, there is no need for her also to be a co-wife.

In fact it is my view that conflict is endemic in polygynous marriages. Some support for this derives from the contradictory evidence of some authors about the relations between co-wives.

Kaberry says "As elsewhere, a woman often welcomes an additional helper, and in the unions I encountered, the co-wives seemed to be on excellent terms, particularly where they are sisters" (1939:154).

Kaberry was a "nomadic field-worker" (Kaberry, 1939:xii), moving about between a number of communities over a large area, and so may not have observed domestic tensions between wives which only manifest themselves occasionally, and often in subtle ways. But in fact in another passage Kaberry shows she did observe some domestic tension, related to jealousy. It is difficult to reconcile the complacent acceptance of a co-wife with the demand for mutual fidelity and the jealous guarding of rights that she describes in some detail (ibid, 143-153).

Meggitt's treatment of polygyny also shows some contradictory features, though it is apparent that he recognises that the complexity of the situation produces contradictory feelings. He says:

"My observations reveal that most co-wives do in fact live together amicably and that a strong bond unites them. Simple
affection is one element of this tie, which seems also to be based on a common solidarity of the women arising from the shared, intimate knowledge of the husband's foibles, faults and virtues, and reinforced by the shared responsibility of rearing his children" (1962:109).

It should be noted that the "shared responsibility of rearing his children" could as well lead to conflict and resentment, and that it is shared only in a very limited sense. He says co-wives display solidarity in the face of a husband's attacks and continues "Nevertheless, relations between close sisters are not necessarily smoother than those between unrelated co-wives. The sisters may exhibit a greater affection, but (perhaps because of this) the quarrels that do occur are often very bitter" (ibid). Two other comments from Meggitt indicate sources of conflict. After describing what a husband "should" do he continues "A man should distribute his sexual favours without bias among his wives; but it is accepted that a comparatively old woman is no longer sexually active and, therefore, need not share her husband's bed" (ibid, 111). One might wonder, considering the phrasing here ("it is accepted that" ...... "need not"), who it is that decides who is a "comparatively old" woman. There is no evidence that women's sexuality declines in later years any more than men's, and Meggitt says that men copulate with young wives regularly at well over 60 years (ibid, 273). Meggitt continues "A man is usually most attentive to his latest wife and sleeps with her to the exclusion of the other women for the first few months" (ibid, 111). It is difficult to believe that an older wife would feel solidarity with a new young wife were she rejected in this way. However, it may be that there is little
she can do without losing sympathy from others, and if the new wife is extremely young and nervous, the older wife's sympathy may be aroused. As can be seen many variables are relevant to assessing a wife's feelings and assessing her overt response also.

Some other observers noted the friction between co-wives. Roth says that a youngest favourite wife, when in camp, suffers at the hands of her fellow wives (1908:10), clearly indicating a jealous reaction. Warner says "The wives live in a fair degree of amiability, but there is sometimes jealousy over their husband" (1937:90). Women's fights among the Murngin are usually about one seducing the husband of another (Warner, 1930:477). Others who testify to the existence of jealousy in women about their men are Berndt (1964:87) and Roheim (1933:226, 256).

Hiatt gives evidence that girls and women sometimes actively dislike the gerontocratic and polygynous situation. He says that a girl will sometimes refuse to return to her promised husband after deserting him for someone else. He continues "Most women accepted plural marriage, but some objected to the husband taking an extra wife or resisted marrying a man who already had a wife. Husbands remarked that a second wife brings trouble and ..... often displayed their generosity by waiving rights or not pressing other claims" (1965:101).

From my own field work at Goinjimbi among the Rembarnga I will describe the situation of three women faced with their husbands taking new wives to indicate more precisely situations of tension. The first of these is Mary, now about 50. She joined her first promise husband
as a pre-pubescent girl, but ran away from him to stay with her married sister, apparently becoming a co-wife. This was a period of conflict until she ran away with a young man. The young man had not encouraged the elopement, but Mary simply left the camp and followed him when he was going on a journey. Twenty years later she is still married to this man. She has born four children, one of whom died, her daughter has a daughter, and her two sons know their father's ceremonial rites. Three years ago her husband went to live with a new wife at a neighbouring community and has fathered two children already. Now he has returned and they have an extended camp with Mary on the outskirts, doing most of the chores and caring for the babies. She also claims that the young wife is jealous of her, that her husband will look after her, and that her eldest son will protect her from insult. She goes to great lengths to keep the peace between her co-wife and the husband, and deals with the humiliations of being superseded by laughing at the situation as she hurries to supply her husband's needs, or the young children's desires.

Another woman Carol, is 45 and was with her first promise husband until about 30 years old, raising six children in that time. She then eloped with a younger man and had a further three children. This man is now taking a younger wife, a girl of about fourteen and the two women have had serious fights several times. Carol asserts that the girl is jealous of her, that the husband did not copulate with the young wife and does not want to; and that her husband only wants her, Carol. None of this is probably true. She has since followed her husband to a station some 100 miles distant, leaving the young wife with her parents.
A third woman of about 45 heard reports that her husband was staying in Katherine with his lambara (father-in-law) implying that he was collecting his lambara's daughter as a second wife. His wife met the rumours in a very positive way by saying "Good. I told him to get that girl to work for us. I am free now. I'll stay 2 or 3 weeks until she gets used to it and then I'll go to Darwin. I'll tell (my husband) I can't sleep with him any more. That girl might have a disease. I'm too old to be jealous". The frequency and feeling with which these plans were made belie the last assertion. A final example is a woman who said that she wanted her husband to take a second wife. She said that as she was a christian she would not be jealous!

My aim is not to answer the question of whether some, most or all women welcome a co-wife. Some information about the situation of co-wives has been produced, but it is only making certain explicit assumptions about the nature of human relationships that this evidence can be used as the basis of generalizations. Female jealousy is usually recognised as existing only in passing, or by some it is treated as a cause of fights. But there is no recognition in the literature on polygyny that female jealousy is a systematic disruptive force. Clearly jealousy varies between individuals. But it is necessary to say a little more than that. While anthropologists may be reluctant to deal with what are often called psychological variables, they seem often willing to accept some psychological assumptions without examination. Meggitt, for instance, accepts that jealousy can be the cause of fights and yet asserts that the advantages of polygyny outweigh the disadvantages.

Just as the relationship between the sexes is nowhere one of equivalence, so sexual jealousy is not seen to be an equivalent
emotion in men and women, at least in Western thought. Very briefly I would observe that there is no female equivalent of the great lover, the Don Juan seducing as a matter of adventure and passion the wife of another. The female seductress has a sinister air. More striking is the lack of a female equivalent of the cuckold. A deceived woman has no such elaborated role. Less attention has thus been paid to women's sexual jealousy.

Hiatt has argued that a significant aspect of male jealousy is to do with the dominance relations between men. This is expressed in the penis anxiety which is in his view the common theme of rivalry between men competing for the same woman. He says "Anxiety and depression aroused by fear of phallic humiliation may, I suggest, be common components of the jealous state" (1966:14).

While I fully accept this common component of male jealousy there are two aspects of this view which require further examination. Firstly, in emphasising the importance of dominance relations between men Hiatt implies that men's confidence is primarily undermined and his anxiety aroused by other men. When rejected by a woman his place in the male hierarchy is threatened. However the emphasis on this aspect of male jealousy does not help in understanding what appears to be the more basic aspect of jealousy which is common to both sexes. In cases where men and women react strongly to actual or threatened infidelity, it is usually, I would argue, directly due to the threat of loss of the loved one. Bowlby's attachment theory seems a more useful basis for explaining this apparently universal phenomenon. Hiatt's unpublished paper written in 1966 does not preclude this explanation.
The second point is to do with penis size which Hiatt has identified as frequently central to male sexual anxieties. Although not overlooking aspects of genuine concern to women, he has pointed out that penis size is not crucial to women's sexual satisfaction. He has accounted for its salience largely in terms of male rivalry. Equally of course women's breasts and legs on which much sexual attention is focussed, have little direct physical role in coitus. However there does seem to be a significant difference between the sexes in their ego involvement with these sexual attributes. As this question is peripheral to my thesis, suffice it to remark that while female rivalry exists, women do not suffer the generalised anxiety about potency which seems to bedevil the male of the species. This difference can be explained by women's lesser involvement in the social hierarchy.

The major component of jealousy, I would argue, results from the same circumstances in women as in men. I would further assert that women have an equal complement of jealous reactions available, but that there is perhaps less opportunity and ability to express them. There is a good deal of evidence though that Congreave's words "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" are as true among Aborigines as elsewhere, even though the sanctions against a woman attacking her husband are severe. If the existence of an equal capacity for jealousy in women as in men is accepted then a powerful and constant source of discontent exists in the polygynous situation.

Older women can direct the labour of young wives. On the other hand a young wife can command her husband's sexual interest leaving an older wife in the position of a worker with no return, especially
It is evident that these sources of conflict inherent in the polygynous situation will be more evident in certain conditions. I would predict that jealousy between co-wives would be more likely when an older wife who has "worked for" her husband for a number of years is joined by a younger wife. In this case the mutual obligations would have built up an interdependence, an attachment, that would make resentment and anger inevitable when she is replaced in her husband's affection and "bed". When a still young wife is joined by an even younger sister the situation is somewhat different, especially if the husband is old. The bond between husband and wife would not have had time to develop and it is likely that the wife will still relate to her old husband as a somewhat feared and distant authority (Goodale, 1971:44). A new young wife to whom she can be senior, and who promises intimate companionship which she may have missed since her marriage, and who may be afraid and in need of support will present no threat and may indeed be welcome. The older wife who has held her position for perhaps fifteen years at least, who has suffered her husband's jealousy, who has borne children into his dawero (patrilineal group) and for whom she has provided fire and food on demand as well as complied with his ceremonial needs, will have become used both to the work and to pleasing her husband. Perhaps the hardest part of rearing the children has already passed so that the practical reasons for welcoming a co-wife would not exist. Especially if her husband is not a great deal older, a woman in this situation will be most likely to feel resentment and anger at being replaced. The strength of this emotion would be far stronger than any 'rational' consideration of assistance with particular tasks.
Thus two intersecting variables would predict the likelihood of conflict erupting between co-wives. Firstly the greater the duration of the marriage the more likely it is that a new wife will cause disruption. Secondly the nearer the age of the married couple the more likely a new young wife will be to cause jealousy. These are not of course independent variables. The same considerations would apply in cases of a third or fourth wife. These cases seem usually to involve several sisters of similar ages, so that any further conflict would be minimal. I would also argue that any reduction in the extent of polygyny following contact is simply an expression of women's preference for monogamy.

C. ELOPEMENT: LEAVING A HUSBAND

There is a considerable level of marital mobility in Aboriginal society. Abduction occurs because men are constantly seeking wives. Widowhood and inheritance are frequent because of the age disparity between husbands and first wives. But elopement provides prima facie evidence of the discontent of women with the marriages that are arranged for them. While women have a high rate of change of husbands over a lifetime, elopement is the one situation where women disrupt the exchanges men make. For this reason it has very different significance from any say that older widows might have in their remarriages. Unlike those women who try to influence the bestowal

1. I have not defined jealousy, preferring a broad interpretation rather than a narrow one. Aborigines use the English term for several forms of emotional reaction. Contrasted with "humbug", which refers to troublesome, noisy, childlike behaviour, "jealousy" is an explanation for most forms of anger. The nature and dynamics of jealous reactions are the subject of research currently being undertaken by P. van Sommers, Macquarie University.
or inheritance of women, those who elope are acting in opposition to the marriage system. Thus it is important to know the extent of elopement.

The first problem is the paucity of figures on this matter. R. and C. Berndt complain that "information on an Australian wide basis is lacking ..... [as to] ..... the proportion of marriages which endure from the inception until the death of one partner, as against those which are dissolved for other reasons ....." (1964:175). They claim to have a good deal of such information themselves, but as it is not available, I am relying on Goodale and my own information. Goodale presents evidence of serial marriages among the Tiwi as Table 2 shows.

Goodale maintains that over a lifetime the mean number of wives per man is less than the mean number of husbands per woman, "women on the average have 1.70 husbands, while men have on the average 1.38 wives" (1971:61). She further points out that "While the figure of 2.00 for mean number of wives per man is not reached until the seventh decade of a man's life, thirty to forty is the critical decade in a woman's life, when the mean number of husbands per woman reaches 2.00" (ibid, 62).

Goodale also demonstrates that the age of spouses will tend to converge over time. While the age difference of husband and wife on her first marriage averages 23.6 years, the average age difference is only 3.9 years for women in secondary marriages (ibid, 65). This information indicates that Tiwi women do have a high level of marital mobility, but does not show the frequency of elopement as opposed to
Table 2. Serial Marriages: Snake Bay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wives' Age Group</th>
<th>Promised No. of Husbands</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
<th>No. of Husbands per Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unborn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17(15)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21(22)*</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Simplified Table from *Tiwi Wives*, Goodale, 1971:60)

*There seems to be a mistake in Goodale's figures. I have put what I believe to be the correct figure in brackets.
widowhood and remarriage. Goodale says that elopement happened occasionally, and that the elopers were often killed (ibid, 57).

But there is one feature of Goodale's conclusions which I believe is quite erroneous. She says "it will be seen that those in the monogamous group tend to have more husbands than those married to polygamous husbands. I believe this reflects the attitude of the two groups of men. Polygamous men tend to hold on to their wives more than the present-day monogamous men, some of whom have a rather rapid turnover of wives" (ibid, 62). She produces no evidence to support this conclusion, and I would suggest that a more likely and more economical explanation would be that it is the women who are taking advantage of greater freedom and expressing their reaction to the arrival of a new wife by leaving. That is, women in the monogamous group have more husbands because they leave husbands who wish to become polygynous. Such an explanation would account for the lower rates of polygyny after contact as indicated above, and accords with my evidence from Goinjimbi.

R. and C. Berndt also support the view that women frequently elope:

"Because most marriages are contracted by parents irrespective of their children's personal feelings towards each other, there is a high percentage of "divorces", many a woman in her day having been the wife of more than one man ..... Several cases of elopement occurred during our stay at Ooldea ..... A woman married to an older man will usually elope with a man her own age ..... They leave their own camp to live in another area,
and do not return until the betrothed husband is dead or the affair has blown over. Usually such unions are lasting. The injured husband in the old days would often arrange an avenging expedition .... to follow the eloping pair. The interloper when found would be killed or speared in the thigh, and the woman would be accepted back with only a caution and beating. But today, in the Ooldea camp, revenge for such an occurrence is rare. Several men with wives who "did not like them" had lost them by elopement. They would take back their runaway wives, should they come; but they are resigned to the matter and will either take another wife or avail themselves of the 'woni'\(^1\) (1943:279-280).

Kaberry also says that the girl's wishes seem to be largely irrelevant in marriage arrangements, and that there are girls "who were both betrothed and married after puberty, and who had run away from their husbands because the latter were too old or had frightened them. They were generally sent back, but a few persisted and finally the project was abandoned" (1939:100).

Elkin describes the methods of obtaining a wife and says "Such marriages lead to a great many "divorces"; and it is usual to find that each woman has been in her day, the wife of more than one man. The reason is not so much that her betrothed husband was cruel, but that her affection or fancy was drawn elsewhere and she had eloped with her lover or been "pulled" (captured) by him" (1938:157).

There is abundant evidence indicating that a woman's punishment could in the past be very severe for deserting an old husband. Such

desertion was regarded as extremely reprehensible by my informants. A woman reputedly died as the result of eloping from a helpless old husband a few years previously, demonstrating the seriousness with which such an action is viewed. It seems that the two important variables determining the reaction to an elopement are the attitude of the husband and the relationship of the eloping pair. If the husband is magnanimous, which depends not only on his character, but on his need for the wife, the punishment may only be formal. After receiving a spear in his thigh the eloper may be allowed to keep the woman. If the husband takes his wife back she will be punished informally by himself or his kinsmen. This punishment ranges from plural rape by the husband's kinsmen through a beating by the husband to simply being "growled at". On the other hand if the relationship is incestuous (and this is a matter of degree) the couple could be punished by death. In other words, while elopement is disapproved, and the formal nature of the punishment laid down, the actual response to elopements takes account of the particular situation of the principal participants in the drama (Spencer and Gillen, 1927:410, 466; Warner, 1937:86-88; Meggitt, 1962:100). Reactions by husbands to loss of their wives is also modified by the attitude of the wife-stealer. The offer of compensation can placate the husband (Hiatt, 1965:102). Clearly this whole complex of conflict and its resolution with respect to elopement and adultery is largely a matter between men, though a wife stealer's usual defence is to represent himself as a victim of the woman's desire (ibid, 102). The implication is that women are seen as the prime initiators of elopements. This is probably a reflection of the fact that it is not in men's interest to elope. As Maddock says "Because he depends for his young wife on the promise being
fulfilled it would be contrary to his interests for other men to be allowed to make off with women who have not been promised to them" (1974:63). Thus the men involved in elopements will have a powerful motive to present themselves as helpless victims of the women's wiles.

In Table 3 I present a record of the marital histories of fifteen Rembarnga women between the ages of 30 and 75 for whom such detailed information could be obtained and verified from a number of different informants. All the permanent residents at Goinjimbi in this age group are included as well as two from the neighbouring community of Weemol and two frequent visitors. While this is a small sample it does indicate that elopement is a recognised practice as a solution to marital discord. I am not suggesting that the rate was always as high as these figures indicate, but that it did occur with sufficient frequency to be discussed in most ethnographic reports. For simplicity I have included as elopements two cases of wives who left to live elsewhere and subsequently remarried. Widowhood includes two cases where the husband died before the girl had joined him permanently, though he was reported to be her first promise husband in one case. Desertions are in each case by a younger husband who was second husband to the women and who had eloped with her in the first place. Not included are three women's "love affairs". One of these lasted over a year and the wife returned pregnant to her old husband. Two women, now widows were married to white men.

It is my contention that there is an increase in the rate of elopement in the recent past indicating some measure of strain or
Table 3. Marital Histories: Goinjimbi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group of Woman</th>
<th>Number of husbands a woman has had</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
<th>No. of Husbands</th>
<th>Husbands per Woman</th>
<th>e - Eloped</th>
<th>w - Widowed</th>
<th>d - Deserted</th>
<th>M - Still Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60-75</td>
<td>One  2</td>
<td>Two  2</td>
<td>Three 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>e, w</td>
<td>w, M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>One  1</td>
<td>Two  3</td>
<td>Three 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>e, e, M</td>
<td>e, d, M</td>
<td>e, d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>One  3</td>
<td>Two  1</td>
<td>Three 4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>e, M</td>
<td>e, M</td>
<td>e, d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>One  2</td>
<td>Two  2</td>
<td>Three 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>w, w</td>
<td>w, ? M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 marriages which have ended can be accounted for in the following way:

- Elopements: 11
- Widowhood: 7
- Husband's Desertion: 3
- Unclear: 1

Total: 22

Discontent in the traditional situation. Women and young men are taking advantage of opportunities which did not exist previously, or, if they did exist were the subject of severe sanctions. Other aspects of the marriage system are intact. At Goinjimbi all marriages are in accord with sub-section rules, and at larger settlements in the vicinity there are few "wrong" marriages. Maddock gives further evidence supporting the latter point (1964:62).
White's information from central Australia is relevant "In marriage arrangements therefore we see women breaking the traditions to their own advantage, with older men resisting the change" (1971:99). She is describing the fact that girls are increasingly choosing their own first husbands, but this testifies to the same thing as does elopement; women felt at least latent dissatisfaction with the marriage system.

It may appear from the foregoing that spouses among Aborigines are neither companionable nor affectionate. In fact, because of the age differences in first marriages and the lack of contact between men and women in their normal day-to-day lives, this is partly true. It is only old couples, usually in a second or third marriage for the woman, who can spend a lot of time together in the camp during the day. It is such old couples who are often remarked on as showing intense attachment. Typical is this account from Meggitt, describing spouses of long standing:

"The patent distress of a man whose own wife is ill, for instance, differs markedly from the conventional expressions of grief he utters when classificatory "wives" are ill. He asks the help of everyone who could possibly ameliorate her condition - medicine men, her sisters and (through them) her mother, even Europeans .... A woman is similarly affected when her husband falls sick, and she rarely leaves his side until he recovers" (1962:86-7).

Kaberry says "A man would sit for hours by the side of his sick wife, stroking her arm, moving the branches so that they cast more shade, and
fetching her water. At other times they would remain quietly in
the camp, apparently content with one another's company. An old
man would help his old and enfeebled wife with her burdens, and gather
firewood for her" (1939:154).

At Goinjimbi one old couple sat together day after day, and
very occasionally set off together to go hunting, moving very slowly
and spending the whole day away. They did not take a great deal of
interest in what was going on in the camp, but this was partly
because they were outside their own "country". A somewhat younger
couple, approximately 55 and 65 were moving towards a similar state,
and spent a lot of time together. The woman in this case was still
active and mobile, but when camping elsewhere would be openly
concerned about "that old man". Another couple were in a different
situation because of the age discrepancy. The husband, who appears
to be in his late 60s has a very active younger wife of about 35.
They seldom spend time sitting together, as the wife goes out
"hunting" at every opportunity and spends a lot of time visiting
other firesides. There is however, affection and loyalty expressed
by this woman towards her husband. Finally a young girl who is
married to a man of about 40 spends most of her days playing with
the children, occasionally collecting wood or making tea for her
husband. They seldom spend time together. The formation of attach­
ment thus appears to be inhibited by the age disparity in most
marriages.
D. SUBSISTENCE: WORKING FOR A HUSBAND

One of the primary duties of a wife is to provide staple food for her husband. I will now briefly describe the production and distribution of food and show how the appearance of women's control over their own products is misleading. There have been no detailed studies of the distribution of staple foods, so I will rely largely on general observations. This is also necessary because not only the married couple but the wider kinship network is involved in food distribution.

Women everywhere seem to have spent more time than men in the collection and distribution of food. They collected mainly vegetable foods, but also a substantial amount of protein in the form of the smaller creatures such as lizards, grubs and shellfish. It is commonly recognised that women provided men with vegetable foods, though the dependence of men on women in this respect has not been stressed. All women collected food more or less regularly from youth to old age, while men only hunted, and that less regularly, during their prime. Peterson found that among the Arnhem Land population only one thirteenth of the band are regular male contributors to subsistence, while about one third of the band are regular female contributors.

Peterson has argued that the composition of local groups is determined by the need of old men to have young women to work for them. This leads to retaining the services of daughters or to exchanging the daughters for young wives (1970a:14). This supports my view of the dependence of men on women's labour. Peterson further
argues that gerontocratic marriage is necessary because older men must have access to the labour of young women. Of course this could be achieved in ways other than their monopolising young women as wives. But the ideology is just as Peterson accepts it. Aborigines believe and state that old men must have young wives to look after them. This is why girls who run away from their husbands are said to be punished by death.

Most observers agree that women supply more food than men. Gould says of the desert groups "Women forage for the staple foods and most of the small game, and supplemental foods as well" (1969: 261). He continues:

"women spent about one-third more time than men in food collecting and food preparation. Sometimes the men practise a mild form of deception by stating that they are going hunting and setting off from camp, only to conceal themselves instead some place in the bush and spend the time carving sacred boards or engaging in sacred activities which, as a rule, are kept secret from the women. Rather than discuss these sacred matters with them, the men, upon their return to camp, usually tell the women that hunting was poor" (ibid, 263-4).

Meehan, in her detailed study of food collection in Arnhem Land, makes the following comments, "The occupants of the Kunapipi [ceremonial] centre, especially the novices and their guardians, constantly received generous portions of food procured by the women and children such as shellfish and cycas media bread, but as far as I know the process was never reversed" (1975:54; see also Warner, 1937:140). She also found that men in general receive more flesh
than women and that women will go without when necessary to provide more for their children (ibid, 211). Maddock also says that women's labour "accounted for a disproportionately bulky part of the diet" (1974:25).

Most of the food that women bring back to the camp is cooked at their own fire for the husband and immediate family, but other old men, especially the women's grown sons and grandsons, fathers and grandfathers, real and classificatory as well as her husband's brothers, can always ask her for food. Thus a woman has little control over the food she collects. It all belongs to her husband, "husbands" and certain kinsmen, just as she belongs to her husband even before he chooses to claim his property. She is under an obligation to provide food for those men who depend on her. She is expected to provide for her children also, and they are frequently fed before she returns to the camp. Small girls are rewarded with praise from their mother for giving a fish or any other catch of any size to their father, but boys can go off and eat their own catch. Men depend on women to provide them with their sustenance especially during their involvement in ritual activities. This is of crucial importance during the large ceremonial gatherings which could hardly proceed without women's cooperation in the supply of vegetable foods. But this dependence is also evident during the preparation of sacred paraphernalia and the local small-scale rituals.

The fact that women eat what they wish to of their catch before returning to the camp and the casualness of the distribution of vegetable foods conceals the underlying economic relations. Women are constrained by the duty to provide food for their husbands and
certain other men as well as all the children, and this shows the relationship to be an exploitative one, in that men regularly appropriate women's surplus products. Men do not reciprocate by providing equal amounts of protein; nor is their duty to provide meat for the women something that women can enforce. The formal distribution of large game caught by the men indicates that there is status attached to this kind of food which does not exist with vegetable foods. As Friedl has succinctly put it "It is the men .... who have the opportunity to achieve recognition and esteem by acting publicly as generous hosts" (1975:22). Women may control their production in that they decide when and where to collect food, but their control of their product is limited. It is the emphasis on production and the neglect of attention to distribution which has obscured this in the past. However I am not arguing that women entirely lack power over distribution. They can as individuals, gain status from a large harvest and can attempt to manipulate distribution of it. It is significant that one of the older women at Goinjimbi went to considerable trouble to collect and prepare a large quantity of yams for distribution at the circumcision ceremony of her sister's son. Unlike the usual damper this was considered to be proper ceremonial food. Avery (pers. comm.) has commented that the women at Borolloola continue to go hunting so that they can retain some manipulative power in the men's world.

Meggitt discusses economic relations among the Walbiri in the following terms:

1. In Chapter Five this matter is explored further and the question of consumption is discussed.
2. Similarly some urban women today cling to traditional means of gaining status among men such as being a good hostess or looking desirable.
"The man who fails to provide enough food for his wife and children should be taken to task by his affines. Ideally, their public criticism should shame him into better behaviour; if it does not, they would hesitate to force a quarrel with him merely for such reasons. This would indirectly attack the conventional belief in male superiority; and most men are more concerned to maintain male solidarity than to redress the wrongs done to women.

..... In short, although husband and wife have in theory reciprocal claims on each other's economic services, there is often in fact marked inequality. The rights of the wife, both in the satisfaction of her just claims on her husband and in the rejection of his unjust demands, may be seriously infringed" (1962:93).

This statement clearly indicates that women are economically subordinate to men. This is a symptom of exploitative relations rather than the defining characteristic. Exploitation consists of the men appropriating legitimately a portion of women's products. This economic subordination indicates one of the ways in which these exploitative relations are maintained.

Roheim sees the division of labour between husband and wife as logical:

"It is true that when on a march the women will be made to carry the scanty equipment they may possess, but there are two good reasons for this. One reason is practical and logical. The man must have his hands free and his spear ever ready both
for the enemy and for the chase. The other is rooted in
the unconscious. Woman bears the child and carries him in
her womb, and then on her body. By extension, therefore,
there is a natural tendency to make her carry things" (1933:255).

Of course it would not be difficult for a man to put his burdens
down, so the first reason need not be paid any attention. As for
the second, there may indeed be a natural tendency for everyone,
men as well as women and children to make others carry things if
possible. The reason why some succeed and others do not has yet
to be clarified. Roheim indicates a possible answer when describing
women being threatened with a spear for not bringing water and wood
(1933:210).

The comments of some authors on the division of labour and
economic relations between the sexes is of interest here. McCarthy
and McArthur concluded their study of subsistence activities in
Arnhem Land with the comment:

"This study illustrates well the perfect co-operation that exists
between the men and the women in their economic life; there
was certainly no attitude of master and slave on either side.
We were constantly impressed by the fact that the women have
a basic pattern of conduct which acknowledges the superiority
of the men in various spheres and they adhere to it consistently.
But the women decided on their day's work and went about it in
their own way" (1960:194).

"Perfect cooperation" does not seem to be the best description
of the economic situation for two reasons. Firstly if it is accepted
that exploitation occurs as defined above it is no more accurate to describe this as cooperation than to describe the relations of boss and worker as cooperative. Secondly if we do accept that men and women are equals in economic life, and further accept that women acknowledge men's superiority in the spheres of politics and ritual, we would have to add that these spheres do not overlap. As of course they must overlap one of the premises is false and clearly it must be the first one. McCarthy and McArthur seem to be stressing that women have considerable autonomy and that they accept their duties to the men.

Maddock also takes a panglossian view but somewhat uneasily:

"In their traditional activities men and women complemented each other. It fell to men to hunt the larger animals and to women to gather plant foods, and each thus made a distinctive contribution to the diet. Although women usually brought home more food, it would probably be a mistake to think that one kind of forager was exploiting the other. The disparity resulted rather from the conjunction of the peculiarities of the Australian environment with the universal rule that men hunt and women gather. In other environments this division of labour results in men producing the bulk of the diet. Given, then, the custom of dividing the economy into a men's component and a women's what each did served to complement what the other did and neither was established as subordinate" (1964:188).

Again I would assert that complementarity does not preclude exploitation and domination. Capital and labour could also be described as complementary.
Maddock apparently sees exploitation as resulting from a deliberate policy or ideology of oppression rather than as a feature of economic relations, embedded in the wider economic system of production and distribution. The "universal rule" that men hunt and women gather is what requires explanation. Far from reducing the possibility that men exploit women's labour, the rule may in fact be the ideological outcome of that very exploitation. It would be possible for women's labour to be exploited even were men collecting most of the food. That is, the nature of exploitation should be sought in the control of the fruits of the labour of women. I have shown that women are in fact constrained to supply certain kinsmen with food, and that the fruits of women's labour are appropriated by men as a right.

Maddock elsewhere stresses the equivalence and complementarity of men's and women's tasks. He says:

"It will by now be clear that men's careers are in certain respects the inverse of women's, for women are at an early age drawn into marriage, childbearing and domestic labour, whereas their brothers of the same age are drawn into the religious life, competence in which is essential to manhood ....... A man's cult expertise is obtained at the price of sexual and domestic exclusion; his sister's domesticity has been for her what religion has been for him" (1964:156).

But earlier Maddock says "Aboriginal societies may not have been divided by class or caste, but they were sexually divided, with women engaging in menial and man in aristocratic pursuits" (ibid,
Now if Maddock is unwilling to characterise the situation of Aboriginal women as exploited, he does consider that their status is not equal to men's. I regard this low status as a direct result of the exploitation of women's labour and an expression of men's political domination.

Finally the woman is in a double bind with regard to her collecting activities. If she collects a lot of yams she may be able to gain a certain amount of status by giving them in a direction which she wishes; however, because anything she collects belongs to her kinsmen and is theirs for the asking, she may attract the attention of those to whom she does not wish to give. Thus it is in her interests to hide her spoils. But in doing so she gains no public status for her labour. It is not surprising in this circumstance that there has been little anthropological comment on the distribution of women's products. Women themselves try to mystify the process. I observed a number of examples of this at Goinjimbi; a woman slipped some of her fish to her visiting "sister-in-law" before returning to the main camp. Also before returning to camp, women would sort out which food was to go where and attempt to send it quickly with a child when they arrived; young men often congregated about the fire of women who had been out hunting and severely curtailed women's ability to keep any food for a later time. They could never and would never appear to be hoarding food. Thus one effect of the ethic of generosity is to preclude women retaining control of their harvest.

In a political system based on cooperation, or mutual dependence, the refusal to cooperate is one of the most significant strategies
men use to subvert one another's plans. This is evident in the frequent long waits for ceremonies to begin because of the non-arrival of some participants. Bern (1972) has described in detail this kind of political activity and Roheim records examples of men's refusal to cooperate with ceremonial leaders (1974:55). Women also use strategies of non-cooperation. By remaining inactive they can frustrate the plans of men. But this is an area where they are likely to face violent punishment. Should they too often not bring food they may be beaten; if a girl refuses to join her "promise" husband all the women fear attack. I do not argue that women usually cooperate only because they fear a beating. Rather the beating and even the anger that precedes it, prevent the development of any alternative arrangements. The perceived necessity for a woman to provide for her husband is confirmed by his righteous indignation if she fails to do so.

E. POLITICS: CONTROLLING A WIFE

In this section I will discuss the ways that men control their wives and the ways in which wives are constrained by structural contradictions.

Interpersonal relations in Aboriginal society are characterised by a lack of coercion. To give orders or forceful direction to another person is to invite ridicule and non-cooperation. Social life is conducted in an idiom of individual autonomy restrained by the stress on cooperation and generosity. Even husbands do not order their wives about and there is little in the way of a husband's daily demands that will cause conflict if not fulfilled. However,
if a woman frequently fails to get food for her husband, if she is not diligent in fulfilling the needs of her children, and most particularly if she is discovered in adulterous relations, she may be beaten by her husband. Such beatings are not uncommon. It is only in the most extreme cases that her father or other kin will step in and protect her (Meggitt, 1962:88, 92; Hiatt, 1965:136; Warner, 1937:79). Roheim says that physical punishment is not always effective "Although generally, and as a matter of course, the women are beaten, some of them will make a stand against their husbands" (1933:255). More extreme punishments for elopement and seeing men's secret rituals have been described above. But physical punishment indicates the limited nature of men's control over their wives rather than its effectiveness.

It has been indicated that older women do sometimes get their way for instance by stopping a husband taking a second wife. But this does not indicate equality in marriage. Women's adultery, for one thing is punished more severely than that of men. Meggitt comments:

"Many women resent the operation of the double standard. Some cannot understand why they should be more heavily penalized for adultery than are their husbands; others cannot see why, when they themselves try to remain chaste, their husbands can fornicate with impunity. As public expressions of their grievances merely antagonize their husbands, the women adopt other courses of action. Virtuous wives become insufferably so and privately nag at their husbands almost without pause. Anyone who has heard a Walbiri women nag will readily appreciate the effectiveness of her technique" (1962:106).
Nagging is of course a defensive reaction, a last ditch stand against domination. Even if one admires the power of a nagging wife it is not the kind anyone would choose to wield were any other weapon available. It seems clear that this is one of women's defences against their husband's superior power.

There are many aspects of beliefs about women's powers which can be seen as expressions of male anxiety. The Munga-munga women, on whose mythical exploits the women's ceremonies are largely based, have a prodigious sex life (Reay, 1970:168; Berndt, 1950:33). The Walbiri beliefs about djanba could be seen as the other side of this coin. Meggitt says that these malevolent creatures are believed to abduct women to be their wives. He observed "Apparently, the sexual prowess of the djanba keeps her contented and unwilling to return to her rightful, human husband" (1955:384).

Meggitt sees the beliefs about djanba abductions as preventing women from going off into the bush alone at night to entertain lovers. But the belief that women, if contented sexually by a supernatural being will cease to want her human husband is surely a transparent expression of fears of sexual inadequacy. There is no evidence in the literature that Aboriginal women deliberately play on these male anxieties, but their involvement in women's ceremonies of which a major component is love-magic directed at particular men, clearly has subversive potential. They are I would argue one of the ways in which women resist male hegemony.

Hiatt sees male anxieties as the underlying motivation for the men's pseudo procreation rites. He says that men believe that they
are superior to women and children and have little difficulty in sustaining a dominant posture except for two points of insecurity; the evident and peculiar ability of females to produce babies and the fond relationships between women and their male offspring. "Men perform these ceremonies with aggressive secrecy because the rites are contrived affirmations of male priorities in areas where women are in a naturally strong position" (1971:80).

It is the domination of men that initially necessitates their finding a justification in superior creativity. That is, just as I have suggested that women experience incipient anger about their position of structural inferiority, I would argue that men suffer incipient anxiety about their position of structural superiority.

Maddock characterises the sexual and domestic relations between men and women in a way which is relevant here:

"No doubt the sexes are by nature complementary, but custom elaborates nature, sometimes to the disadvantage of men, sometimes to the disadvantage of women. It will be taken as proof of the subordination of women that while single they form a pool of objects of exchange by the distribution of which alliances are created or sustained among men; that marriage arrangements are decided principally by men; and that domestic violence is monopolized by men. Polygyny also is suggestive of hierarchy, though it is at least open to debate whether a man is more fortunate with five wives than a woman is with one-fifth of a husband" (1974:189).
In many cases a man with five wives may be less fortunate than a woman with four co-wives. But it is surely clear that in the traditional situation women had less choice about whether they shared a husband than men did. Men could generously allow a younger brother to have one of their bestowed wives; a woman had no equivalent virtuous action available. Men thus control their wives with the aid of ideological hegemony.

The most telling limits to a woman's power stem not from a husband's physical or moral coercion but from the situation of "double bind" that she constantly finds herself in. A girl's obligation to her old husband is more powerful than her obligations to infants. Thus though she may be beaten for it she has a strong motive for infanticide. Men's covert acceptance of infanticide may indicate the recognition that it allows them both a more ample supply of food and a more generous quantity of sexual activity from their wives.

Another quite different area where the conflicts between individual women's interests inhibits solidarity is in her relationship with her sisters, real and classificatory, and with her sisters-in-law. Sisters together want to be protected from brothers or sons-in-law, but they are rivals for the same husbands. The hostility between two sisters at Goinjimbi, one of whom was a widow was very obvious. While the underlying jealousy of the married younger sister was recognised by all as the cause of the fights, the other women were sure that the husband would take sexual advantage of the presence of his obviously willing "wife", just as he took advantage of her providing food for him. Sisters-in-law could be close and affectionate companions. They can call each other "spouse". But
the husband of one is the brother of the other and this means that they must be careful and restrained in his presence. Also such women do not cooperate in the provision of food for ceremonies, as they belong to different moieties. This general theme of rivalry between women in one area coupled with cooperation in another is characteristic of women's position.

I have noted Meggitt's comment that "most men are more concerned to maintain male solidarity than redress the wrongs done to women" (1962:93). If this is so one might ask whether women also express their solidarity of interests in action, or are actions of self-interest purely individual. There is plenty of evidence of the latter from Meggitt's description of nagging Walbiri women to Warner's account of wives who frequently "discipline their husbands by refusing to give them food when the men have been away too long and the wives fear they have had a secret affair" (1937:91). Goinjimbi women occasionally threaten not to feed a husband when they are particularly angry. But their complaints are more often expressed in private, by commenting on the "madness" of a particular man, and expressing fear and resentful anger at men's attacks and demands on them. Most often though they express uneasy hilarity at the actions of the men who frighten them.

Meggitt records an occasion when attacks on a woman were prevented by other women, some of whom were mothers-in-law to the attacking men, surrounding the victim. The men had to retreat (1962:241). Meggitt also says there was a tenuous solidarity displayed by most women in the face of assertions of male superiority (ibid, 109), and further, that the strong and lasting affection between
mother and daughter "is reinforced by the daughter's later recognition of the women's community of interests as members of a more or less solidary group coping with men's vagaries" (ibid, 127). But there is little in the way of concerted action that results from this recognition of a "community of interests".

Sharp asserts that co-wives may, in cases of extreme mistreatment of one of them by the husband "institute a Lysistrate régime, an economic and sexual boycott in which they may enlist their other sisters in the community (1933:429-30). He says that such a programme may prove extremely effective, but he also points out that a woman, unlike a man has no freedom from society whatever, and that they at times receive terrific physical punishment, "But though the position of women among the Yir-Yoront is certainly inferior, they are not downtrodden as a group" (ibid, 430).

Again this author seems to be merely asserting that women have some autonomy and residual power. Discussion of political oppression has frequently not distinguished between the limitations of women's life chances because of men's hegemony, and the other question as to how far these limitations preclude women being content. C. Berndt (1970:45) has asserted that there is no evidence that women wanted to change the system and White (1975:140) agrees. But overt discontent is not the only sign of political oppression. Actions such as elopement which disrupt or contradict the logic of the system may not be intended as revolutionary, but they are indications of conflicts.
F. CONCLUSION

Gerontocratic polygyny results in a system of relations which oppresses women and ensures certain specific areas of discord. This is expressed in elopement particularly and also in infanticide and women's love magic. But as Maddock says "Thus the marriage system is designed in such a way that those caught up in it are unlikely to work for change. Adulteries, elopements and other breaches are self assertions; their occurrence testifies to the oppressive weight of denial and deprivation, but leaves the system unchanged" (1964:63).

Maddock is mainly referring to the situation of young men but the statement applies even more strongly to women's situation in a gerontocratic and polygynous society.

The subordination of women is not simply due to direct coercive forces but is more generally embedded in the economics and politics of marriage and supported by an androcentric ideology. It is not sufficient therefore to examine the extent of a woman's influence on bestowal, her control of production or her autonomy in particular areas. Rather, to reveal the underlying political processes it is necessary to separate two aspects of them.

Firstly, there is domination of young men and of women by mature men. Secondly there are the complex political relations between individuals and groups of mature men in which young men and women can sometimes have some influence. This is the public political process which is premised on the control of women by men. Accumulating wives
is virtually the only possible form of accumulation. It is a major source of male rivalry and the major source of inequality in this aggressively egalitarian society. The continuance of this political process depends on the maintenance of control over women. Women take part as conscious actors in the system of exchange, but in so doing they are forced to accept as axiomatic that they are objects in this exchange and thus must cooperate in the conditions of their oppression. The beatings by their husbands are thus neither the cause nor the condition of the continued subordination of women. Rather it is the sign of the weaknesses in the pattern of male hegemony.

The dominant theme of this enquiry has been the psychological and social consequences of the structural position of women in Aboriginal society. In the last sections I have explored some of the characteristics of this structural position, mainly as it relates to marriage. The focus will now be shifted somewhat to consider the consequences of this approach in the area of demography. The literature which includes a consideration of demographic questions, is largely to be found in different journals from that which considers the position of women. However it is my view that it is precisely this divorce of population dynamics from questions of social dynamics which has made some of the debate on these questions unsatisfactory.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE FERTILITY OF TRADITIONAL ABORIGINES
In order to be able to make some estimation of the frequency of voluntary forms of birth control it is necessary to have a look at fertility levels. It is often assumed that high levels of fertility and mortality were characteristic of primitive populations (e.g., Cowgill, 1975; Smith, 1976), and that these two features produced a relatively stable population. My extensive review of the data for Australia as set out in the first section below, led me to conclude that neither of these is true. Instead it seems that low physiological fertility\(^\text{1}\) rather than high infanticide and infant mortality account for the low birth rates\(^\text{2}\) which are reported for pre-contact Aboriginal populations.

Support for this view comes from three contrasting sources. Firstly McArthur et al. give some evidence suggesting that low fertility and mortality rites may have been characteristic of "primitive" populations. They ask that the causes of presumed high mortality rates be explained (1976:324). Secondly Howell is of the opinion that "in general the hunter-gatherers are probably characterised by fertility and mortality levels that are relatively low by the standards of agricultural peoples, intermediate in level between agricultural and industrial peoples today" (1976:138). Thirdly, the geneticist Roberts asks about the basis of low fertility:

1. Physiological fertility does not refer to an innate racial quality but to the physiological consequences of diet, lifestyle and other environmental factors. Any racial differences in fertility (which are unlikely (Llewellyn-Jones, 1974:110)) would be minor compared with environmentally determined differences as is demonstrated by the dramatic changes occurring with changed conditions. Thus Roberts' (1970:474) suggestion that high fertility might be selected against cannot be accepted.

2. This refers to reported birth-rates which may include infant mortality. See below.
"In the calculations for the index of selection intensity .... the aborigines had the lowest fertility on the list. We do not know whether this low fertility, if it is real, is biological, and the results of selection, or cultural, conserving the energy that would otherwise be wasted in superfluous child-bearing and then mortality" (1970:474).

There is some problem with terminology because fertility is both a medical (physiological) and a demographic (statistical) concept. These two aspects of fertility could be seen as the cause and effect respectively of the birth rate. Both will be dealt with here.

In his textbook on demography Cox states "The word fertility is used in demography in relation to the actual occurrence of births, especially live births, and fertility rates are obtained by dividing the number of births during some period by the number of persons in some section of the corresponding population" (1959:162).

Cox further says "Those who are not sterile are said to be *fecund* and *fecundity* is thus the ability to have children" (ibid, 161). This demographic concept of fecundity is similar to the medical concept of fertility. Llewellyn-Jones discusses the confusion in meanings between fecundity, and fertility. "To the biologist and gynaecologist, the term fertility means the ability to *conceive*, and even if the woman subsequently aborts, she has proved her fertility, although she has no child in her arms to prove it. By contrast, to the demographer the term fertility means that the woman has actually given birth to a live child" (1974:111).
But there is a further problem here because each of the terms as a demographic concept refers to rates for a population, whereas the medical concept refers to individual abilities. That is, fertility to a demographer is actually measured by birth rates in populations and has little concern with individual women's ability to conceive and bear children. Further, the demographic references to fertility rates or birth rates are not particularly concerned with rates of infant mortality, infanticide or stillbirths, and frequently rates given do not distinguish between these. This question will be dealt with below. I will use the terms birth rate or population fertility, to distinguish these from physiological fertility. Demographic data on birth rates, usually referring to survival rates, will be presented, and then the results will be accounted for partly in terms of physiological fertility.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish a basis for identifying a low birth rate. I shall use the following measures of population fertility after Nag (1962:15-16). These are the measures available for Aboriginal populations and can be compared with his survey of population fertility in selected groups for which data was collected under similar conditions.

Total maternity ratio: average (arithmetical mean) number of live births per woman when all living women (unmarried and ever married) of age 45 and over are considered. (This measure is called total fertility by others, e.g., Howell, 1973:253).

Maternity ratio: average (arithmetical mean) number of live births per woman when all living women (unmarried and ever married) of all
ages are considered. This is a marginally more reliable figure as it is less dependent on informant's memories. However, for most of the material available, the figure represents the average number of surviving children per woman, rather than live births. Both measures have serious limitations and neither shows changes which occurred with contact. However, one of these is often the only figure that can be calculated from the anthropologist's data.

A. FERTILITY STATISTICS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

A major problem with the figures that are available is that different bases are used for collecting figures. Total maternity ratio (or total fertility, the average number of live births per woman) cannot properly be calculated from census data provided by anthropologists which does not give ages.

The Fertility Ratio is useful for census data but when only complete families are recorded it reflects survival rather than birth rates. Crude birth rates (number of births per 1,000 population) cannot be calculated unless the total population over a period is known as well.

All the available material which would indicate birth rates in pre-contact Aboriginal groups has been included, both statistical data which is rare, and estimates which observers have given without any details to support their opinion. In presenting the tabulated data I will in each case detail the manner of collection and the nature of the population as an aid to assessing reliability of the figures. The manner of collection is of importance as there are a
number of pitfalls which have led to serious errors. A major point is that few writers give mortality figures. It is also of importance to my arguments to be clear as to the degree and nature of European contact which the population has experienced. Especially changes in life-style, diet and medical treatment must be important, for it will be shown that birth rates and infant mortality rates have increased since the advent of missions and government settlements.

Krzywicki collected many estimates of birth rates from early writings, mostly referring to south east Australia. The observers range from settlers, missionaries and explorers to proto-anthropologists. Mostly the original reference is a single figure given as an average number of children. In Table 4 the left hand column indicates the number of times such an estimate appears in the literature. In the middle column are estimates of the average number of children born, and in the right hand column are estimates of the average number of children reared.

From the figures given in this table Krzywicki calculates that on an average the Australian woman gave birth to 4.6 to 5.0 children and reared 2.7 to 3.2 of these (1934:134, 135). Though this is a low total maternity rate, there are factors which suggest that some of the figures are exaggerated. Krzywicki himself suggests that this might be the case for the number reared because of later infant mortality not being included (ibid, 136). In several of the cases maximums rather than averages are being stated. There appears to be no consideration of sterility so that where averages are meant, it is apparently for mothers only. Also, the highest figures of eight children born comes from the least reliable of observers.
Table 4. Fertility of Australian Native Women

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(Slightly modified from Krzywicki, 1934:133-4)

Again Krzywicki notes that this figure is of doubtful accuracy. If the latter figure is omitted one reaches an average of 3.8 to 4.3 born per woman. If this figure as well as the 2.7 to 3.2 children raised is considered inflated because referring to maximums and
mothers only, then the Total Maternity ratio is indeed low. While none of Krzywicki's observers can be considered as being of very great reliability, as he fully realises (ibid, viii), the consensus as to the limited numbers of children born and raised is the strongest evidence in favour of accepting this fact. The degree of contact cannot be assessed for these populations though the observers believed themselves to be reporting an indigenous phenomenon.

The following evidence of mean family size and infant and child mortality rates in Victoria from 1863 to 1966 were collected by Barwick from Government census material and other written records. The mean family size is of interest here. The other data is included to show how the latter is calculated.

![Figure 1: Mean family size, Victorian Aboriginal women, 1863-1966. (From Barwick, 1971:311)](image-url)
Several aspects of these findings are of significance here. Firstly it is apparent that, as with other Aboriginal populations discussed, there is a high proportion of sterile women. One fifth of the total of 1,767 have no children. No breakdown of figures allows an assessment of whether this proportion has changed over the 100 years under consideration. The second significant finding is that the women born between 1802 and 1836 had a total maternity rate of 1.5 to 2. The author says "The upper shaded segment, representing women born 1802-36 who had almost completed their childbearing careers by 1863, must be considered incomplete: the average family size is small and we cannot know whether this was due to infertility or infant mortality before 1863" (1971:313). For all the figures being presented this distinction cannot be made, and other grounds must be used to assess the determinants...
of the low family size. Thirdly there is a marked increase, more than doubling of the family size for those women born after 1851. Figure 2 shows that there is also a very marked increase in infant and child mortality in the same period, which began to decrease slowly after 1866.

Billington's figures (Table 5) show the Maternity ratio to be 3.5 at Angoroka, 3.8 at Yirrkalla and 2.3 at Oenpelli. He suggests that the lower rate at Oenpelli may be a sign of depopulation as a result of the fifty years of white settlement. However as the periods of white settlement are not so very different, and the amount of sedentarisation varies independently, and as the numbers are not large, it is difficult to make any such judgement. The major

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omission here is of women who have never given birth. If 20% of the women in these populations were sterile (this is the average recorded) the Maternity Ratio would be 2.8, 3.0 and 1.8 respectively. The data was collected during a study of nutrition and health which involved procedures not conducive to intimacy and trust by the Aborigines. Thus the figures do not have very high reliability. I will be examining more of Billington’s information below when discussing diet.

Roth in 1899 and 1900 surveyed the populations at two north Queensland settlements, the first on the Georgina River Barkly Tableland (Table 6) and the second on the west coast of York Peninsula (Table 7). This is purely census data with no record of deceased offspring.

Table 6. Survey of the 25 Women in the Camoweal Camp on 24th May, 1900 (Puberty and Above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children borne</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Total children</th>
<th>Number of children that have died</th>
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(Modified from table in Roth, 1908:16) Maternity Ratio: 1.44 Childless: 16%
Table 7 shows a survey of "the first one hundred women above puberty, young and old, whom I (Roth) saw" at Mapoon in 1899.

Table 7. Survey at Mapoon in 1899

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children borne</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Total children</th>
<th>Number of children who have died</th>
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(Modified from Roth, 1908:17) Maternity Ratio: 2.25 Childless: 15%

Unfortunately there are several weaknesses in this data which makes it of less value than would otherwise be the case. Roth says "taking young and old alike, I asked each one separately how many children, boys and girls, had been born to her, and how many of these, of either sex, were alive or dead" (1908:16). He does not seem to have cross-checked the figures, but as had been noted above Roth seems to have been an accurate if somewhat superficial observer. He was also reasonably familiar with these populations, as he was a regularly visiting medical officer. Thus it is not likely that the errors are gross. As no ages are given it is not possible to make any assessment of age specific fertility.
Roth says "At any rate amongst people living a natural existence in their own environments, it is impossible that the birth rate can be so low and the death rate so high" (1908:15-16). The maternity rate of the larger population is not excessively low compared with the others presented here. It is the infant mortality rate which looks excessive, and it seems reasonable to suppose that it is the sedentary conditions which are responsible for this high mortality (see below, p. 257 for supporting evidence). It should be noted that as there is no age data these deaths could be of people at any age including adulthood.

Roth believes that he is providing evidence of the effect of European contact. He says "the natives have succumbed to the encroachment and abuse of the pastoralist and pearl-sheller respectively" (1908:16). However he does not describe what this "succumbing" consists of, and as the European presence could only have been felt in the recent past, it seems likely that Roth's evidence of a relatively low birth rate reflects the pre-contact situation. It is likely however that the "abuse" by European commercial interests such as the introduction of infectious diseases may have initially increased the mortality rates.

Sharp (1940) studied the population of a group of four closely allied tribes on the west coast of Cape York in 1933 and 1935. I have modified Sharp's tables in two ways. I have distinguished only the bush and mission populations, and not the tribal division. Also I have rearranged the figures to enable direct comparisons to be made (Tables 8 and 9).
Table 8. Mission Population, June 1st, 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of women ever married</th>
<th>Total children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Maternity Ratio: 2.13
Childless: 21.7%)

Table 9. Bush Population, June 1st, 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of women ever married</th>
<th>Total children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Maternity Ratio: 2.12
Childless: 22%)

*A question mark occurs here in Sharp's chart. Apparently the exact number of children is not known in these cases and for that reason Sharp has omitted these figures from his calculations. I have used a high figure here so that if anything my result would tend to exaggerate the average number of children. Sharp also omitted the sterile women from his calculations of the average number of children a woman bears. His figure for the whole population is 2.3, higher than mine because of the latter omission.
Sharp rejected the genealogical method of data collection for reasons which will be discussed in detail below. He took two censuses (only the first of which is used here), and asserts that omissions could not have occurred. The study relies on materials which could be observed or verified during the period of study. There is no record of deceased offspring.

The bush population had not experienced direct European influence at the time of Sharp's study. A mission was established in 1915 to the south of the tribal land of the four groups under consideration. Some members of two of the tribes were attracted to the mission and these comprise the mission group. At an earlier stage there had been some direct conflict with European expeditions. None of these influences can be distinguished in these figures as there is no age specific information on birth rates. While in the marriage tables presented by Sharp there is evident a change in the marriage pattern among the mission residents there does not appear to be a difference in birth rates.

Peterson collected the figures in Table 10 from an Arnhem Land community who were still largely nomadic and depending for long periods of time on traditional foods. He remarks "The point that stands out from this table is the high incidence of women with no living children .... At least six of the women over 22 have never given birth" (Peterson, 1971:156).

1. Peterson (1972:30, f.n. 10) quotes Jones' figure of 4.25 as the total fertility for N.T. women despite the fact that his own figures are much lower and those of Jones depend on the Government census figures. The reason no doubt is his very small sample.
Table 10. An Arnhem Land Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Women without living children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 female</td>
<td>4 (by 1970 all had borne children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 male 7 female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 male 6 female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 male 2 female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52-61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 male 4 female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19 males 22 females</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Mat from Peterson, 1971:156)

Maternity Ratio (including the 4 recent births): 1.6
Childless (" " " " "): 36%
(21% never gave birth)

Of course this sample is very small so cannot alone be used as the basis of any generalizations. Again deceased offspring are not recorded.

The following table is intended to indicate the different fertility ratios at Arafura and other outstations. Because the samples are small the difference must be treated as random variation.

Table 11. Arnhem Land Outstations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Childless</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Ave. Children per mother</th>
<th>Total women</th>
<th>Maternity ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arafura Swamp</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other outposts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(From Long, 1963, reproduced in Peterson, 1971:158)

Overall Maternity Ratio: 2.1
Childless: 25%
The final and most valuable evidence comes from the unpublished data collected by Hiatt in 1960 and 1975. The population in 1960 was approximately 135. Three categories of wives of Anbara men are distinguished (Tables 12, 13 and 14).

Table 12. Anbara Women Category One - Deceased before 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Total children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Maternity Ratio: 2.5  
Childless: 16%

The women in this category would have mostly been born between 1860 and 1910. The Blyth River area was not directly affected by European contact until after World War Two and the settlement at Maningrida was only set up on a permanent basis in 1957 (Hiatt, 1965:7 ff). Thus this population can be seen as displaying traditional patterns.
Table 13. Anbara Women Category Two - Over 45 in 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Total children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Maternity Ratio: 3.3  
Childless: 8%

The population represented in category two would not have had flour, medical services or any other change for sufficiently long a period to affect their fertility. Thus the higher birth rate and lower sterility rate is probably due to chance variation over time in a small population.

Table 14. Anbara Women Category Three - Under 45 in 1961  
(Data completed in 1975)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Total children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Maternity Ratio: 4.3  
Childless: 0
Most of the women in Table 14 would have ceased nomadic hunting and gathering, have had European food available and had European medical services available at the birth and rearing of their children.

Table 15. The Anbara Population in 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of births</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Maternity ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>164</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The genealogical material on which these figures are based were collected by Hiatt over a period of eighteen months intensive enquiry. He was of course aware of the problems which Sharp found so daunting (see below, Chapter Six, p.340) and took pains to avoid the pitfalls. It is not claimed that all infants who were born are represented in these figures, but that the low fertility in the first category of women represents the traditional pattern and that category three indicates both a change in infant mortality and a change in fertility.

Hamilton (1970a:129) provides further information on the fertility of Anbara women, but as she does not give complete figures for the population and omits the ages of the women, a close comparison is not possible. She enquired particularly into deaths of children born to women who were child-bearing adults at the time of first settlement. She found that twenty women had given birth to 101 children before 1958. Of these 39 had died. Thus these women bore an average of five children each and an average of three survived. By
1968 these same women averaged almost seven children per woman, indicating an increase in fertility. Unfortunately the number of childless women is not given.

An increase in fertility is also indicated in Hiatt's record of eleven women married to Anbara men between 1961 and 1975. By 1975 these women had produced a total of 38 offspring, an average of 3.5 children per woman. Their reproductive lives were far from complete.

The figures in Jones' demographic survey of the Northern Territory Aboriginal population which he conducted in 1962 are not of very great relevance here as he depended almost entirely on official census material which has only been available since the publication in 1957 of the register of wards (Jones, 1963:9). Also the figures he gives for the Northern Territory compound different trends for cattle station, mission and fringe dwellers. Thus the Total Maternity Ratio of 4.25 for the Northern Territory in 1958-60 (ibid, 75) cannot validly be compared with any earlier figures. However, there are two observations of interest with regards to the Bathurst Island Mission population where the Total Maternity Ratio was 4.5 in 1952-6 and 5.8 in 1957-61 (ibid, 42). Jones says that the rapid growth in population commenced after the war and was associated with the establishment of a hospital in 1946 which cut the infant mortality rate dramatically (ibid, 34). Thus the birth rate must have increased at an earlier stage and been compensated for by the high infant mortality. This is confirmed by the fact that infant deaths are largely caused by pneumonia associated with diseases such as dysentry, gastro-enteritis, etc.,
which are the result of over-crowded unhygienic conditions (ibid, 47). These are a post-contact phenomenon associated with settled camps and mission life (ibid, 51). Such conditions are not characteristic of traditional Aboriginal nomadism. Thus it seems probable that the birth rate has risen continuously since the founding of the Bathurst Island Mission in 1911 which provided food for an increasingly large number of the people. Any increase would have been more than compensated for by the emigration, increased infanticide of infants fathered by Japanese (ibid, 24) and by the increased infant mortality.

The following reports support the data presented above. A high rate of sterility is remarked by Spencer and Gillen "Sterility is of frequent occurrence at the present day amongst the native women. The greatest fertility is amongst the strong, stout women, the thin and weaker ones rarely having children. Possibly sterility in many cases is associated with injury received during the initiation rite of Arilthakuma"\(^1\) (Spencer and Gillen, 1899:52, f.n.). Hernandez, a missionary in north west Australia expresses puzzlement at the lack of children among the Drysdale River Tribes. While naming various contributing factors such as disease, abortion, and sexual abuses (!), he says that these do not account for the situation. "Physicians who have examined the natives appear to be as much puzzled by the case as ordinary observers" (1941:124). He further asserts that 30% of the women have never conceived. In 1943 at Ooldea R. and C. Berndt observed that "few women had more than four children while many had only one or two" (1943:247). They also say that some young women were infertile (ibid, 275). A mission was set up at Ooldea only in 1933 and before that the intermittent contact was probably not

1. This is the female initiation rite described above, Chapter Three.
disruptive of fertility (R. and C. Berndt, 1942a:305). Haddon's information on Torres Straits shows that fertility is low. "by consulting the genealogies it is found that 2.6 is the average number (of children) excluding marriages in which there are no children" (1908:108). He also reports that about 6% of the women were sterile. The Torres Strait Islands have had contact with outsiders of several kinds for a number of years so it is unclear whether this figure represents the traditional situation. A mission was set up in 1871 but only a few of the Islanders used the mission supplies.

The highest total maternity ratio given by Nag in his survey of the fertility of selected societies studied by anthropologists is 10.4 and the lowest is 2.6 with a median of 5.8. The highest maternity ratio is 5.6 and the lowest is 1.7, with a median of 3.2 (1962:169-172). None of these populations have access to modern contraception. Though the notes to some of these figures indicate that they do not have complete reliability, the range of maternity ratios is a standard against which to judge the figures available for Australia. It will be found that Australia's figures are among the lowest.

Another figure that will be given is the number of childless women. The only figure available with which to compare this is the rate of infertility among white Australian couples which is approximately 10%. Of these 25% are due to the wife's fault, 25% are the husband's fault and factors which affect them both are present in the remaining 50% (Llewellyn-Jones, 1972:82). Howell gives the following rates from the carefully studied !Kung. Total Maternity
Table 16. A summary of fertility statistics for Australian Aborigines with some figures for comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date collected</th>
<th>Collected by</th>
<th>Maternity Ratio</th>
<th>Total Maternity Ratio</th>
<th>Number Childless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971 (from historical documents)</td>
<td>Barwick 1971</td>
<td>1.5 to 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849-1922 (originals)</td>
<td>Krzywicki 1935</td>
<td>4.6 to 5</td>
<td>3.8 to 4.3 (amended)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Roth 1908</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>&quot; 1908</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Haddon 1908</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>6% (Torres Straits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Sharp 1940</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Berndts 1943</td>
<td>Approx. 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Billington 1960</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Long (in Peterson 1971:158)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Hiatt 1978</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>16% )Sterility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>8% )Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Peterson 1971</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Hiatt 1978</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962 (from public documents)</td>
<td>Jones 1963</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.5% Nth.Di. 31.5% N.T.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparisons

!Kung

| Howell 1976         | 3                   | 4.7              | 16%                |
| Nag 1972            | Highest             | 5.6              | 10.4               |
|                     | Median              | 3.2              | 5.8                |
|                     | Lowest              | 1.7              | 2.6                |

White Australians

| 7.5% (Llewellyn-Jones) |

The foregoing material is summarised here in order of the date when the material was collected. (Barwick uses early sources.) This does not necessarily represent the degree of contact which varies from district to district. See information given above for details.
ratio, 4.7 (1976:145). Maternity ratio, 3 (calculated from Howell's table 6.4, ibid, 146). Howell says "This level of fertility is considerably lower than any other population known that is practising natural fertility" (ibid, 145). In fact these figures appear to be higher than the lowest given in Nag's survey of Melanesian populations who are not using modern contraceptives to any significant degree, if at all. The explanation probably lies partly in the fact that Howell recorded all the births so that her birth rate does not include losses from infant mortality, infanticide and still births, whereas the other figures are probably better designated as survival rates. Polgar points out "The practice of demographers of counting infanticides in both birth rates and death rates, while not including abortions in either, is misleading" (1972:206). Howell is one of the few who paid attention to these factors; few anthropologists have such information available.

Elsewhere, in discussing the demography of hunter-gatherer groups, Howell hypothesises "That fertility will range from high to moderate, that is, total fertilities of about ten down to about five" (1973:262). This is one of a number of hypotheses which Howell suggests as "a framework within which empirical data can be collected, collated, and permitted to surprise us" (ibid, 261). My results suggest a total maternity ratio of about four which would seem, on Howell's view to be both low and surprising.

This material suggests that Aboriginal women had a total maternity ratio of about 4. Contrary to the view of Rose (1968:203) who asserted that Aboriginal women who lived to menopause had at least eighteen
children, the evidence supports the view that the average number of children borne by a woman was about four. Far from there being a huge infant mortality rate, or an infanticide rate of 50% as proposed by Birdsell (1968:236), these need only have been at a combined level of about 20% to account for the figures presented above.

I am arguing that the low population fertility reflects a low physiological fertility but, as has been pointed out above, the figures can not be used to separate infant mortality (including infanticide) from infertility (failure to ovulate, conceive or parturate). The increased birth rate after contact shown in the figures of Hiatt and Jones could be due to decreased infant mortality. There are three sources of evidence that this is not the case and that it is more likely that both infant mortality and fertility have increased.

I have already mentioned that infant mortality is due to diseases which are nurtured in the sedentary unhygienic conditions on missions, government reserves and station camps (Jones, 1963:97). The increased population cannot then be the result of a decrease in infant mortality but must be due to a sufficiently increasing birth rate to account for the higher infant mortality and the population growth (see also Jones, 1965). It is generally accepted that the Aboriginal population is increasing today despite a very high infant mortality rate. Attitudes of Aboriginal women to the current birth rate confirm the view that early pregnancies and short birth intervals are a new phenomenon. White reports from central Australia:
"The older Aboriginal women I know (born before European contact) remark on the fact that their daughters conceive more frequently than they themselves did when younger. (This is confirmed for other areas of Australia.) The older women had five or six conceptions at most, whereas there are younger women today who conceive every year or eighteen months" (1971:278).

Hamilton's informants from central Australia also said that babies did not come close together previously (1977:6a). It should be noted that a sharply increased birth rate will upset women's traditional nurturance patterns and this will not be conducive to good health of the infants. In fact the level of indulgence already described could hardly be customary unless the numbers of children were low.

Further, ethnographic evidence does not indicate an excessively high infant mortality rate in nomadic conditions. Though deaths immediately at birth would seldom have been remarked on by ethnographers, those occurring later would have been followed by mourning and this would certainly have been noted. In fact there are very few reports of the deaths of infants. Exceptions are Meggitt (1962:319) who asserts that infant mortality was high, and Hamilton (1970a:129) who gives figures from a sample of twenty Arnhem Land women which show that "39% of those born in the pre-contact era died before age five"¹.

¹. There are some weaknesses in Hamilton's data. It is not clear how the sample was selected; information relies on memory, though as ages of the women are not given, it is not clear how long ago these deaths occurred; the sample is small. However, there is no doubt that Hamilton's figures do represent a high level of infant mortality. Hamilton considers that the harsh environment can account for this rate. I do not deny that the rate of infant mortality would have been higher than is usual among, say Australia's white population. Further, if my thesis is correct, and if Hamilton's sample is biased towards the more fertile women, these infant deaths could partly be explained as a response to this unwelcome fertility.
On the other hand Hamilton reports that central Australian women maintained that in the old days the babies they wanted rarely died (1977:6). While the impact of European contact on population levels is complex, the continuing increase in infant mortality along with continuing increase in the population is the major basis for questioning standard transition theory which says that population increase with sedentarisation is due to reduced infant mortality. Clearly there must have been an increase in the birth rate.

Increased fertility could be due to dietary changes, changes in energy expenditure, an increased coital rate or a change in lactation patterns, among other things. It must be admitted that the figures, largely because of their disparate nature and the small samples are suggestive rather than definitive. It is thus helpful to enquire further as to whether low physiological fertility was characteristic of traditional populations. It is necessary to seek those factors which could contribute to such a condition. The rest of this chapter attempts to suggest the range and significance of these factors, and I wish to stress that social organisation is at least as important a determinant of fertility as is the physical environment or considerations of adaptation. These matters will be dealt with under the headings of the probabilities of ovulation, of conception and of parturition.

B. FACTORS AFFECTING OVULATION

Before taking up the question of reduced ovulation frequency it is of interest to note that several observers have commented that Aboriginal women menstruate infrequently or irregularly. Abbie for
instance says "menstruation under native conditions tends to be scanty and infrequent" (1960:142). Roth reports that women claim to be able to stop their menses by standing under a certain kind of tree. Husbands are also believed to be able to stop their wives menstruating. Older women tease younger ones who are menstruating (1903:24). From this it appears that menstruation is not seen as an inevitable monthly occurrence.

Roheim reports:

"Regarding menstruation; it is a fact that they sometimes make confused statements. Strehlow, for instance, tells us that menstruation is very irregular and the flow is much less than that of the white women. Therefore they regard it as some sort of disease ..... But this is only because the subject is one that is likely to provike a considerable amount of resistance ....."

He reports two informants' assertions that "women only have menstruation when they are quite young and once they are married they do not menstruate again" (1933:233). Hamilton, a more recent and female observer, also reports that women in Arnhem Land menstruate irregularly and less frequently than whites (pers. comm.) (See also Montagu, 1937:254).

It is impossible to reach a reliable judgement about such matters where direct observation is rare and unverifiable, but some analysis of the underlying processes of ovulation make these statements seem plausible. Infrequent and irregular menstruation is *prima facie*
evidence that ovulation is infrequent and irregular which could indicate a state of long term infertility. Evidence about factors which would affect ovulation will now be examined, under the headings, diet, lactation and introcision. Nourishment and energy expenditure will be examined for the effect on the length of the period of fertility in women and for reduced ovulation during that period. Secondly, anovulation associated with lactation will be examined. Lastly, possible sterility resulting from the introcision operation will be assessed.

The evidence that Aboriginal women menstruate infrequently and irregularly, coupled with the figures suggesting an increased fertility resulting from residence at missions, indicates that there may be a causal connection between nomadic Hunter-Gatherer life style and reduced ovulation. Data from the !Kung support this view.

Describing a population similar to Australian Aborigines with respect to fertility, marriage patterns and diet, Howell comments "In the !Kung population almost none of the differences between the maximum level of human fertility and the observed low level can be attributed to the marriage patterns. Women marry young and remarry relatively quickly when marriages end in divorce or widowhood" (1976:147). Howell finds no satisfactory explanation for the low fertility among the !Kung. The demographic changes taking place among the !Kung also parallel those among the Australian Aborigines. Those !Kung who have settled down in agrarian Bantu villages seem to have lost a natural check on their fertility. Lee asserts that there is evidence of a shorter birth interval among the more sedentary
Bushman. The previous average interval of four years between births has been reduced to 33 to 36 months (1972:341)\(^1\).

**Diet and energy expenditure**

The contribution of nutrition to reduced fertility will be examined. There is considerable evidence that general dietary factors do have an effect on ovulation, particularly on the ages of menarche and menopause:

"the data we have on menarcheal age are impressively consistent 
..... The main conclusion is perfectly clear: girls have experienced menarche progressively earlier during the past 100 years by between three and four months per decade. On this basis puberty is attained 2½ to 3½ years earlier today than it was a century ago. The trend in height and weight at the age of puberty is in good agreement with this figure, the 11-year-old children of today having the size of 12-year-olds 30 or 40 years ago" (Tanner, 1968:25).

"The only known group that nowadays experiences menarche as late as many Europeans of a century ago did are the Bundi of New Guinea, with an average menarcheal age of 18.8 and no girl menstruating before the age of 17" (ibid, 26). There is a high correlation between earlier menopause and later menarche. The shorter period of fertility is confirmed with work among the Bundi (Malcolm, 1970). Better

\(^1\) Harpender has questioned Lee's findings, but by his own admission his was a broad survey, "collected by fairly cursory interviews....." (1976:160). Thus his finding of lower infant and child mortality in the sedentarised groups must be treated with caution and the matter regarded as still in doubt.
nutrition is believed to be the major cause though the evidence is circumstantial (Tanner, 1968:26-7). The physiological mechanisms involved are not well understood. This shorter period of fertility in women's lives has great significance for pre-historic population dynamics. As Howell says:

"The total length of the fertile period for the average woman is not 30 years (the difference between age 15 and age 45, which is the age range in which essentially all fertility occurs), but a much shorter period, on the order of 20 or 25 years. This is true because the loss of fertility is not experienced promptly at menopause but accumulates up to that point. Some women never achieve fecundity at all, some start to lose their fecundity at age 20, and this proportion accumulates throughout the childbearing years" (Howell, 1973:253).

Experimental evidence that a relationship between body weight and ovulation exists is set out by Frisch and McArthur. They show that:

"The cessation of menstrual cycles (amenorrhea) following chronic undernourishment or rapid weight loss in otherwise normal women is a well documented although often overlooked, fact of human reproductive physiology. Amenorrhea also accompanies the self-

1. The "relative infertility" which Malinowski recorded among post-pubertal Melanesian girls has been shown to be a general phenomenon in all mammalian populations (Montagu, 1937, 1974:259). It is matched by a gradual rather than a sudden cessation of ovulation at the end of a woman's reproductive life. Any exaggeration of the effect in the population under consideration can be considered a part of the general argument of this chapter.
inflicted starvation of anorexia nervosa, a psychogenic disease most prevalent among adolescent girls. Undernutrition delays menarche and the adolescent growth spurt, which normally precedes menarche. An increase in food intake and a gain in body weight restores normal menstrual function after varying intervals of time ....." (1973:185).

They further claim that "The average critical weight represents a critical body composition of fat as a percentage of body weight ....." (ibid, 185). Further, "Other factors such as emotional stress, affect the maintenance and onset of menstrual cycles. Therefore menstrual cycles may cease with severe weight loss and may not resume in some subjects even though the minimum required weight is attained" (ibid, 185). In a more recent article Frisch (1978) has given historical evidence for a direct effect of nutrition on reproductive ability.

Hythen and Leach give evidence of the existence of "war amenorrhoea" (failure to menstruate), and their interpretation of the evidence is that "The most severe forms of deprivation, as in war and famine, are associated with widespread amenorrhoea and failure to conceive" (1964:373). That is, they conclude that it is the severity of deprivation which leads to infertility. Unfortunately these authors do not consider factors of stress which would have operated in the same environment. There is evidence that the body fat of both !Kung Bushmen and Australian Aborigines is very low and this could be a cause of anovulation. Trusswell and Hansen addressed themselves to the question of whether the San Bushmen are adequately nourished. They found no qualitative
nutritional deficiency and concluded that "As a rule, barring accidents and illness, it would seem that the only nutritional weakness of the San's diet is a shortage of energy (calories) usually in the dry spring season" (1976:194). However in the light of the findings above it is a more significant observation that the San are "very thin by all the standards of developed countries" (ibid, 189). It seems likely that it is this lack of body fat which is responsible for the observed low fertility in the light of the evidence of Frisch and McArthur cited above. This observed thinness as well as the low fertility and the coarse but adequate diet seem to apply equally to the Australian Aborigines. I shall present some evidence as to the weight for height and age of Aboriginal boys and girls that indicates a low body fat composition.

Billington presents tables showing comparisons between Arnhem Land Aborigines and white Australians with regard to height for age, weight for height and weight for the same height and age. The height for age data showed a small difference for girls only; Aboriginal girls are a little shorter for their age than their white counterparts. The weight for height comparison showed a regular lower weight for Arnhem Landers again more pronounced in girls. Figure 3 shows the weights for the same height and age for males and Figure 4 for females.

These tables indicate that Arnhem Land Aborigines were in 1948 thinner than white Australians. Billington says "In no instance was an obese adult encountered. The people are lean ....." (ibid, 31). I would assert that this reflects the traditional situation as, in three of the four communities studied, only some of the local
Figure 3: Corresponding weight for same height and age of Arnhem Land and white Australian males, 11-50+ years.
(From Billington, 1960:32)

Figure 4: Corresponding weight for same height and age of Arnhem Land and white Australian females, 11-50+ years.
(From Billington, 1960:33)
Aborigines had been living on the settlement, and that only intermittently for ten years. Besides the difference between blacks and whites, the contrast between male and female Aborigines is marked with girls' weights being markedly lower. Billington says "The decrease in weight with age after early adult life is particularly noticeable in women; the skin of the abdomen hangs loosely in folds, showing an obvious loss of subcutaneous tissue" (ibid, 31). Subcutaneous fat loss in women over 35 was confirmed by Fysh et al. on the same expedition (1960:139). Billington considers "It seems difficult to attribute this to heredity and in view of the relative position of the sexes in Aboriginal society, it is possible that it may be the result of discrimination in the allocation of food supplies. The evidence cited for the loss of subcutaneous fat in women beyond early adult life seems to support this" (ibid, 36).

It is the accepted view that hunter-gatherers in general and Australian Aborigines in particular were neither undernourished nor overworked. But it is necessary to know more of the balance between work expenditure and nourishment, and the particular qualities of the diet that may have some bearing on fertility. To assess the adequacy of a diet Robson points out that it is necessary to measure all nutrients:

"Thus protein adequacy cannot be estimated without taking into account energy intake. Similarly, vitamin A levels in the blood are dependent on protein, and thiamine needs on the carbohydrate source of energy. Consideration of a single nutrient in isolation causes us to overlook important side effects resulting from synergism or antagonism between nutrients or even the food supplying those nutrients" (1975:51-2).
As well there may be periods or areas where there is undernourishment or overwork. It is important to realize that it is the girl's and women's diet that is of interest here, both because women's fertility would be more affected by diet than men's and because female fertility is of greater demographic importance than male.

I wish to show that it is women who seem to have suffered in the distribution of food. As women collected most of the food it would be surprising if they did not take advantage of this fact to ensure themselves an adequate diet. I have already discussed something of the politics of the situation above. Here I will attempt to deal in more detail with evidence that women may indeed have suffered dietary deprivation despite their apparent control of major food supplies.

The only works available giving details of total food consumption are those of McCarthy and McArthur (1960) and the recent unpublished work of Meehan (1975); both of these studies are from Arnhem Land. Gould (1967) recorded the catching and distribution of meat in the Western Desert. Unfortunately he gives no indication of any difference in the amount consumed by men and women and no mention of children's share. The consumption of about 1 1/2 lbs of meat per person per day seems remarkably high, but as records were kept only for six days separated by at least several days (ibid, 59), and as rifles were used, it is difficult to assess whether this was the usual pattern and what relation it bears to the traditional situation. The general conclusions drawn from these and others of a more general kind are that in such an environment the staple dietary needs of the people are adequately supplied by only a few hours of work a
day. Meehan, for instance, concludes "There is no doubt that the diet enjoyed by the Anbara during 1972-73 was a good one. In general, it provided as excess of the recommended intake of energy including an abundant supply of protein in various forms" (1975:222). The work of McCarthy and McArthur also shows that an adequate and protein-rich, if somewhat less reliable food supply was obtained during the driest time of the year. I will take up some considerations that might lead to a modification of Meehan's thesis firstly dealing with a point which is specific to her thesis and then taking up the more general questions of the way in which food preferences and women's position may lead to a less than adequate diet for girls and women.

It is clear from Meehan's study that the collection of the food, particularly the staple shellfish which was collected mostly by the women, did not require their maximum effort. But of course flour was used regularly at the time of this investigation. Meehan calculated how much vegetable matter would have been equivalent to the amount of flour used and calculated how much effort would have been expended in collecting it. She says:

"Yam digging is hard work, but I feel sure that women could probably get more if they were really pressed, and not just providing luxuries. The figures for September, January and May, as they stand, requiring women in the community to gather yams on 7, 14 and 17 days respectively, are reasonable expectations for a traditional hunting and gathering situation. The April figures, requiring women to dig for yams on 28 out of 30 days in the month are totally unrealistic in terms of
Anbara foraging styles. However a small change in the population structure, an increase in the yam yield, a lowering of the calorific intake - or better still a combination of all three, renders the task feasible. For example, if there were three less children in the April population, being replaced by three more women, then each woman would have had to collect yams on 20 out of 30 days. If the daily yield was doubled, that is made 10 kg per woman per day, 8 women would have had to collect yams on 14 out of the 30 days .... Thus there is good reason to believe that the structure of Anbara diet in 1972-3 resembled fairly closely that of traditional times, with bought goods replacing gathered vegetables but providing more or less the same order of quantity" (1975:A43-4).

It must be pointed out that the population may have been unbalanced in any one of a number of ways. At any one time there may have been comparatively few women and more men, old people and children. In such a situation the women may have suffered considerable strain on their energy resources, which could have led to a less adequate diet for all. Also Meehan does not consider that the extra work involved (and yam collection is considerably more strenuous than the collecting of shellfish as she notes (ibid, 227)) would require an extra calorie intake by women to maintain the same nutritional level. Further consequences of population imbalance will be discussed below, but more general questions of dietary habits and food distribution indicate that it is necessary to consider more than the simple availability of food.
It is sometimes assumed that limited time spent in food gathering activities indicates that adequate nourishment is gained in that time. But it could be that the time spent is the result of a cost benefit analysis. That is, a woman might decide to refrain from collecting more food than she must because it would have to be distributed or because the cost of collecting more may be too high for the benefit accruing in some way. For instance, she may have to spend much more energy for little more food. Marshall put forward such a view with regard to the !Kung:

"It has been suggested that because they [the !Kung] do not have to work every day they can be said to have an "affluent society". This is a bon mot but does not add to the understanding of the reasons ..... the !Kung we worked with are all thin and ..... constantly expressed concern and anxiety about food. There must be reasons why they do not gather and eat more. I think energy for digging runs out and the daylight hours come to an end, for one thing. It has been suggested that they cannot eat more roots, berries, and seeds than they do, because the roughage is too much. Also I believe we might look more into a possible social reason. If a woman gathered very much more than her family needed at a given time, would it turn out that she was working for others?" (L. Marshall, 1968:94).

Such a view seems to me a valid explanation of the apparent lack of foresight shown by Aborigines, especially with regard to
the limited use of food preservation techniques. Meehan also describes the fastidiousness about food that has been kept for any length of time which necessitates daily fresh supplies of meat or fish (1975:229, also McCarthy and McArthur, 1960:165). Distribution patterns are such that no hunter or gatherer retains control of his or her spoils. With virtually all other members of the group having claims through one or another kinship link on the food brought to the camp by any individual, extra effort by any one person or by a group of women would result in the surplus being quickly dispersed through the camp. Thus, unless some particular obligation must be fulfilled there is little incentive to collect more than is usual and there is no advantage to an individual who collects more than her companions do.

Actual consumption patterns can also be relevant here. Chaseling describes the Arnhem Land men consuming everything to hand ..... cashews, turtle meat and potatoes were all gorged at once. He then describes the morning search for food; nothing had been saved from the previous night (1957:17, 28; see also Gould, 1969: 264).

My own observations indicate that the men's habit of gorging large quantities of meat contrasts markedly with the women and children's displays of delicacy and control, and frequent self-

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1. See Gould (1969:265) for discussion of food preservation for which techniques were known but seldom used. Sahlin's (1968: 86) view that hunter-gatherers do not plan because of confidence that the environment will provide sustenance is not accurate. Much concern is expressed about food (Roheim, 1933:208; Berndt, 1970:43-4; Gould, 1969:264). This whole question of the limited use of food preservation techniques is a challenge to vulgar adaptation theory.
sacrifice. A fastidiousness bordering on disdain for food is often displayed. The earlier descriptions of the shaming of children, especially young girls out of showing greed provides the explanation for the development of such attitudes. There is evidence that "nutritional imprinting" occurs, so that nourishment patterns formed early in life are not easily altered later (Foman, 1967:271-2). Concern about the size of appetites is expressed in the report of Mathews that babies are given blood from the umbilical cord at birth. "The natives say that if a baby swallows plenty of blood from the umbilical cord it will not require so much food in later times" (1904:218).

The gorging of meat by men also contrasts with women's behaviour in that women's food taboos most frequently apply to the larger animals and fish, so that it is usually only men who can indulge themselves in this way. At Goinjimbi I observed all the young women to be restricted in their choice of food because of one or another taboo. At times it was unclear what the particular restriction was, for instance when a husband and father sat down in front of a whole roast bush-turkey and his wife and daughter chewed damper. They simply said "We dont eat that for our brother/son". That is, a classificatory kinsman usually resident at another community was undergoing his initiation, and during many months this fact placed a restriction on his "M"s and "Z"s. At other times girls refused meat, especially large fish and animals, because she had only "one leg". This is a reference to the number of times she had been in

1. Chewings observed that women do not portion out their food. "Each eats as much as she considers her share, then passes the bone to the next one entitled to a bit. It speaks volumes for their self-restraint that they only eat their proper portion; they never fail on this however hungry they may be" (1936:34).
Yabuduruwa and received a ceremonial object\(^1\). As buffalo beef is available at Goinjimbi and is not the subject of taboos, these girls and women do not suffer deprivation today, but evidence of the extent of the taboos on the major sources of protein indicates possible deprivation in the past, most markedly for young girls, and pregnant and lactating women. Most of the young girls' restrictions are intended to improve the efficacy of the initiation rites for the sons and brothers, real or classificatory, of the girls and women.

Medical evidence that such taboos can cause a major nutritional handicap comes from a contemporary observer who found that mourning taboos caused serious malnourishment at Derby, north western Australia (Akerman, 1975). This is important evidence that while women may have access to food, they could still suffer severe physiological consequences because of cultural proscriptions.

Kaberry (1939) says that female relatives are most endangered by death so that "they must make their grief more obvious and adopt additional precautions. They observe a taboo on meat ..... and their diet is mainly limited to vegetable foods, small fish, snakes and witchety grubs ..... the last two being never eaten by the rest of the community, except once by the men during their initiation" (ibid, 214-5). These restrictions of course apply to young women as well as old and could apply concurrently with the food taboos which Kaberry implies begin some eyars before puberty perhaps from the girls' earliest years. She says:

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1. My informants who were girls and young women stressed the initiatory aspects of this ceremony for themselves, a somewhat different view of the ceremony from that of Maddock (1974:147).
"Some of the taboos on food which the girl must observe until marriage are broken and she is given hill-kangaroo, wild-cat and a small kind of iguana. A year or so later she is given a large type of iguana, but all these become taboo again at menstruation and at pregnancy, or during the dancing of the women's secret corroboree" (ibid, 94, my emphasis).

She describes the taboos:

"At her first menses the girl goes apart with her mother, away from the men and young children. She must not eat certain foods ..... porcupine, long-necked turtle, emu, native companion, little kangaroo, dog, oppossum, snake, turkey, iguana, barramundi and wild cat. These taboos are observed at every period, and during pregnancy; and they apply also to the boy during initiation. They obtain in all tribes discussed in this book. Since all meat caught by the men is gunbu, taboo, it follows that her diet is practically restricted to vegetable foods, fruits and small fish procured by the women" (ibid, 100; this latter sentence refers to the 3-5 days of menstruation).

From north west Arnhem Land R. and C. Berndt report "Prohibitions based on age, sex, locality, and life crisis or sacred ritual also help define what foods are "available". More broadly, inedible things include small animals ....." (1970:35).
Most other accounts of food taboos indicate similar restrictions on the major sources of protein, though in many cases the information is either incomplete or indicates a good deal of variation between tribes (e.g., McArthur, 1960:124-6).

I will now turn to evidence that women provided more food and received less than men. The material presented above demonstrating that women's labour is exploited, supports this point. Gould for instance described women as providing the staple as well as most of the supplementary foods for the group (1969:261-3). Meehan also describes women as receiving less flesh than men (1975:211). Peterson points out that "While men contribute no vegetable food to the collective diet women do contribute meat. At certain times of the year their contribution includes the bulk of the meat in the diet" (1971:118). He reports that at Mirngadja an average of 41.3% of band members are non-contributors to subsistence (ibid, 121). As noted above, regular male contributors are 1/13th of band numbers and regular female contributors are 1/2.7th of band numbers. Thus a male supports 13 dependents and a female supports 2.7 dependents. A band with no regular female contributors could not survive (ibid, 123). Kaberry asserts that as the women bring in food every day, the family is primarily dependent on the women's efforts (1939:36). McCarthy and McArthur also show that men have control over the distribution of meat and generally get more of it, though when the men chose they could lift the taboo on the women eating kangaroo (1960:150-8). Their Fish Creek population included no children and so the women's burden must be substantially underestimated.

I have argued that as women supplied much of the men's staple foods, especially during ceremonies, and supplied their children's
wants at times to their own detriment, the energy expenditure/nutrition balance would have been heavily weighted against the women. This would be so especially in the cases when the population was unbalanced, with fewer women and girls in the group. This could be expected to be the case frequently because of small group numbers, and random fluctuations in population size and structure.

Thus within a generally adequately nourished community, women could have suffered privation because of the higher demands on their labour and lesser rights to food, especially meat. Simple availability of food is thus not the only issue. Women may have "voluntarily" been undernourished due to food taboos, the demands of others, training in childhood to eat little, and the overriding claims of their dependent males.

Bowdler (1976:251-2) has surveyed material on the question of different diets for men and women and makes a number of points supporting the view that men and women have different diets, and that women provide vegetable food for men but receive little meat from men.

I do not wish to overstate the case. One aspect of the women's food gathering activities is that they eat a good proportion of the food they collect before they return to the main camp (Meehan, 1975:156; McCarthy and McArthur, 1960:151). My observations among the Rembarnga bear this out and it seems to be a general finding. But even here young girls refrain from eating large fish and are encouraged to bring such creatures home for their fathers. If they
are not to be considered greedy, women will divide what they collect and balance the immediate satisfaction of eating against the satisfaction of fulfilling obligations.

The argument so far consists of the following points. Lack of body fat in women causes anovulation. Aboriginal women were thin, considerably thinner than the men. This was so partly because of differential rights to food and partly because of greater energy expenditure. Pre-contact Aboriginal fertility was low. Finally fertility has increased markedly on missions and Government reserves where flour and sugar are provided. The significant factors leading to the increased fertility would seem to be a greatly reduced energy expenditure on the part of the women and an increased carbo-hydrate intake leading to a build-up of body fat. Thus there seems to be a good case for asserting that pre-contact Aboriginal fertility was low partly because of a low calorific intake and a comparatively high energy expenditure. This conclusion may apply generally to other hunter-gatherer groups.

The contraceptive significance of lactation

It is the contraceptive significance of lactation rather than that of nutrition which has been considered the major reason for long birth intervals among hunter-gatherers by several recent authors (e.g., Lee, 1972:340; de Roos, pers. comm.; Hamilton, 1977, ms.). Before examining their views it is as well to be clear

1. I am not of course arguing that the diet is "better", only that this specific effect might be expected in women who have been on the verge of undernourishment. The high roughage content in the diet may also have had specific effects.
about the physiological mechanisms involved in order to clarify the theoretical arguments. The contraceptive effect is related to the production of prolactin. This hormone was only identified in humans in 1971 (Healy and Burger, 1977:62), so that there is not a great deal known about it. Prolactin is present during pregnancy and is responsible for the cessation of ovulation. Its production is also stimulated by suckling and it is present immediately after suckling at levels equal to those obtaining during the last phase of pregnancy when prolactin is at its highest level (see Table 17). While the prolactin level falls fairly rapidly by half during the first hour after suckling, the basal level remains high. It seems agreed that lactation in the first three months after birth is associated with elevated basal values, which gradually decline in magnitude, and a further elevation during suckling (Dr. D.L. Healy, pers. comm.). A study among the Lwiro in central Africa where post-partum amenorrhoea persists for up to 24 months, showed that basal serum prolactin concentrations were high until fifteen months post-birth in those women who were nursing. Despite these elevations in basal prolactin in nursing mothers, after three months post-partum the increase in serum levels of this hormone with suckling was negligible (see Table 18) (Delvoye, 1976:288). That is, after three months the amount and frequency of suckling had little effect on prolactin levels. This is not to say it did not have a role in maintaining the basal level. From the evidence provided by these authors it seems that persistent elevation in prolactin from 614 to 977 uU/ml (or 15 to 24 ng/ml) is sufficient to suppress ovulation. Dr. J. Murray, a Sydney gynaecologist, from his own observations, judges that women will not conceive with 50 ng/ml of serum prolactin or more and that under 15 ng/ml there is no inhibition of ovulation.
Dr. D.L. Healy says the infertile patients with amenorrhea and prolactin levels of 25 to 30 ng/ml will ovulate and conceive once these levels are reduced (pers. comm.). Clearly there will be a good deal of individual variation.

Table 17. Prolactin Concentrations in Various Physiological States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluid</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Prolactin concentration (ng/ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ± S.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serum</td>
<td>Women: Non-pregnant</td>
<td>9.0 ± 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pregnant: 1st trimester</td>
<td>56.2 5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd trimester</td>
<td>117.4 14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd trimester</td>
<td>251.4 23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 weeks postpartum: not suckling</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 weeks postpartum: suckling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before suckling</td>
<td>15 to 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 minutes after</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 minutes after</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(From Healy and Burger, 1977:63)

Table 18. Mean Serum L.H., F.S.H., and Prolactin in Regularly Menstruating and Amenorrhoeic Mothers of Central Africa (Lwiro) Who Breast-feed for 1 to 24 Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Before suckling</td>
<td>Before suckling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>after start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>of suckling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly menstruating mothers (N=13)</td>
<td>614 (522-685)</td>
<td>14.6 (11.1-19.1)</td>
<td>11.3 (10.6-11.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenorrhoeic mothers (N=26)</td>
<td>977 (920-1028)</td>
<td>9.3 (7.9-10.9)</td>
<td>11.7 (11.4-11.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult men (N=20)</td>
<td>214 (198-232)</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means±1 S.E.M. are in parentheses.

(From Delvoye, 1976:289)
The question of what prolactin level blocks ovulation and what produces this level are crucial to assessing the views of Hamilton and R. and C. De Roos. These authors asked how birth spacing was achieved among hunter-gatherers. Hamilton's (1977) argument is that where infants depend exclusively on breast milk for a number of years because no sufficiently soft supplementary food is available in the environment, then the level of lactation will be sufficiently high to inhibit ovulation. That is, it was alternative food sources that released human fertility from the control that existed among hunter-gatherers. Howell's suggestion for the Bushmen is similar: "One of the practical reasons why lactation continues so long among the Bushmen is the relative absence of soft, easily digestible foods in the wild diet that are suitable supplements for infants or young children" (cited by Lee, 1972:341).

The similar argument of R. and C. de Roos (1977) puts more stress on the frequency and intensity of suckling. Noting that serum prolactin levels fall swiftly after suckling ceases, they assert that only among hunter-gatherers, where commonly babies are virtually continuously suckled for a number of years, will there be a sufficiently continuous high level of prolactin to block ovulation. Non-nutritive suckling is common where the breast is used as a pacifier. Among primitive agriculturalists babies are commonly left in the village during the day while the mother works in the field. Breast feeding has been limited during most of European recorded history. The modern four hour feeding schedules mean periods of some hours between feeds, and longer during the night. Thus the "natural" physiological process which while providing nutrition for infants also ensures that the mother does
not conceive again, has ceased to be effective in all but hunter-gatherer populations.

There are several problems with these arguments which must lead to further enquiry. The major weakness is in using the suckling factor to explain a four year birth interval without attention to changes in the lactation or suckling pattern over this period. Infants gain a progressively smaller proportion of their nutritional needs from breast milk. Studies in New Guinea show that each year the milk supply is progressively reduced from "700-400 ml. in the first year, 400-200 ml. in the second, and around 200 ml. thereafter until weaning" (Bailey, 1965:36). The quality of the milk is somewhat improved in both protein and solids content until the fourth year, but not nearly enough to counteract the lessened quantity, let alone the increasing nutritional needs of the child (Beecroft, 1967:400). Bailey concludes her study of breast feeding in New Guinea with the observation that there is no evidence of a correlation, between quantity of milk consumed and the growth of the infants beyond 6-12 months (1965:47). Thus the level of lactation is reduced independently of the provision of supplementary foods.

While R. and C. de Roos' concept of non-nutritive suckling may appear to resolve this problem they have not given evidence of its frequency after two years. From my observations many infants between two and four only suckle occasionally during the day and seldom at night. Of course there is a wide variation in this behaviour but if it is argued that the frequency of suckling itself is the releasor of prolactin then some evidence must be produced as to the frequency of suckling in infants over two years. Both decreased
total suckling time and increased length of time between feeds occur as a result of increased mobility, emotional independence of the infant, and also because there is less milk available.

A second problem is that the contrast between hunter-gatherers and primitive agriculturalists is not so dramatic either in terms of feeding infants nor in the provision of supplementary foods. Aboriginal infants from the age of six months are given almost anything they ask for so that there is little food they miss out on entirely. McArthur describes the range of foods Arnhem Land infants were given from six months and says that by the age of about two solid foods form the bulk of the diet (1960:123; also Meggitt, 1962:124-5). By eighteen months children can eat most adult foods and gain most of their nourishment from them. These children certainly continue to suckle, but it cannot be asserted that they are required to depend on breast milk because of the lack of grain foods to supplement the diet.

Evidence exists that with the continuation of lactation over time, the contraceptive effect is reduced. Bonte and Balen in a study demonstrating that lactation did reduce fertility conclude that "During lactation the majority of conceptions were found to be delayed by some 15 months, but the family spacing effect was maximal during the first 9 months. By 27 months after delivery the contraceptive effect of lactation can be assumed to have largely disappeared (1969:97). The usual delay of conceptions by 15 months accords with the information from the Lwiro above showing that prolactin levels remain high for that period. After that, and perhaps even before it, the level of prolactin in independent of
the infant's rate of suckling. Thus the actual length of time
since parturition appears to be an independent factor in reducing
prolactin and re-establishing ovulation.

Of interest for my previous argument on nutrition is the
evidence cited by Saucier that suckling does not have a uniform
effect in all populations.

"Sheps (1965) and Potter (1965) have discovered that the length
of post-partum amenorrhea differs strikingly from one population
to another. A large sample of Hutterite women was found to be
fecundable again about seven months after having given birth,
whereas a large group of Indian women (Ludhiana) remained
infertile an average of eleven months. All the women in both
samples were suckling their last born. Resumption of sexual
relations was shown to have no effect on the length of their
amenorrhea. Although the level of nutrition of the two groups
is not similar, many authors attribute the difference in length
to a genetic factor" (Saucier, 1972:249, my emphasis).

Individual variation is also considerable. In one case I know
personally, an Aboriginal woman has twice conceived within six
months of giving birth and was in both cases breast feeding
continuously as is usual. Thus it can be shown that the prolactin
effect is not a single and reliable inhibitor of ovulation. Other
factors must be involved in the low fertility of Australian Aborigines.

A more general point about the arguments is that there seems
to be some misunderstanding of demography. While primitive
agriculturalists may have had a denser population than most hunter-gatherers (though see Lourandos, 1977:202 ff) it has not been demonstrated that their populations were growing or fluctuating more than hunter-gatherers except over very long periods of time. Thus the balance between fertility and mortality would be expected to be similar for both types of populations. There is clearly a potential for growth in all populations as exhibited by the near universal practice of contraception, abortion and infanticide (Himes, 1936:421, etc.).

Finally, the increase in birth rates which has occurred on missions and Government Stations is not preceded by a change in suckling habits. If anything the sedentary life with no necessity to collect food means that infants have more access to the breast and from my observations, take advantage of this fact. There is no evidence that the provision of supplementary foods in this changed environment leads to reduced suckling. It may be suggested that the low body fat discussed above may significantly increase the anovulatory effect of lactation. However malnourished women, eating little protein produce breast milk of relatively normal protein content for long periods without detriment to themselves (Meyers, 1974:233). It may be rather that the anovulatory effect of low calorie intake leading to lack of energy reserves, may be exaggerated due to lactation. That is it is the effect of low nutrition levels on ovulation that is increased when a woman is lactating.
Oviduct Blockage and Stress

The introcision operation has been described above in detail. There are two ways in which such an operation could have an effect on fertility. The first is by some direct physical damage to the reproductive organs. This appears to have occurred in a few cases (Roth, 1897:175) but it seems probable that such an occurrence was accidental and rare. The other possible effect is through infection causing infertility by blocking of the fallopian tubes. Expert opinion is that such an effect is unlikely as the result of defloration or introcision alone (J. Murray, gynaecologist, pers. comm.). While ritual plural intercourse immediately following the operation may slightly increase the probability of infection, this is not likely to be a major cause of the high level of apparent sterility. This sterility is also observed to exist in areas where there is no such initiation for girls and this precludes it as a general explanation.

The syndrome of "one child infertility" which has been identified in "Western" populations must also have occurred among Australian Aborigines. The condition referred to is oviduct blockage which occurs because of infection at parturition. This would be at least equally likely to occur among Aboriginal women. Perhaps more significantly it is likely to occur as the result of procured abortion, especially by the methods used by Aboriginal women. As we have seen, abortions were not uncommon when girls conceived early. It is likely that such girls were the most naturally fertile. Thus a proportion of the 20% of women who had no offspring may have suffered oviduct blockage as the result of aborting an infant when young. Oviduct blockage is difficult to correct. If an operation

1. Chaseling observed that in Arnhem Land there were many stillbirths and that infertility was the result of abnormal births (Chaseling, 1957:68).
is performed only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the women become pregnant and only $\frac{1}{7}$ have a live baby (Llewellyn-Jones, 1972:89). Llewellyn-Jones also says "these factors may well be the reason for the different proportions of barren women in the nations of the world" (1974:126).

It is necessary here to refer to stress or anxiety as a factor which could reduce fertility by causing anovulation in women and/or a reduced sperm count in men. Several authors have suggested that cultural stress could have caused the infertility observed in post-contact populations. W. Thomas for instance reported Aborigines saying they had no country now "so no good 'em have piccaninny" (1839:80). Lommel says that "aborigines may be right in claiming that their falling birth rate in recent times is due to the mental disturbance which is caused by the news of the approaching civilization. According to their opinion they "cannot find the right dreams" any more which are necessary for fertility ....." (1950:163).

A more careful suggestion of the same view is made by Sharp, who says there are indications that "the total population is declining rapidly but not as a direct result at present of introduced European diseases. Conditions of acculturation, while presumably precipitating this decline for the entire group, do not effect a differential rate of decline for sub-groups exposed in different degrees to these conditions". Sharp suggests that "mild and largely indirect acculturation ..... may be as disastrous in its effect on cultural morale as is more intense, direct acculturation ....." (1940:507). Finally Berndt describes the disastrous reproductive lives of a small sample of women in the Northern

1. This second effect of stress should rightly be treated as a factor affecting conception rather than ovulation. However the stress effect is mainly anovulatory and for simplicity it is included here.
Territory and asserts that discontent, and distrust of the future were factors helping to keep the birth rate low. Both men and women could see no reason for rearing children to grow up under such conditions as Aboriginal workers were experiencing (1945:52-3).

Jones (1963:6) gives evidence suggesting that reports of the decline in Aboriginal populations are greatly exaggerated. I have argued above that the reports of low fertility in post-contact populations could indicate a traditionally low fertility. Samples and time spans are far too small to even attempt any generalisations about these effects of stress. The expressed anxiety could also indicate a traditional concern by men about reproduction. It is also possible that there was a declining reproduction rate, and a factor here could be that women wanted even fewer children than previously, or that stress due to culture contact was indeed affecting fertility. There is little firm physiological evidence about such a reaction to stress, but it is known that stress (tension, anxiety) can lead to anovulation in women and a lowered sperm count in man (Katz, 1972:360-1; J. Murray, pers. comm.). It could also be argued that such an effect would have been produced in traditional Aboriginal populations in times of food shortage: some anxiety about food seems to have been endemic where fresh supplies were required daily. However it is unlikely that the level of anxiety in Aboriginal women was chronically high enough to produce anovulation.
C. FACTORS AFFECTING CONCEPTION

Two factors seem to be of importance in considering the reduced probability of conception. Firstly the frequency of coitus and secondly the sub-incision operation.

Frequency of coitus as a factor affecting the fertility of a population has been treated by Nag (1972). He points out that if coitus commonly occurs less than four times a week, the chances of conception are significantly decreased. This is because the fertile period of a woman is limited.

"If the average duration of the fertile period in the ovulatory cycle of women is accepted as less than 48 hours, then it is easy to see that a variation of the average frequency of coitus, even within a moderate range of six to twelve per menstrual cycle, can be expected to result in a considerable variation in the probability of conception in a noncontraceptive situation" (ibid, 232).

Using a study of a sample of 428 New York couples, Nag demonstrates that "It is very clear ..... that a strong inverse relation exists between conception delay and reported coital frequency, even when the frequency is higher than four times per week" (ibid, 233). This holds true regardless of the age of the husband and wife.

Now it may be argued that such a consideration would have no relevance to the Australian Aborigines as they have been described as having a vigorous sex life. White has said "Aborigines were and
are sexually vigorous, and most women would have run the risk of becoming pregnant whenever they ovulated by either their husband or lover" (pers. comm.). It is my opinion that this question requires further examination. As I have argued above, such a public view may reflect events in the lives of some of the group's members but it is unlikely to accurately reflect all. For instance, older women in this case are often rejected by the husbands. Secondly the flesh may be willing but the opportunity may not arise either because some women deliberately subvert the sexual wishes of their possible partners\(^1\) or because the couple cannot achieve sufficient privacy. Thirdly there is the existence of post-partum sex taboos\(^2\).

While in every society sexual behaviour is of intense interest, the ease and manner in which such interest may be publicly expressed varies greatly\(^3\). It is R. and C. Berndts' opinion that among Aborigines, "The whole subject of sex is treated frankly, as a normal and natural factor in human life" (1964:159). Such a view

1. That it is women who do this is not a consequence of any biologically given difference in sexual receptivity, but a direct result of the socialisation of women's sexuality (See above, Chapter Three).

2. No relationship is suggested between coital frequency and nutrition. While starvation is known to reduce libidinal drives, chronic hunger and under-nourishment, which it was suggested above may apply to women, does not have this effect (Nurje, in Saucier, 1972:252).

3. Homosexuality, which could also be a factor in decreasing the rate of conception, will not be discussed here both because its occurrences appear to be rare and also because information is scarce and contradictory. For instance, T.G.H. Strehlow (1971: 493), Roheim (1933:219), Berndt (1943:276-7) and Kaberry (1939: 257) assert it does not exist. Meggitt (1966:305) says it is rare and treated as shameful. Hiatt's (1969:6) informants denied that it existed among the Anbara.
is difficult to accept from a general understanding of human sexuality. My observations indicate that some aspects of sexuality but not others were openly recognised and discussed. While sexual permissiveness may be defined differently among Aborigines and Whites, that category of behaviour exists and is disapproved. The rules and restrictions placed on sexual expression differ from society to society, but everywhere these rules are the subject of intense feeling and powerful sanctions. Tonkinson's observations in the Western Desert confirm this. He found that the Jigalong men considered discussion of menstruation and pregnancy dangerous and punishable (1978b:83).

It is misleading to accept general descriptions of Aboriginal sexuality or any other without recognising the wide variation between the experiences of young and old, men and women, attractive and unattractive (Berndts, 1964:161-2), and without recognising also the problem of ascertaining what behaviour is occurring. It is extremely hard to know when coitus occurs, and a flirtation with the intention of consummation can arouse as much excitement and jealousy as a consummated affair. For this reason such divergent opinions as have been expressed about permissiveness among Aborigines are not surprising. They indicate the difficulties of observation in the area of sexuality.

One source of limitation is the form of actual taboos, or at least conventions discouraging coitus at particular times. Those during menstruation and pregnancy, which seem to have been neither extensive nor powerful any way, would not of course have any influence on reproduction. But there is some evidence that a post-
partum taboo on coitus existed in some areas. "The mother is expected to refrain from sexual intercourse for varying periods, in some areas as long as a year or so, and a woman who becomes pregnant within a few months of bearing a child is likely to be the butt of ridicule and scorn" (Berndt, 1964:127). Reid's informants at Yirrkala stated that the traditional post-partum celibacy was not being observed and blamed this fact for the decreased spacing between children (pers. comm.). But many authors state that a married couple could resume sexual relations after only a few days or weeks (Warner, 1937:78; Meggitt, 1962:278; Goodale, 1971:27). It seems likely that even when there is a belief that post-parturient mothers should refrain from coitus, there is little force in this rule. In some areas such a rule appears to be absent altogether (Roheim, 1933:252; Kaberry, 1939:154). Where a second wife is available, though, the constraint would be easy to observe, and this is a further aspect of the limited coital frequency that co-wives would normally experience.

Meggitt (1962:111) gives evidence that co-wives who shared their husbands' sexuality would not have had coitus at all with their husband for extended periods. Warner (1937:91) describes a man who waits for one wife to sleep when he wants to sleep with another. If such situations are typical, co-wives would not have the frequency of coitus for the optimal level of fertility to obtain which, as indicated above is over four times a week. Evidence given above about older wives being rejected by their husbands would indicate the same situation. Now it may be argued that while older co-wives in particular receive less sexual attention from their husbands, they are commonly in a better position to have lovers. Those who
are still attractive to the younger single men would certainly find lovers available. The major consideration here is privacy. Coital privacy is of importance in all human societies (Brain, 1977:193). In a hunter-gatherer group where life is lived in public, where solitude is feared, and where everyone is aware of the activities of others, privacy is difficult to achieve. I have dealt above with women's use of this fact to avoid coitus (Chapter One, p. 28). But it seems also that lack of privacy as such might mean a less than optimal level of coitus for optimal fertility, at least for some women and perhaps for all. As coitus does usually take place outside the camp, as stated by several authors the organisational problem warrants further examination. Married couples especially men with new young wives frequently go out for a few days hunting together. This does seem to indicate that they have insufficient privacy normally. As far as bush meetings go, assignations require full co-operation of the couple and, one might suspect, the turning of blind eyes by others. As all women are married, their liaisons with another man would need to be kept secret. A woman who has one or two children may have difficulty even in finding opportunity to copulate with her husband if this generally takes place in the bush in the daytime. Meggitt describes the difficulties Walbiri people face because of areas around the camp being designated as men's or women's country. Any man who goes to the "women's country" alone is thought to be contemplating adultery. Women are thrashed by their husbands on suspicion. Further sanctions arise from public knowledge. "A couple detected in amatory adventures in the women's country, for instance, may be publicly ridiculed, as well as physically attacked; and Walbiri humour and sarcasm are extremely heavy-handed" (1962:54).
Another aspect of Aboriginal social life would to some extent counteract the above and facilitate licit or illicit sexual liaisons. People take care to avoid questioning others about their activities or discussing an individual's whereabouts or actions. That is, there is a recognition of privacy even when an individual's movements and activities are known. This is enhanced by the widespread use of sign language. Thus women may not remark the fact if one of their number separates off from the group for some time, and men out hunting will also not question the exact movements of others. It is only when the actions of others over a period cause conflict that public reference will be made to them, and of course the spouses of an adulterous couple will not be so tactful. I am suggesting that the latter may often be kept in ignorance because of a habitual conspiracy of silence about the actions of individuals. However it can be readily recognised that this is not a very reliable method of achieving privacy, so that the previous argument retains some force.

Two factors then could have been significant in reducing coital frequency below the minimum. Privacy, it has been argued should not be lightly dismissed as a factor simply because adultery is common among Australian Aborigines. It may be that there is a reduced overall frequency of coitus as the result of lack of privacy in a hunter-gatherer band, Meggitt's example of potency notwithstanding (1962:89). The other factor is the different levels of coitus experienced by women in different age and marital categories. There is insufficient evidence to make any definitive statement about the effect on fertility of any reduced coital frequency, but it seems probable that monogamously married women would not have reduced
chances of conception due to low coital frequency; polygynously married women, and especially older co-wives and widows may well have suffered, or perhaps enjoyed such a reduction in the probability of conception. Again, changed conditions on missions and government stations and even cattle stations, would add to the opportunity for privacy because of buildings. In some cases this may have a major effect on the frequency and regularity of coitus. Also women's opportunity for avoidance of coitus will be much reduced; young men will be enabled to gain easier access to women; the restrictions on violent physical punishment that European law imposes will be exploited by men and women who wish to contract adulterous liaisons (see T.G.H. Strehlow, 1971:494).

The fact that it is older men who have the regular and licit access to the most fertile women makes the fertility of older men of interest. Male fertility in general will also be discussed.

**Male fertility**

In Chapter One I detailed the evidence about male genital operations. Early observers viewed sub-incision as the Australian

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1. Pitt-Rivers' (1927:148) theory that promiscuity causes infertility because of an immunization effect of the sperm from one male on that of another, has received some support in recent years. Nag says "When the frequency of coitus is .... very high, as in the case of prostitutes, there are reasons to believe that fertility is negatively affected by immunological reaction" (1972:233). It is likely that it is a reaction to sperm *per se* rather than different sperm which is the significant factor. In fact an immunological reaction can develop to the sperm of a particular man as is not uncommon in cases of married couples who use contraceptives for some years and subsequently have trouble conceiving (J. Murray, pers. comm.). This of course could not occur among Aborigines in the absence of modern contraceptives. Any promiscuous coition could only have occurred for short periods during large ceremonial gatherings. Such an effect as discussed by Nag would be reversed in a short time.
Aborigines' successful solution to the Malthusian problem. Later writers became convinced that sub-incision was not intended for contraceptive purposes. I will here argue that sub-incision would have had the effect of reducing the probability of conception to some extent. Circumcision and "fire stick circumcision" would not have caused this reduced probability of conception though it may possibly have caused infertility through infection. While Stuart (1896) said "there will generally be upon the whole lessened chance of fecundation, but in particular cases it may not be very marked at all .....", there were many who followed Roth's view that combined with the mutilation of women and the particular manner of coitus, there would be no reduction in the likelihood of fecundation.

"In this position the vaginal orifice, already enlarged by the general laceration at initiation, is actually immediately beneath and in close contact with the basal portion of the penis, and it is certainly therefore a matter of impossibility to conceive the semen as being discharged for the most part anywhere but into its proper quarter" (Roth, 1897:179).

Roth's argument has been echoed by Basedow:

"Through this lateral distension [of the sub-incised penis] the receiving vagina will gape more than it would under normal conditions, and so there is greater facility for the fluid to enter. And more, the tribes who practise sub-incision in most cases also submit the female to corresponding mutilation, which further dilates the passage. In some cases this artificial dilation is trivial and merely amounts to a defloration of the hymen" (1927:154-5).
It is true that the vaginal cutting would allow the vaginal orifice to widen. Details of the operations which were performed on girls have been described above. But the view that the sub-incision operation does not reduce fertility at all must be questioned. Himes considers sub-incision to be a "deviation from optimum conditions" for fertilization (1936:47). Stanton Hicks commented in passing "the sub-incised penis, together with the squatting method of coitus limits multiplication . . . ." (1963:49). The description of the most common method of coitus seems to support this view (see fig. 5).

Figure 5. Method of Coition.

(a) and (b) after Miklucho-Maclay
(c) after W.E. Roth

(From Basedow, 1927:152)

While in the drawing of Roth perhaps the superior position of the male would allow the semen to be ejected into the vagina, the drawings from Miklucho-Maclay suggest that the semen would be more likely to be deposited outside. With variations in position it is likely that there would be a reduction in the overall probability of conception.

1. Hicks is a physiologist who measured skin temperatures of Aborigines in central Australia and showed that they retained body-heat by shutting down their skin circulation.
Sub-incision is a source of blood for rituals, as well as being the occasion for ritual. The incision is extended at each ceremony so that there would be an increased contraceptive effect at the later stages. Older men, who monopolize women, would thus be the most affected. A second factor concerning male genital operations is the increased likelihood of urethral stricture caused either by infection or by scarring. This is likely to lead to sterility in men.

There is a further aspect of these operations which is relevant here. A myth reported by Howitt tells of the inflammation of a man's penis when he continued to have coitus with his wife after being circumcised. His immodest behaviour enraged others and they killed him (1904:793). It seems likely that the reference is to subincision, either the original operation, the extension of the incision or the reopening of the wound for the supply of blood for ritual purposes. The myth implies that there is a period of abstinence after such operations, no doubt because of the painfulness of coitus at such times. This is an interesting contrast with the fact that women's introcision operations were immediately followed by ritual plural intercourse. Any such abstinence at regular intervals should be noted as causing some reduction in the conception rate. The more general point is that male fertility does decrease with age though unlike women, men may never completely lose their fertility (Timiras, 1972:533). It is widely recognised that men's ability to enforce the fidelity of their younger wives is limited. However they can severely curtail though not eliminate the access of their wives to younger men, so the reduced level of fertility in old men would reduce the conception rate in some small measure.
Finally to complete this examination of factors affecting Australian Aboriginal fertility we must examine the probability that conception will not result in a birth; that is the probability of spontaneous abortion. The rate of spontaneous abortion is a good deal higher in all populations than is generally known and some estimates follow. "One study estimated that one-third of all fertilized ova are shed before the first missed period and nearly one-quarter are lost later" (Nurge, 1975:26, referring to Westoffs' study). Other estimates based on known pregnancies give somewhat lower figures of twelve to fourteen per cent (ibid, 27). Nurge also says "Fetal deaths are more frequent for women under 20 than for those in the 20-24 group, and the risk rises with age" (ibid, 27). In a study of the fitness of the human zygote in England, James says "Of 100 human zygotes, now, in this country, it is estimated that embryonic and early fetal loss (before the end of the third month) accounts for 44; induced abortion, 7; late fetal loss (after the third month), 4" (1975:1).

A study by Cutright demonstrates that spontaneous foetal loss changes over time in response to changing environmental conditions. He says "these data may then suggest that environmental conditions have a differential impact at different gestation periods, with the environmental impact being generally greater in the 8-19 week period than in the earlier or later periods of risk. We need additional research to clarify the causal factors determining these patterns" (1975:424).
It seems probable that the major environmental conditions which would increase the rate of foetal wastage among Australian Aborigines are to do with the physical demands of food collection in harsh climatic conditions and a somewhat irregular diet including a high percentage of roughage. Though there is no experimental support for this assertion, it seems intuitively obvious that it is such conditions which would considerably increase the rate of foetal wastage.

Dewhurst's textbook on obstetrics and gynaecology notes:

"Dietetic factors have long been listed as causes of abortion, but the evidence is generally inconclusive as to which substances are specifically involved. Hibbard (1964) drew attention specifically to folio-acid deficiency in women who aborted, and the evidence suggesting that this vitamin is important is stronger than for any other" (1972:209).

There is no evidence of folic acid deficiency among Aborigines in Arnhem Land, the only area where tests have been carried out (Hodges, 1960; Fysh et al. 1960). In a detailed study of !Kung nutrition, where as noted above there is an unexplained low fertility level, Truswell and Hanswen found that the intake and blood levels of folic acid were "very satisfactory" (1976:193)

Howell says:

"Nor can the low observed fertility be attributed in any large part to high rates of fetal wastage or infanticide. The rates of miscarriage and spontaneous abortion reported are very low
for remote periods in the past as women forget to report these events. During the past ten years the levels of fetal wastage reported are believable and comparable to schedules reported in other populations" (1976:147).

Howell does not consider the fact that early foetal wastage may not be recognised by the mother. The fact that the level of foetal wastage is "believable" does not preclude it being under-reported. Hamilton mentions miscarriage as a contribution to population control which would be reduced with a sedentary life-style (1970:130). This is supported by Yengoyan (1972:87) and Jones (1963:75).

Thus a possible high level of spontaneous abortion would be a significant contributing factor in low Aboriginal fertility. The higher rate of successful pregnancies which could be expected with the cessation of physically demanding food gathering would be another factor contributing to higher post-contact fertility.

E. CONCLUSION

I have tried to demonstrate that pre-contact fertility in Aboriginal women was low and I have tried to explain why. Some of

1. The increase in the birth rate would lead us to assume that Aboriginal women would quickly accept modern contraceptives. Reid and Dhamarrandji (1978) have argued that Aboriginal women do accept and want to use modern contraceptives but are prevented from doing so by the clumsy and ignorant way such services have been offered. I would go further and say that the medical services share with most other encroachments of European institutions the characteristic that their acceptance by Aborigines often means humiliation and insult. Aborigines are not alone in preferring great discomfort and difficulty rather than face such things.
the factors I have dealt with would extend the period between pregnancies, via any contraceptive effect of lactation, and spontaneous abortion. Other factors would diminish the probability of pregnancy at all times. I have argued that coital frequency was probably below the optimum for highest possible fertility. Demographers who suggest that the age of marriage and the delay in remarriage are important for fertility are really referring to coital frequency which may be controlled by other factors such as privacy among hunter-gatherers. Such a view would help account for the increase in birth rates when populations become sedentary with permanent dwellings. Finally I have presented evidence that a low calorific intake resulting in lack of energy reserves causes anovulation. I have shown that even in relatively well-nourished groups, women would have suffered a dietary handicap while expending more energy. There is evidence that women were very thin and had lower weight for the same height and age than men. Thus it is likely that women's fertility was reduced because of dietary factors.

These two factors of diet and coital frequency, largely ignored in the previous literature, as well as those factors tending to lengthen the birth interval, confirm the existence of a low birth rate among Australian Aborigines and help to explain it.

The material presented here may be seen as antipathetic to the original argument of the thesis. My suggestion that traditionally Aborigines had low fertility may appear to obviate the necessity for infanticide and other deliberate methods of birth control. However it was never a part of my argument that these voluntary and deliberate controls on population were a major explanation of population
stability. The demonstration that fertility was low among traditional populations does not alter the reasons for infanticide etc., in individual women. Some women will be more fertile than others and have children too young and too close together. It is these women who will attempt contraception, abortion and infanticide. Deformed and illegitimate infants as well as twins will be subject to infanticide independent of the birth rate. Moreover voluntary forms of birth control could not have been entirely responsible for reducing total fertility from a possible level of eight to the probable four. On the other hand even a small rate of voluntary birth control could have major demographic implications over a long period of time (Durand, 1972:370). Thus it is reasonable to suppose that both low physiological fertility and voluntary forms of birth control contributed to the low population fertility which characterised traditional Aboriginal society.
CHAPTER SIX

THE POPULATION OF PRE-HISTORIC AUSTRALIA
In this chapter I will attempt to draw out the implications of my argument for prehistoric Aboriginal populations. Firstly I will consider the biological basis of so-called population control mechanisms, arguing that this phylogenetic heritage is precisely what man has lost in the course of evolutionary development. Next I will look at various writings that represent infanticide as a population control mechanism and show certain weaknesses in both the data and theoretical frameworks. Thirdly I will take up the problem of the demographic analysis of pre-industrial populations, showing that, within limits, the methods and findings of demographers can assist anthropologists in their efforts. Finally, I will look at what evidence is available on the population of Australia for the last 40,000 years during which man is known to have inhabited the continent, and indicate what this thesis might contribute to the debate.

A. THE EVOLUTIONARY BASIS OF POPULATION CONTROL

Wynne-Edward's views have in recent years dominated the debate about the means by which biological populations regulate their numbers. He argued that in many species, if not all, numbers are regulated not by starvation, disease and fatal conflicts, but by indirect means which keep the population well beneath the carrying capacity of the area available to them. His view of the way this is done is as follows "Sociality appears to have evolved in animals originally as a homeostatic mechanism, a device for limiting population at a safe level, and of doing it reliably, automatically, and from within" (1972:54). He shows how this is so in species as diverse as flour
beetles, mice and Scottish grouse. There is considerable dispute about this question. For instance Wilson writes "Few ecologists believe that social conventions play a significant role in population control, and many doubt that such a role exists at all" (1975:87). This is an ongoing debate which I am not competent to judge. I am here concerned with Wynne-Edwards' remarks on homeostatic mechanisms in man and more importantly, with those anthropologists who have been influenced by the Wynne-Edwards' model. He says:

"In early man the traditional or customary element in achieving population homeostasis had mushroomed at the expense of automatic, innate controls. Social competition ceased to have a direct physiological effect on fertility, and in the place of automatic mechanisms primitive man had developed traditional codes of behaviour to take care of population control. The four commonest methods were by the deferment of marriage for ten years or more beyond puberty, by compulsory abstention from intercourse which resulted in births being widely spaced, by abortion, and by infanticide" (Wynne-Edwards, 1972:63, my emphasis).

My objection to this view is twofold. Firstly, it is a teleological argument and thus controverts the basic tenets of evolutionary principles. Secondly, it is apparent that these controls were not

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1. For arguments about Wynne-Edwards' concept of group selection see Weins, 1966. I cannot take up this wider issue here except to remark that it is not only altruism that poses a problem for natural selection but all kinds of cooperative behaviour that cannot easily be shown to benefit the individual organism directly. Perhaps it is the nature of the genetic basis of a much wider range of cooperative social behaviour that needs accounting for.

2. In fact neither of these is found to any marked degree in hunter-gatherer groups and there is no evidence from earlier stages of human history.
always and perhaps never, effective, so to explain the behaviour concerned in terms of its effect ceases to be plausible. That is, human populations cannot be shown to be in a state of equilibrium; most often numbers have been growing or declining, and are above or below someone's idea of optimal size. Even if populations could be seen as regulated it would need independent evidence to show that such customs as deferred marriage were instituted for that reason.

I shall try to substantiate these arguments in terms of Wynne-Edwards' own work, and then turn to some of the applications which have followed the same principles. Wynne-Edwards describes the basis of territorial behaviour in most of the higher species as being partly based on information which is transmitted by tradition regarding such things as "special localities, for instance those where breeding, feeding, or wintering takes place" (ibid, 62). He then makes the assertion "There is no critical demarkation between this kind of tradition and the more elaborate body of learning that constitutes a culture: the one expands to produce the other. But both demand an underlying gene-determined ability to learn, and an impulse to obey, the dictates of traditional codes" (ibid, 62).

I do not deny that these characteristics exist in man, only that they developed for population homeostasis. There appears to be some carelessness with evolutionary principles. The argument is that because the learning which constitutes a culture shows no evolutionary break with "tradition" in many other species, and because this tradition developed to achieve population control, therefore culture has the same primary function, and what is more achieves success at it. There are several problems with this argument.
Firstly, there is no reason in terms of natural selection why qualities retained from an earlier evolutionary stage should retain the same function. If tradition at an earlier evolutionary stage "expands to produce" (a troublesome phrase) culture, the expansion may have occurred to free the former quality from its previous function. A more fundamental problem is that the genetically given capacity to learn and the impulse to obey are seen as mechanisms to achieve a particular end, that is, population control. Wynne-Edwards admits that it can cease to operate. "It is perhaps our greatest misfortune today that no homeostatic control of reproduction remains any longer in the civilized races of man" (ibid, 60).

But, he argues, homeostatic controls did exist among hunter-gatherers. It seems then that although no genetic change has taken place, the genetically given qualities that ensured population control in one type of social organisation has ceased to be effective in another type of social organisation.

It seems to me that the reasoning and the evidence are erroneous. It is particularly troubling that those who espouse an evolutionary perspective on human behaviour should bring this perspective into question by their cavalier treatment of evolutionary principles. An evolutionist does not assume that species have achieved perfect adaptation but asks why characteristics have developed. Surely it fits better with the known facts to argue that in the course of hominid development, along with gaining larger brains, language and upright posture, man lost other limitations on reproductive behaviour besides freedom from the
oestus cycle. It seems clear that any controls on population expansion that did exist, ceased to be reliable and automatic; as in so many other areas of man's development the most striking feature is the variability of behaviour, the ability to develop new responses, and so avoid previous constraints. Man characteristically expands into new areas or squeezes more people into a dwelling. To argue that obedience and conscience developed to replace genetically given behaviours in regulating population implies that either the authorities who are obeyed know when and how to regulate population, or that everyone knows and acts in the interest of the group.

A further objection to Wynne-Edwards' version of the evolutionary continuity from man's past is that the actual behaviours involved do not in fact appear to have an evolutionary past. Deliberate abstention from intercourse, abortion and infanticide, as well as other "population control mechanisms" cited by other authors, are behaviours peculiar to man, or perhaps more precisely, to woman, for it is women's fertility which is at stake here. Also they are all behaviours which seem to reverse evolutionary trends and depend on the freedom from genetic determination. That is, the inborn tendency in man to copulate and to nurture infants must be reversed for abstention and infanticide to take place. The major empirical evidence that is relevant, to do with whether in fact hunter-gatherer populations were stable, will be presented below. But first I will briefly review some of the work of those who have followed Wynne-Edwards.

The framework under examination is simply functionalism, with its assumptions of stability and harmony. Birdsell's (1968)
"equilibrium systems", Peterson's (1975) "principles of optimum numbers", are Wynne-Edwards' "homeostatic systems" under different names. The errors in some of the anthropologists' views of population control often stem from the assumption that small local populations must be stable. This leads to the asking of such questions as how did hunter-gatherer groups keep their populations from growing? What were the mechanisms of population control? It is assumed that these populations were in equilibrium, and that some combination of automatic and conscious devices kept them so. Thus the task seemed to be to discover what these mechanisms were. Lists of mechanisms have been produced and attempts made to quantify these. Many writers have been aware of one or another fault with the model. Thus Peterson (1975) has asked how did the people know when to apply the population control devices. Hayden (1972) points out that it is the women whose actions must achieve population control. Schrire and Steiger (1974) question the statistical possibility for populations to survive at all with any significant regular rate of infanticide of females. Mary Douglas (1966) argues that it is not the lack of bread and butter that will alert people to hardship due to over-population but lack of champagne and oysters making it very difficult to define optimum population density. Despite this unease expressed by many authors, the debate is still dominated by the homeostatic model stemming from Wynne-Edwards\(^1\). Not only is the model probably wrong in its assumption of population homeostasis but it has directed attention away from questions of motivation and conscious intention which I have shown are crucial ones in considering such behaviour as infanticide.

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1. There is a recent move to more sophisticated views by, for instance, Cowgill, Polgar and Lourandos.
Peterson takes as an assumption that "Resolution of the population problem is a fundamental adaptational problem of evolutionary importance" (1975:59). He argues:

"The methods by which pre-industrial man attempted to limit his population are well known. The most important have always been infanticide, abortion, senilicide, and, in more recent times, abstention from intercourse. The existence of these consciously controlled practices suggests that the uncontrolled restraints such as disease, accidents, fighting, and starvation were inadequate. The most important question, however, is "How did the people know when and at what level of intensity to apply these regulations in the absence of bureaus of statistics and national perspectives" " (ibid, 58).

I have already presented my objections to the underlying assumption that populations are always well adapted, but Peterson makes some further dubious claims that should be challenged. It sounds suspiciously as if he believes that bureaus of statistics and national perspectives do solve the population problems in those societies fortunate enough to have them. This is clearly not so. Further, Peterson seems to think that consciously controlled restraints on population have developed because uncontrolled restraints (disease, accidents, fighting, starvation) were inadequate. If he included relative infertility I would agree that such "unconscious" population restraints existed and do explain why

1. He fails to explain why he thinks that abstention from intercourse is a "more recent" means of achieving population control. Post-partum sex taboos were known in hunter-gatherer communities. Abstention by women of child-bearing age of course would be the only significant kind for population control.
hunter-gatherers' populations did not increase as quickly as they were capable of doing. But the view that if people know that the population is increasing they will automatically do away with their next infant or two or leave mother behind is unacceptable. There are accounts demonstrating that in physically demanding environs "useless" people such as the very old and incapacitated are cared for at considerable cost (e.g., Kaberry, 1939:54). Peterson himself says that "Even under the harsh desert conditions bands support the aged and incapacitated adults. In one case a group of Pintubi are known to have carried a lame adult man, who eventually lost his leg, for two years before he was able to get around on a crutch" (1972: 27). To argue that the rational awareness of some possible future limitation on food resources will be stronger than the urge to nurture, the attachment to parents, and the sexual urge, shows a lack of understanding of human motivation. Peterson's adoption of a biological perspective on man's behaviour makes it more surprising that he ignores ethological findings about the strength of attachment behaviour.

Birdsell is another who takes a similar position, naming his model a density equilibrium system (1968). He makes explicit his "broad biological assumption of a balanced condition in nature for all life, including man at a hunting and collecting level of economy" (ibid, 229). He emphasises the inherent excessive fertility which characterises all successful species and adds that it is "depressed when necessary by the complex of forces existing in the environment" (ibid, 231). Here he departs from Wynne-Edwards' view that population controls are not external but operate within the system. In fact little emerges from Birdsell's paper that could
explain the origin or the maintenance of this system other than
the statement that because of the necessity to control population,
"some limitation on procreative activities naturally filters down
to the level of the biological family" (ibid, 236). This is a
most odd reversal of any possible causal chain in terms of
evolutionary theory. That the system's nature and requirements
should be claimed as the explanation for particular behaviours
seems manifestly absurd. It is man's biological nature that places
constraints and limits on the social systems which he develops.¹
Were man's behaviour streamlined to the needs which "filtered down"
from the system, societies would remain stable and well adapted.
Birdsell is included here because he has based work in wider fields
on his erroneous assumption. More serious errors in his work will
be taken up in the section on demography.

Divale is another who begins with a Wynne-Edwardian hypothesis
of primitive populations in equilibrium, and describes the particular
system which achieved this equilibrium. It consists of four related
practices; infanticide (primarily of females), polygyny, wars and
marriage alliances. The first two created the woman shortage which
in turn caused wars and marriage alliances. "It is suggested that
the overall function of this cultural system was to maintain a
culture's population growth to within the tolerance limits set by
their ability to harness energy" (1972:225). He somewhat confuses
the issue as to whether the level of these practices was related to
the current population density by asserting that "It is not claimed
that this system was the only method of primitive population control"
(ibid). He names disease, late age of marriage, coitus interruptus

¹. Of course this is an over-simplified view. I do not deny that
there are feedback mechanisms.
and post-partum sexual abstinence as also effective in reducing the birth rate. The members of these societies were unaware of their population control system.

"They had material reasons, of course, for each of the practices of this system. It is only claimed that members of these societies were not aware that the practices of female infanticide and warfare were interrelated and that the latent function of these systematically related practices was the control of population growth" (1972:226).

Divale does not present any kind of explanation as to how such a system originated (though he suggests when it may have become necessary), nor how it functions. That is, while he implies the existence of a self-regulating system, he does not detail its functioning, and indeed by noting the existence of other ways in which the birth rate is limited, he forgoes the possibility of such a hypothesis. Thus he is merely saying that female infanticide, polygyny, warfare and marriage alliances are interrelated and that all societies practised these to some extent. Without any kind of quantitative statement the conclusions are untestable and unremarkable. The statistics he marshalls to support this thesis leave much to be desired as will be shown below.

One other author who makes an interesting contribution to this debate is Denham (1974) who criticises Birdsell's view that infanticide was a major and successful means of achieving population control. He argues that populations were probably not stable (ibid, 193), that infanticide would have been unnecessary and often
inappropriate (when the population was declining), and that problems of infant transport were probably not acute anyway. But Denham's most telling and original point is "Although the study of nonhuman primates has been beneficial to much recent research into hominid evolution, it has given no clues to the origins of systematic infanticide among Pleistocene hunter-gatherers. Systematic infanticide simply is not reported in the literature on hun-human primates" (ibid, 195).

Denham's conclusion is that "it seems probable that infanticide was no more common among most Pleistocene populations most of the time than it is among most present day human and non-human primate populations" (ibid, 197).

I have provided evidence earlier in this thesis that infanticide was not uncommon among Australian Aborigines and evidence has been cited that infanticide is known in all human groups, and exists today despite public condemnation. It is virtually unknown among other primates. However, infanticide is not completely unknown lower down the phylogenetic scale. Guppies very efficiently eat their young when overcrowding occurs and many insect species do the same. This is clearly behaviour based on fixed action patterns (see, e.g., Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1970:15). The only cases in higher species that I have found are among lions and langurs, and in both cases it is invading males who kill the infants of their rivals; the usurpers then inseminate the females themselves (Wilson, 1975: 246, 321). There is nothing here comparable with infanticide among humans, and I would argue that infanticide, defined as the deliberate killing of a newborn infant, is a peculiarly human form of behaviour.
and one that requires strong motivation in that it must overcome the phylogenetic heritage that usually leads to nurturance. I would argue that the evolutionary change consisted of loosening the genetically given responses to infants which, in other primates, ensure that infants are nurtured. This allows infanticide to occur in humans, not in response to a species need, for such teleological reasoning cannot account for anything, but as one of a wide range of behaviours that became possible, because variability in behaviour is adaptive. That is, variation in behaviour resulted from fewer fixed responses being built into the organism, and this added to the fitness of the organisms showing this variability.

Marriage rules, warfare, post-partum sex taboos, prolonged lactation as well as abortion, infanticide and senilicide are sometimes identified as mechanisms which exist to achieve population control. Wynne-Edwards' view that the function of sociality is just that, allows him to include almost anything which has the effect of reducing the birth rate or increasing mortality under the heading of "population control"

However neither Wynne-Edwards nor anyone else develops the implication of this argument, which is that such a function explains the aetiology of the marriage rules, warfare, etc. To do so would be to show the inadequacy of the functionalist viewpoint. I wish here to take up the question of intentionality which is a crucial one when discussing the effects of behaviours as different as infanticide and warfare. It could be argued, that a homeostatic population control system exists quite outside man's conscious intention. This is presumably Wynne-Edwards' view. But this
would necessitate demonstrating either that conscious intention had a minimal effect on populations or that it was always in harmony with the system's homeostatic mechanisms. Neither of these seems to be the case.

It seems clear that man is characterised by freedom from just those responses which would bind him to a certain geographical area and a certain population density. This is not to say that man is free of all innate controls on his behaviour, but that these cannot be assumed to have either the same form or function as those of other species. For instance, unlike other species, he defends territory without being tied to one territory. If density increases he emmigrates or builds another partition across the room. He fights others of his own species to death, a most unusual thing in the animal world. He displays attachment behaviour but forms a wide variety of social groupings based on these attachments. And, unlike all his fellow animals his wife aborts foetuses, kills neonates and tries to avoid conception. The most striking characteristic of the ways in which man's behaviour differs from that of other species is in intentionality.

I repeat that man is not free of his biology. The view that man is infinitely plastic is as unenlightening and trivial as that he is a slave to his genetic endowment (Cowlishaw, 1973). Both views are false. Innate behaviour is not replaced by learned behaviour, but by the ability to control instinctive responses and replace them with other responses. The very important questions posed by man's biological heritage and the nature of learning cannot be taken up further here, except to point out that man's characteristics
of conscious intention, and problem solving strategies must be considered when accounting for particular behaviours. The internal logic of social systems cannot suffice as an explanation if people are considered to be problem solvers, largely free of fixed action patterns, and innate releasing mechanisms (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1970:60).

Some recent authors have rejected the view that infanticide developed as a means of controlling populations. Polgar (1972:206) says "It is hard to imagine, however, that among pre-agricultural people the perception of population pressure would often be consciously translated into the intensification of anti-reproductive practices" (1972:206). He argues that populations were probably kept stable so that population pressure did not occur. Faris expresses similar views. He says that when infanticide occurred it was to insure the success of the living and to secure a strong healthy and productive society. Its cause could hardly be the consequences documented (1975:250-1). This view is reminiscent of that of Spencer and Gillen who said that numbers are kept down "Not with any idea at all of regulating the food supply, so far as the adults are concerned, but simply from the point of view that, if the mother is suckling one child, she cannot properly provide food for another, quite apart from the question of the trouble of carrying two children about" (1927:221).

Polgar and Faris, while aware that the cause and consequences of behaviour such as infanticide must be very different, do not consider what the causes of infanticide might be.
In discussing population control, a distinction must be clearly drawn between ecological factors which reduce the population either by reducing fertility or increasing mortality; and social behavioural factors some of which reduce the population unintentionally and others which have as their aim the reduction of the population. The latter category must again be subdivided into those individual actions intended to achieve a particular person's or family's aims and those public policies or rules made by a society with the intention of controlling the population. Only the latter category should properly be called population control.

The accompanying table is intended to provide a framework for classifying anything which has the effect of reducing population. To be complete such a table should include those factors which increase population, particularly behaviour intended to increase fertility. There are a number of questions raised by this categorization which are inherent in much of the literature. These centre around which behaviours are intended to have an effect on population and which are not. There is also some question as to whether some "private decisions" should be designated "public policy". I shall discuss these questions in relation to the post-partum female sex-taboo, for although this is not a widespread phenomenon in Australia, it is a more equivocal case than infanticide, and the latter has been discussed at length.

Ethnographic evidence treats the taboo on sexual intercourse for a post-parturient woman as a rule, publicly affirmed and attended by sanctions usually involving illness for the infant or the mother. It is either overtly stated or implied that the mother does not wish to or should not conceive again while her infant is small. However, any illness of the infant may be treated as evidence of the rule being
Table 19. A Classification of Population Reducing Factors
(Including all factors which have the effect of either increasing mortality or decreasing fertility)

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<th>NON-BEHAVIOURAL</th>
<th>UNINTENDED EFFECT ON POPULATION</th>
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<td>Increased Mortality</td>
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1. Used in demographic sense of probability of giving birth.
2. At least some authors put these in intended effects (Douglas, 1966:270; Birdsell, 1968:242; Divale, 1972:225) For my views see Chapter 6, page 323.
3. In terms of dietary choices; preferences, taboos, unequal distribution (Chapter 5, page 266ff).
4. Infanticide is often seen as public policy as described in this Chapter.
5. This can be seen as public policy in that it is a stated rule of behaviour intended to postpone conception. It is questionable though, whether it can be seen as a population policy.
6. This may appear to contradict the indulgence of infants I have stressed. However it refers to the lack of protection from rough treatment and is stressed by Hamilton (1970).
7. The evidence I have marshalled in Chapter 5 indicates that prolonged lactation is probably ineffective as a check on fertility.
broken, so that it could be said that the intention is not directly to postpone a further pregnancy, but to protect the child who is already born. In this case it is intended as a population conservation mechanism, and it could be argued that that is what it is, whether intended as such or not. If it is not public population policy, it could still be the case that individual women and men do refrain from intercourse during this period in order to avoid a further pregnancy. This would make the appropriate classification, private, intentional. On the other hand if they are refraining from intercourse simply in obedience to the rule then the behaviour would be classified as having an unintentional population effect. My view is that intention is one factor in a pattern of motivation of all behaviour.

I have attempted to show in this section that assumptions about the evolutionary basis of population control mechanisms are mistaken. The behaviour involved cannot be shown to have evolved as a form of population control. Nor does it achieve this effect. It is the lack of attention to the motivation involved, both conscious and unconscious that has allowed the Wynne-Edwards' theoretical tradition to continue in social anthropology.

B. MOTIVATION OF "POPULATION CONTROL" BEHAVIOURS

This section will look more closely at the motivation underlying the behaviours which deliberately reduce the population such as abortion, infanticide and senilicide. Woodburn's comment on senilicide is an

1. Suicide could be included here because of Douglas' mention of "suicide migration" as a population control (1966:263). Firth does see suicide as a result of famine and the immediate motivation is the inability to fulfil obligations to provide for self and family (Firth, 1959:66).
appropriate opening to this discussion. He warned against explaining the abandonment of the old and lame in terms of ecological pressures (1968:91). Blainey takes up his point. "Heartless pressures were also at work. Thus in some favoured regions of Australia the old were usually given the poorer scraps as food and — for blankets — the tattered animal skins" (Blainey, 1975:102).

I have argued above that human emotional attachment is ignored when theorists discuss ecological pressures or system homeostasis as determining the occurrence of infanticide, and senilicide. But I take Woodburn's point; the emotions involved may also be hostile ones. Human relationships are always characterised by ambivalence. My main point is that there is some motivation, and some emotion. Such events as smothering an infant or hitting it on the head, will always be accompanied by a good deal of feeling. Now this has several consequences, one being that reliable information on the subject is difficult to come by and the actual events are seldom if ever observed. The same holds true of abortion and of senilicide. Also if attention is paid to the emotional nature of the behaviour involved it is insufficient to explain it simply as a "population control mechanism". More must be said of its context. In the broadest sense, the weaknesses I have described so far in this chapter are all due to a mechanistic view of society and behaviour. More specific examples, both of the gaps in the available data and the explanations offered will be presented.

Firstly it should be noted that there has been a change over time in the literature which dealt with such things as infanticide. At first the early settlers and observers in Australia recorded many
details of such practices while expressing horror and regarding them as a demonstration of the poor moral development of the Aborigines. Social anthropologists hastened to assure everyone that these practices were not indications of depravity among savages but were intentional and necessary methods of regulating the population (e.g., Spencer and Gillen, 1927:221).

The main shortcoming of the literature dealing with infanticide, is the lack of behavioural data. That is, there is not only a lack of first hand observation of the practice which is not surprising, but there is a lack of direct information from the communities. The first chapter of this thesis is intended to remedy this situation as far as is possible, with regard to Australian Aborigines. Few authors have been aware of the seriousness of this paucity of data.

Schrire and Steiger (1974) in their investigation of the Eskimo material demonstrated that the evidence about female infanticide is weak, though that is the area where female infanticide is generally believed a proven phenomenon. They say "In our study of the ethnographic literature, we find only one report that might be classified as "direct" evidence" (1974:164). Further, they found that many of the reported sex-ratio figures did not indicate that female infanticide occurred to any marked degree. Their opinion that "Since infanticide has an immediate effect on the sex-ratio, it is a useful and satisfying

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1. The entire evidence of an unbalanced sex-ratio, on which much of the belief in female infanticide in the Arctic rests, comes from three reports from Rasmussen and one census quoted by Boas. Rasmussen's evidence was collected for the explicit purpose of illustrating the extent to which female infanticide was practised, and he asked the women "how many children they had borne and how many girls they had 'put out of the way' " (Schrire and Steiger, 1974:164, 166).
policy" (ibid, 176), demonstrates their lack of interest in the motivation which might underlie such behaviour. They argue that, as women are unproductive in this primarily hunting economy, it is more satisfactory to have more men than women.

Briggs, who worked with the Utku Eskimo, says "Utku children are usually born about 3 years apart. How this spacing is managed I do not know; I found no evidence either for abstinence or for infanticide, and direct enquiries about birth control elicited only embarrassed smiles" (1970:136). Briggs lived in intensely intimate contact with a small group of Utku for one and a half years, and this demonstrates the difficulty of gaining first hand information on such behaviour.

Hayden is one author who refers to the situational factors which might lead to women committing infanticide among hunter-gatherer peoples in general. While Hayden uses a homeostatic system approach, he does see the need to specify the workings of the system in terms of the behaviour which is being discussed. He asserts "population is limited by resources and regulated by cultural mechanisms" (1972:207). That is, Hayden aims to show that food supply does indirectly control population density among hunter-gatherers. He attempts to specify the "operating factors" which can be related to food resources and which also control population. He points out that it is women who must be affected by this "operating factor" because man, unlike the chimpanzee uses mainly "cultural methods" such as infanticide, prolonged lactation, abortion and abstinence to limit population, and these are "exclusively controlled by females". He concludes
"The work load culturally imposed on women, including, in most cases, collecting the major portion of subsistence, supplying all water, gathering all firewood, caring for children, preparing meals, building shelters, transporting belongings on camp moves, etc., would be a tangible pressure, operating on an individual level, which could motivate such behaviour as abortion, infanticide and strict abstention" (ibid, 213).

I am in agreement with this view of the matter though as I have shown there is a great deal more to women's motivation than a desire to avoid hard work. Hayden takes a further and interesting step in trying to relate the control mechanisms among primates to that of man. In the former, population control, Hayden argues, is related to dominance hierarchy. This is not so in man. "Nevertheless, the work-maximum control system does presuppose a dominance hierarchy, which is found in primates and also in man, where it is based on age and sex: would it be too much to see the roots of one system in the other?" (ibid, 214). That is, Hayden sees male dominance as having the same population control function in primates as among hunter-gatherers. It is the limit on women's labour power which leads them to abort and commit infanticide. While this view is not in conflict with my arguments, it wrongly characterises evolutionary change as being always adaptive. In ignoring the individual nature of human action Hayden fails to see that women's actions, given the situation he describes, may not be motivated for the good of the group. That is he is convinced that population control mechanisms work.
Another interesting view is that of Sharp (1940:492-4) who says:

"It may well be that quite unconsciously female infanticide is practised as a pattern of behaviour which is simply not explicit in the culture. Such an unconscious pattern might result from the recognition that a high masculine mortality obtains among the older half of the population and would be supported by the many other patterns which indicate explicitly or implicitly that males and masculine activity occupy a preferred position in the scale of cultural values in this androcentric community, these factors in the case of women contemplating infanticide influencing them to preserve boys and to destroy girls" (1940:492-4).

This view has some plausibility in that a woman would determine which children were killed and she may value sons more highly than daughters because this is the accepted view. It must be remembered that though daughters will not add the same burden to their mother's lot, as sons, and indeed will relieve her of some obligations, a mother will not necessarily appreciate this when giving birth to her children. However, any such weighing up of advantages and disadvantages would lead only to some slight bias in the ratio of male/female infanticide as the chief determinants are immediate circumstances as I have shown above. I will deal with Sharp's figures in detail below.

Mary Douglas, in a paper discussing the reasons for population control mechanisms, also begins with the assumption that they are effective, but only in some populations. She points out some of
Despite her objection to some of the assumptions made by those espousing the homeostatic view of populations, she makes no real break with the framework. While her article is of interest for some other observations, it is relevant to this enquiry only to point out that her lack of interest in motivation leads her to confuse intended with unintended effects. The limits on populations, she asserts, are effected in a number of different ways such as female infanticide, postponement of marriage for women, polygyny, selective male infanticide, abortion, general infanticide, suicide migration, and not allowing marriage for large portions of a population (ibid, 263). Of Tikopean contraception, abortion and infanticide she says "it seems that when they were sedulously restricting their population it was supplies of coconut creams that they had their eye on, not supplies of roots and cereals" (ibid, 271). It is difficult to translate this sedulous restriction of population into the behaviour of individual women who are to kill their child. And again there is lack of attention to who is missing out on the coconut cream. Is it the same women who abort, and does this act lead to their being assured of better supplies? No information is given on these questions.

One author who has shown concern to describe the motivation involved in infanticide is M. Freeman. He argues that female infanticide at least among Eskimo groups answered "a need for
explicit demonstration of male dominance" (1971:1015). This is a refreshing change from the many authors who Freeman objects to as invoking blatant environmental determinism (ibid, 1013), but his thesis is unconvincing, initially because he assumes it is always men who insist on infanticide. There is insufficient data from the Arctic to support this. The one observed case of infanticide was the action of the mother (Schire and Steiger, 1974:164). And certainly in Australia, it was almost invariably women who killed the infant.

Little attention has been paid in the literature on Australian Aborigines to the motives for abortion, infanticide and senilicide. B. Hiatt takes a position typical of prehistorians in saying "Because of their struggle to maintain a constant and adequate food supply in an extremely harsh environment, they practised several socio-demographic controls. The most rigorous of these was female infanticide" (1970:7). I have argued at some length that this common view is an inadequate account of the behaviour being cited. While attachment by the mother grows as a result of interaction with the infant this is not to say that infanticide at birth is an easy or natural action for a mother to take. It is my opinion that she must feel at least latent hostility towards the infant to enable her to kill it.

Senilicide is a somewhat different case. Blainey cites several observers of Australian Aborigines to support his view that "The very old were then treated with a kind of indifference. Their life had been lived; to prolong it was pointless and perhaps cruel" (1975:101). Now while he gives examples of old people being neglected, abandoned and even burned, there are a number of equally telling cases in the literature of old people being revered and cared for at great
cost to their younger kinsmen or spouse (e.g., Kaberry, 1939:54; Meggitt, 1962:86; Fison and Howitt, 1880:212; Peterson, 1972:27). Strong feelings of affection and commitment are clearly present in these cases and it is thus too simple a view to see environmental pressure as reversing these feelings. I am not denying that such feelings may be absent in some cases, or that they may not be overcome by necessity on occasion. But it should be noted that when this does occur and an old person is abandoned, it has virtually no demographic significance. It is a response to a short term food shortage or the necessity to move, not a response to population pressure.

Charles Darwin's comment on Aboriginal population control is of interest. After crossing the Blue Mountains in 1836 he wrote:

"It is said that numbers of their children invariably perish in very early infancy from the effects of their wandering life. As the difficulty of procuring food increases, so must their wandering habits; and hence the population, without any apparent deaths from famine, is repressed in a manner extremely sudden compared to what happens in civilized countries, where the father may add to his labour, without destroying his offspring" (Darwin, 1965:230).

While the exact reason for the deaths of children is not specified I think it significant that Darwin appears to appreciate the fact that women in nomadic groups dependent upon gathering could not manage more than one infant under the age of about four. I have spent a good deal of time earlier in this work discussing implications of this fact, and it is important to realise that sedentarization means
an alteration in this condition. I will look at the implications of this below.

What then are the motives for infanticide? I will here summarise arguments which have been presented earlier. The core of the argument is that infanticide occurs as the result of oppression felt by the mother in particular, and by all women. I have described the general conditions of Aboriginal women's lives which involve firstly constant obligations to children and male relatives. Secondly, humiliation occurs at the hands of various men in situations of female initiation, sexual punishment, brother avoidance, wife-lending, polygany and generally in their contacts with male ceremonial life. The third source of oppressive demands is the care of infants, where the extreme indulgence which is the normal child-rearing practice, puts a considerable strain on the mother who is responsible for her own children.

This situation has not led to the development of a female ideology, but women have developed self-protective strategies. Institutionalised infanticide is one such strategy. That is, infanticide is a known and accepted practice among women even though publicly disapproved and sometimes arousing anger and punishment from men. The particular conditions when infanticide is accepted, even by men, are when twins or deformed children are born and sometimes when it is known that the infant was illegitimately conceived. Another set of circumstances when infanticide is likely to occur and when it is accepted at least by women, is when the woman is too young to have a child, or when she has an infant who is still breast feeding. In these circumstances she may kill the child herself or her mother or another female kinswoman may do so.
It seems that besides the general situation of oppression which motivates infanticide as one of a number of self-protective actions, there is also a supporting feeling and an accompanying belief that certain foetuses had no business to be gestating inside that woman. That is, there is anger and resentment directed at the foetus on occasions when the mother is too young to have a child or when she has an infant at the breast. Anger and resentment also are expressed when twins or deformed infants are born. These things are considered improper or abnormal, and so protection against the vagaries of spirit children are justified. Such attitudes can be extended and allow women to justify the killing of those children they do not want to raise.

I have tried to show that besides the inadequacy of the usual homeostatic model for an account of pre-historic demography, the literature is even more seriously inadequate in its account of the behaviours involved. I have singled out senilicide and infanticide, arguing that attachment behaviour - leavened with a certain degree of ambivalence - is characteristic of human relationships. This may be quite obvious in the case of old parents for instance, but with the newborn the emotion will be more likely determined by some conventional attitude. That is, if hostility is felt because the infant is not acceptable for one of the reasons given above, then this attitude is less likely to be complicated by feelings of attachment as there has been no time for this to occur. In the case of abortion there must be strong motivation considering the crude and painful methods used. And contraception, whether attempted by ritual means, by medicines or by abstinence also requires determination and forethought.
C. DEMOGRAPHY

As discussed above, anthropologists face major pitfalls in using small samples as the basis of demographic generalizations. Unfortunately the literature is full of just these kinds of generalizations, and in the absence of better data, those who speak authoritatively are quoted again and again. Errors can stem from research conditions such as limited observations (of infanticide and abortion); too small samples (e.g., to determine populations' sex ratios); lack of information (on ages, mobility, genealogies); small size of residential group (for understanding interaction patterns). To a large extent these are not problems which can be solved. But the other source of error is lack of attention to demographic and statistical method. I shall give examples of some of these faults and then attempt to determine whether any better basis exists for making statements about male/female ratios, infanticide rates and population dynamics:

Howell says:

"Unfortunately, the only kinds of populations that are ever reported to fall outside of the known human range that will be described here are precisely those that anthropologists study, and anthropologists are usually the source of the report. Thus Rose (1968) seems to believe that the Total Fertility Rate of the population of Groote Eyland was approximately 18, and Birdsell (1968) thinks that fertility in Australia was so high in the pre-contact period, and mortality so low, that infanticide had to be practised on 15 to 50 percent of the births. These statements, if they are meant to characterize the populations over the long run and are not simply unusual
temporary conditions, are very suspicious to a demographer because they are well outside the known range within which reliably studied populations vary. There is a long tradition in empirical demography of finding that in country after country, the amount of variation from central tendencies decreased with improvements in the quality of data and analysis. In other words, deviations have often come from bad reporting rather than from the population itself, and this is the question we have to ask about primitive populations" (1973:251).

I shall illustrate some of these problems with material on the sex ratio among Australian Aborigines.

Birdsell (1968) has claimed that his and Tindale's figures show that a high rate of female infanticide was practised. He says

"Among 194 matings based upon precontact genealogies for desert Australians ..... data shows a sex ratio at adulthood of approximately 150 per cent (150 males to 100 females). Other data show that the sex ratio at birth among Australian aborigines is 100 per cent. The discrepancy in the sex ratio among adults indicates that at least 15 per cent of the children born to aboriginal women are eliminated by infanticide. Ethnological evidence for Australia documents that infanticide was preferentially practised upon female babies. This was true for desert groups, and also for those living in better endowed areas. The value of 15 per cent demonstrated by these data is a minimal one, and the observations of observant, early, postcontact Europeans places the figure as high as 50 per cent" (1968:236).
He further claims

"If you arrange pre contact genealogies and adult sib-ships of Australian aborigines according to completed family size, the sex-ratios form a very interesting systematic curve varying from about 130 males per 100 females for the modal families to about 260 males per 100 females for families in which five children have survived. Statistically, this shows an enormous amount of family planning that is not indicated in the ethnology" (ibid, 243).

In Chapter One I presented evidence from many sources which showed that Birdsell's are indeed extraordinary figures, as the weight of evidence demonstrates that infanticide was not preferentially of females. As Birdsell does not give details of his sample size or how the information was collected it is difficult to assess his assertions any more closely. Nevertheless, his views seem to be based entirely on data collected during a 14 month expedition from north of Cairns to Perth when a total of 2,450 people were interviewed and also subjected to anthropometric examination (Tindale, 1940:140-1). Genealogical data collected under such conditions must be treated with suspicion. Furthermore, there are several other likely sources of error.

Firstly, it is easy to imagine male informants remembering male kinsmen more clearly than female. The general weight of this dissertation supports the view that women among Australian Aborigines are socially devalued, and this alone would tend to bias memory. More important, there are strong taboos on mentioning the names of
the dead which makes all genealogical data somewhat liable to various sorts of error. Particularly the names of sisters and mothers-in-law are never mentioned and this could weigh against the equal chances of women being identified in the genealogies. Rose says that male informants never mentioned females by name (1960:24), and some such restriction was common throughout Australia. Hiatt spent eighteen months overcoming problems of obtaining reliable genealogies. Besides the necessity of gaining competence in the language and trust of informants, he had to cross-check names which were whispered to him and could not be spoken aloud (pers. comm.).

A further source of error which is of importance here is that classificatory kinsmen become identified with genealogical kinsmen when the death of the latter leads to the role being adopted by the classificatory kinsmen. This is most evident in matters of parenthood and sibling-hood. If a woman dies, her own children will be firmly identified with those of her sister as the latter takes over as their "mother", and this is a ubiquitous process affecting many genealogical links. Thus Birdsell's "pre-contact genealogies and adult sib-ships according to completed family size" are doubly suspect.

By contrast Sharp collected detailed demographic data from a Cape York population using the census rather than the genealogical method because "The genealogical method is apparently of very doubtful value in providing accurate biological data for a population living under the cultural conditions found among the four tribes of this study" (1940:483). But Sharp found a preponderance of males in the younger age groups also apparently indicating female infanticide.
His findings are presented in Table 20 in part.

Table 20. Sex ratio in a Cape York population

| Sex ratio (males per 100 females) by age and culture groupings, June 1, 1933 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                                 | All ages        | Pre-puberal     | Post-puberal    | Under 25 years   | Over 25 years    |
| Total population                | 103             | 128             | 97              | 132\(^1\)        | 84               |
| Mission population              | 114             | 73              | 131             | 175              | 95               |
| Bush                            | 99              | 162             | 86              | 105              | 81               |

N = 376 (p. 490)

(From Sharp, 1940:489)

Sharp's cautious conclusions are as follows:

"Among all persons in this population under the age of 25 years there is thus a very considerable excess of males over females represented by an index of 132, which is in sharp contrast to the situation among the older half of the population where an index of 84 represents an excess of females . . . . While it is true that these excesses of one sex over the other are within the range of probability for such a small population series, it is also possible that other factors than pure chance are

\(^1\) This is misprinted as 135. Sharp refers to this figure as 132 in the text which is correct according to the figures of 100 males to 76 females given on p. 490.
are involved ..... It can be assumed, though not demonstrated with the limited mortality statistics available, that the predominant femininity of the older half of this population is the result of a higher mortality rate for adult males and perhaps a greater longevity for females, as is the case in other populations" (ibid, 490).

Sharp is thus left with the task of explaining the excess of males in the younger part of the population. This he does by suggesting that infanticide, which is readily admitted to occur, is practised more on girls than on boys, "although they are unconscious of any trend towards preserving boys in preference to girls. It may well be, however, that quite unconsciously female infanticide is practised" (ibid, 493-4). I have discussed this motivational aspect of infanticide above. Here I wish to draw attention to other possible explanations of these figures which stem from the general problems of demography in such populations. Sharp is himself aware of them, and describes several sources of difficulties. "It was found difficult to establish refined age categories among a people who have no annual chronology, whose exact numeration does not extend beyond two, and whose rate of biological aging and appearance at different ages may vary so from European standards" (ibid, 485).

A footnote to this statement says "where a check could be made against events in the European chronology it was discovered that the

1. Sharp appears to have rejected this explanation himself in later years for in 1966, still apparently puzzled by his figures, he said "Do the anxieties of hunting life somehow affect the chemistry of conception, or is it simply the accidental result of a two-year census as opposed to a longer one? (in Lee and De Vore, 1968:159)."
observers' estimates of age were subject to a high degree of error which was judged to be so considerable at the higher age levels that even the attempt to identify adults as being over or under the approximate age of 45-50 years was abandoned" (ibid, 485).

He further points out that "Since the mission has exerted a differential attraction for various age and sex categories . . . . neither the Bush nor Mission members of these tribes constitute a normal "natural" population" (ibid, 484, f.n. 6). In the overall population count we do find the sex ratio approaches 100. For all ages the ratio is 103 for the whole population, with the three sub-groups, which vary on their degree of culture contact, having sex ratios of 114, 103 and 95 (ibid, 489). It seems that more 15-25 year old males are at the mission while women of this age are more likely to remain in the bush, no doubt with their older husbands. As Sharp states, the figures are well within the expected variation for such population sizes, so there is really nothing to explain. However there are further reasons for such results, were they considered significant, as shall be detailed below. Firstly I will present further figures which purport to demonstrate the sex-ratio in Australia.

Divale (1972) gives sets of figures on sex ratios, separately for young and old, as well as infanticide according to whether it is common, occasional, not common or not practised. Warfare is coded as to "presence or absence in years at the time of census" (sic). His data and calculations contain so many sources of error that it
would take too much valuable space to detail them. I have questioned his argument on theoretical grounds above. It is worth presenting his data on sex ratios in Australia (Table 21) as he claims that they indicate preferential female infanticide.

The sources Divale uses are varied. I have discussed the figures of Sharp above. Ling-Roth's observations in Tasmania are of tribal remnants and show extreme variation in sex ratios (Ling-Roth, 1899:163-5). Krzywicki's figures cannot be considered reliable as he himself says, and reflect very much a post-contact situation. Hart and Pilling's Tiwi figures are from a very small group. It is surprising that Jones' Bathurst Island figures are not given, though they do show more females than males among children and adults for every year bar one from 1957 to 1961 (1963:26). The apparent asymmetrical sex ratio among the Murngin appears to be an artefact of Divale's arrangement. Warner does not report how many females were under 15 and made a rough rule-of-thumb estimate for the males. Rose, a very reliable author, admits that "The minority of women over eleven may have been more apparent than real" (1960:50). This was for reasons to do with field conditions which the author describes in detail. Meggitt's figures, especially for the Walbiri where the sample size is larger (1,570, not as given, 297) are perhaps the most impressive, but these are the kinds of populations where misaging would be significant. Also, as we shall see below, such a statistic is not very useful alone.

1. Briefly some of the weaknesses are as follows; secondary and primary sources are not differentiated and are of very different reliability. Sample sizes, information content and categories used all differ considerably between sources. Such varied data is treated as if it were homogeneous and calculations are made ignoring elementary statistical rules. When the sources are consulted the flimsiness of the evidence particularly on infanticide and warfare is apparent. The more reliable figures will be discussed below.
Table 21. Modified table from Divale (1972:240-241) showing sex ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Males per 100 Females</th>
<th>Source of Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groote-Eylandt</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murngin</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray River</td>
<td>4037</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pintubi</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiwi</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walbiri</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangman</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yir-Yiront</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yir-Yiront</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yir-Yiront</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Divale says this figure is the "sex ratio of those less than 15 years of age, although sources sometimes just say "young" and "adults"" (Divale, 1972:234, my emphasis).

2. This figure is not given by Divale. Where it was not available in the original source I have calculated it, making the rough assumption that a third of the population is in the category "young".

3. Meggitt's figure is 1,570.

4. This is a miscalculation. It should be 81.6.

Thus while Divale's table shows that nine of the thirteen populations have more males than females in the younger age categories, and eight of the thirteen populations have the reverse situation among the adults, there are many sources of bias and error which make it dangerous to generalize from these figures. I will present the views
of two recent authors on these questions before discussing the
issues involved more fully.

Yengoyan asserts that the 10% more females than males which he
calculated from a sample size of 94 (43 were males and 51 were females)
was due to differential infant mortality as well as the reduction in
female infanticide which he says only occurs in those recently in from
the bush (1970:73). Neither the evidence nor the conclusions drawn
from it stand up to scrutiny. Two years later Yengoyan changed his
mind and argued against female infanticide being a significant factor
in population control (1972:87).

Hayden makes generalizations about possible birth rates, whatever
they may be:

"Thus in general terms for hunter-gatherers, we might suggest
that out of a maximum possible fertility of 20-30 living
offspring per female, this is reduced to 5-6 or fewer primarily
by prolonged lactation, physiological controls, abstinence
and abortion; that this is further reduced to 3-5 by infanticide
etc.; that a moderate natural infant and child mortality rate
reduces this even further (perhaps 20-50%); and that 5% or more
of the remaining adolescents or young adults are killed in
fighting" (1972:209).

While Hayden is working within a population framework which may
not be too far wrong, it is not a method that any demographer would
approve of. His final 5% killed in fighting would surely be mainly
male, but more seriously such a method of procedure does not come to
grips with what population dynamics are all about. The general characteristics of many populations are known and they have not been discovered by making informed guesses about the rates at which individual females are likely to have their reproductive potential reduced. Either evidence about these factors reducing fertility, or statistics showing that such a reduction occurs would be of more use than these speculations.

I will now turn to the issues involved in making demographic generalizations from "anthropological" populations.

Schrire and Steiger (1974) show in some detail sources of error in the work of authors relying on population statistics to infer female infanticide. "An ethnographer who documents the composition of a group for a year or two cannot be sure his findings reflect the true long term picture" (ibid, 163). It is necessary to have age specific sex ratios if the extent of female infanticide is to be known (ibid, 166). They point out also that in the most common situation, where ages are not known, marriage is the most likely indicator of maturity. This is so among arctic people because they wear heavy clothing, but it seems quite possible that even among naked Aborigines a girl of fourteen to sixteen who is married will be judged older than a boy of the same age who is just beginning his initiation. Her physical development is in advance of his and socially, she is older than him, with the same role as a mature woman, while the boy will take years to attain the responsibility of his elders. It would be surprising if this were not reflected in girls being put in the adult category much more frequently than boys of equivalent ages. If puberty is used as a differentiating
criterion, as in the work of Sharp (1940:485, f.n.), this will also exaggerate the number of boys in the younger category. Sharp is aware of the problems in ascertaining the ages of the population, problems which led him to abandoning the attempt to include other age categories, so that his confidence in his 25 years criterion is surprising. Schrire and Steiger continue:

"If marriage were a criterion used to assess maturity, one might expect to find girls of 12-18 classified as women, and boys of the same age grouped with the juveniles. Such an error, if repeated systematically would reduce the incidence of juvenile females, and inflate the adult ones. In the overall population count, however, we might expect to find roughly the same number of males and females" (ibid, 168).

The difficulties of producing convincing demographic data stem from four sources. Firstly, there is the problem of collecting accurate genealogical data as described by Sharp. Anthropologists are of course aware of these difficulties and the need for caution but it is when attempting to make demographic generalizations that such problems become acute and caution is often thrown to the winds. Secondly, there is the problem of accurate aging of the population without which data is too limited to gain any understanding of the population dynamics. Thirdly, there is the small size and limited time span of the studies. Finally, there is the problem of specifying group and territory boundaries, due to the complexity of Aboriginal, local organization. That is, there is some difficulty in specifying what the population is in each case.

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1. e.g., Peterson (1971:156) asserts that as there were 9 female children to every 10 adult women the population was not increasing.
Shrire and Steiger's rejection of the statistics on Eskimo infanticide as erroneous and limited led them to develop a computer simulation model of the effects of regular rates of infanticide. Their conclusion was that with any invariable rate of infanticide above about 8% the effect will be genocidal (1974:179). But in fact as they say themselves "in small groups, the nature of the random component would be important" (ibid, 171). Of course the groups being discussed are often small, smaller sometimes than the populations in the simulation model which began with 408 people (ibid, 178). They treat infanticide as a mechanism not under conscious control, for the rate is treated as a constant. But the size of the population at a given time will surely be a major factor in its dynamics. Treating infanticide as a constant is the chief weakness in their simulation model. Most writers would regard it as a response to some feature of the environment, whether population size, food supply or individual women's situations. No-one so far as I know has argued that it is an invariable proportion of the population nor that there is a conscious aim to produce a certain sex ratio. However the most surprising conclusion the authors reach is that the 8% infanticide rate, which is the highest that a population can stand, "In terms of constituting a meaningful cultural practice, this is virtually negligible" (ibid, 175). Surely the killing of one in every 12.5 girls born has significance both demographically and as a behavioural phenomenon.

Thus while I agree with the conclusions of these authors that infanticide was not the major population control, their manner of discussion of their results makes it clear that they are not considering infanticide as a form of behaviour but as a "mechanism
of population control". Their conclusion is that it could not be an effective one because of the long term demographic effect that such a policy would have.

We have seen that there is no conclusive demonstration that males outnumber females in the younger section of the Aboriginal populations for which figures are available. The samples are too small to demonstrate any general trend. But it ought to also be pointed out that there is always a slight bias in the sex ratio at birth, though this is only in the order of 102 to 107 per 100 females. Howell says of this "The number of births needed to analyze variants patterns in sex ratio at birth start in the tens of thousands, because the size of the expected differences, although persistent, is small" (1973:251). She calculates that it would take a minimum of twenty years to test a hypothesis of a particular sex ratio at birth in a population of 1,000 persons. The same can also be said for the slight mortality bias that favours the survival of girls. But the significant point here is that even small variations if regular have important demographic consequences.

"if we start with a basal population of 100, a net annual rate of increase of 0.5 percent, would at the end of 1,000 years yield a population of 14,800. However, if that average annual rate of increase were raised another 0.1 percent, which is only one extra person per decade, then the total population after 1,000 years is not 14,800 but 39,820" (Durand, 1972:370).

It would be quite impossible to observe such small rates of increase
from census figures or in small populations over a limited time. Nor can particular patterns of fertility and mortality be inferred under these conditions. In fact the large biases in the figures given above indicate that they could not possibly be typical of the population structure. As Wobst says "the effect of small populations size on population fertility is particularly interesting. As size decreases the chance decreases that the proportion of males and females will match each other closely. Similarly, the chance decreases that the proportions of the adult sexes will closely coincide" (1975:76).

Of the general characteristics of human populations Howell says:

"Under stable population conditions, the static view of population, which is what results from a census, and the dynamic view, which is formed from the study of birth and death processes, are two aspects of the same reality. Each has to be consistent with the other, and any two out of age composition, fertility, and mortality tells us what the other one has to be" (1973:259).

As shown above there is insufficient data for the Australian Aborigines to allow such checks to be made. It is important that anthropologists realise the limitations of their data. But the applicability of these general principles may be limited in that "stable population conditions" may not exist because of the small and scattered groups which compose the total Australian population. Perhaps most significant in this situation is the fact that in small
populations the amount of variation is large. Roberts, a biologist, points out:

"The numerous examples from primitive populations, collected by [Livi, 1940] demonstrate that excessive fragmentation of a population leads to its disappearance.

Diminution of numbers below a certain point destroys the demographic structure so that resurgence becomes impossible ....... All populations are subject to fluctuations in size and structure as a result of the play of chance factors and hence all are in danger of random extinction, calculable as a probability for any given period. The smaller the population, the higher this probability, while in large populations the probability of such extinction is infinitesimal" (Roberts, 1970:479).

The computer simulation work of MacArthur et al. confirms this. They tested the probability of very small populations surviving and found that there was great diversity in the behaviour of the populations, so much so that no generalisations could be attempted. They had populations of 3, 5 and 7 couples and, with identical fertility and mortality rates, ran at least twenty trials for each of five age specifications, the oldest being 29. For the populations consisting of seven couples they ran 160 trials. Of these 92 were "presumed successful", 35 were "doubtful" and 33 were "headed for extinction" (1976:312).
"The larger the initial group the greater is its chance of success, but the evolutionary course of all of the populations is so variable that there is no predictability in either the period of time needed to attain some specified size, or the time that those which failed to survive persisted before eventually heading for extinction" (ibid, 322).

"There is ..... no simple explanation for the differences in outcome except that the randomisation of birth and death rates and the sex ratio at birth randomises the chances of any group's survival" (ibid, 319). It is the size of the group that is crucially important in the light of these findings about the vulnerability of small populations. As Wobst says, "The smaller the population - if it is to survive - the greater the fertility has to be ....." (1975:76). The alternative to assuming a high fertility level is the possibility that small populations often do not survive. These demographic principles are the basis of the next section wherein the question of population dynamics in pre-historic Australia will be taken up.

D. THE POPULATION OF PRE-HISTORICAL AUSTRALIA

There are two separate questions here that should be clearly separated. One is that of the total population of Australia which is believed to have been approximately 300,000 when European settlement began. The other is the question of regional population dynamics. A more or less stationary overall population would still allow for a great deal of fluctuation in regional populations, and the converse is also true. That is, if the total population were
growing or fluctuating, there could have been relative stability in the local group numbers. Another way of putting this is that it is necessary to be careful when translating local small scale events onto the wider canvas of pre-historical time and vice versa. Particular characteristics of local populations, especially the small groups studied by anthropologists, can have quite remarkable effects when so translated.

I will first outline the view of Blainey (1975) on the nature of the pre-historic Aboriginal population: "Learned opinion is inclined to imply that the population of Australia had long been static, and that a rough balance had been attained between the level of population and each different environment" (1975:93). But, he asserts, "The evidence suggests that the history of Australia's population was a complicated story of many fluctuations, rather than a simple story of quick growth and then long stagnation" (ibid). The evidence that Blainey marshalls leads him to the conclusion that:

"If we had to draw a graph of the population history of Australia, perhaps the shape would resemble a slightly sloping saw-tooth roof. A gentle rise in population would often be followed by a dramatic fall, and the fall would usually be followed by another long, slow rise which would sometimes pass the previous peak before another fall or levelling out of population took place" (ibid, 116)

The evidence that Blainey amasses to support his thesis comes from various sources. He includes evidence that abortion, infanticide

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1. Cowgill says that "data on ancient population trends clearly show many significant changes in growth rates and some significant periods of declining population" (1975:521). His evidence and arguments give firm theoretical support to Blainey's position.
and senilicide were at high levels (ibid, 95-102), and argues that as these practices were responses to nomadic conditions, they would have remained stable independent of population density (ibid, 115). these were the curbs which Blainey believes would preclude rapid population rise in all conditions. The particular factors he mentions are not those I have shown to be most important; particularly low fertility is not considered. However my evidence supports Blainey's view that practices which checked the population were the result of nomadic conditions and, I would add, social organisation, and these practices would thus have continued independent of population density.

Further curbs which caused periodic downswings in population numbers were epidemic diseases, warfare, catastrophic droughts and floods. He argues that deadly epidemics could have occurred even in a relatively isolated continent with scattered nomadic bands, because epidemics can be carried by migrating birds or people from other land masses, and that dangerous viruses could have originated in Australia. He further argues that such viruses could spread in a scattered population because there is intercourse between adjacent groups across the continent (ibid, 102-5). One major epidemic in 6,000 years could reshape the population graph (ibid, 113). The evidence about warfare is rather more substantial. Blainey shows that, at least in heavily populated areas at the times for which evidence is available, the annual death rate from warfare was extremely high. He refers to several sources of evidence including Buckley's reports, Warner (1937), and several general sources; D.Thomson, Meggitt, Howitt, Roth (Blainey, 1975:105-112, 266).
If we accept the high rates of mortality described by Blainey, it does not mean that this had a controlling effect on the growth of the population, unless women and children were also killed. As Blainey himself says, "warfare was a terrible scythe in those regions where it killed women and children as well as men, because it thereby affected the birth rate as well as the death rate" (ibid, 111). He provides only rather unreliable evidence that warfare in Victoria often involved wholesale slaughter of men, women and children.

Finally Blainey's argument for a dynamic view of Australia's pre-historic population includes an argument for a dynamic culture which developed and lost techniques for food utilization, both in terms of tools, knowledge and preference. Some sources of food would only be gradually utilized as taste and techniques for their usage developed (ibid, 117-120). Evidence is in fact mounting since Blainey's work was published, for changes in level of food utilization (Rhys Jones, 1978; Lourandos, forthcoming).

Blainey's rejection of the view that Australia's population was static is supported by demographic principles. Howell says:

"The fertility and mortality certainly do not have to be equal to one another, that is, the population can be growing or even declining, as long as it is doing so as the result of the differences between long-standing fertility and mortality levels. The special case in which the population is not growing because birth and death processes are equal is called a stationary population and is simply one stable population in a field of many" (1973:259).
This stationary condition is rare, yet it is the condition that many authors believe characterised the population of Australia for at least 30,000 years. While equilibrium or homeostatic\(^1\) models are usually referred to, the arguments are directed to showing that the total population numbers remained the same.

Peterson for instance has responded to Blainey by reasserting that the archaeological evidence supports the view that Australia was populated to capacity within 8,000 years of the first inhabitants arriving 40,000 years ago, and that since, the numbers have remained relatively stable (1975). I am not competent to judge the archaeological evidence on the matter. White and O'Connelly (forthcoming, 1978) have evidence of the distribution of sites in B.P. 20,000 which supports the view that population numbers were of the same order of magnitude as at contact. This still allows for both local fluctuations and a slow overall growth. There is virtually no evidence to assess the population distribution in the previous 20,000 years nor the population density for the whole period up to first contact\(^2\).

Peterson's view raises the immediate problem of how the growth of population slowed after 8,000 years. What were the changes that

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1. Lourandos (forthcoming) has analysed the meanings variously attached to these terms, showing that their usefulness is severely limited. Equilibrium can be stable or unstable. Without specifying the mechanisms which produce the particular population characteristics, these concepts can be misleading.

2. Peterson rightly points out the problem of shifting focus from short to long term questions. "Pre-history", he says, "is not the history of chaps" (1975). He further accuses Blainey of seeing Aborigines as unthinking captives of custom. In the light of my earlier criticisms of Peterson, this seems a true case of the pot calling the kettle black.
allowed populations to be checked after explosive growth had occurred? Were there changes in conscious strategies or changes in social organisation which followed a situation of shortage of food resources? Or was it an unconscious response to felt deprivation? If so what was the nature of the deprivation? None of these questions seems to have been asked, let alone answered. I would support the view of Blainey that some checks on population were always present, though there was always population fluctuation also. The findings of Len Smith who has recently surveyed this question in detail, support the latter point. He argues for a more complex picture of the population dynamics of this long period than that presented by most writers. He says "It is inconceivable that long-term trends have not occurred" (1976:120). Smith puts forward what he calls a "tenuous model" for Australia's pre-historic population. While this model shows the usual rapid increase after settlement with the unexplained abrupt levelling when 300,000 is reached, it also shows long term growth and decline with changes in glaciation, tool use and climate. That is, while Smith finds fault with the accepted view of pre-historians and suggests that social and cultural mechanisms are important considerations, he does no more in this regard than clarify some of the demographic issues and make useful suggestions as to the many environmental factors that indicate that the population of Australia was changing over 40,000 years. He does not consider social structural factors.

I shall not proceed further with this question but will take up a narrower focus on events among regional populations. The population characteristic of long slow trends proposed by Smith (1976) does not describe the dynamics of local groups. There are some characteristics
of populations consisting of scattered nomadic groups that should be considered in any discussion of the demography of hunter-gatherers. The problems of specifying the population have long been recognised. George Grey said:

"Several writers have given calculations as to the number of native inhabitants to each square mile, in Australia. Now, although I have done my utmost to draw up tables which might even convey an approximate result, I have found the number of inhabitants to a square mile to vary so much, from district to district, from season to season - and to depend upon so great a variety of local circumstances, that I am unable to give any computation which would even nearly approach the truth; and as I feel no confidence in the results which I have obtained after a great deal of labour, I cannot be expected to attach much importance to those which, to my own knowledge, have, in several instances, been arrived at by others from mere guess work" (1841:246).

Nearly a century later Warner expressed similar sentiments. "The demographic aspects of the Murngin society are extremely difficult to ascertain, owing to the roving life and impossibility of a head census" (1937:17). Such a statement after three years in the field is a striking contrast with those who speak confidently of population figures after a much shorter period (e.g., Birdsell, Yengoyan). It may also be considered the explanation of the dearth of demographic data in other ethnographies.

Besides the problems of defining the geographical or demographic boundaries of populations the composition of local groups is not a
simple matter. There has been some dispute about the nature of
the local group (Hiatt, 1962, 1966a; Stanner, 1965). The weight
of evidence seems to support Hiatt's view that the local residence
group usually consists of members of a number of local patrilineal
clans. Thus the intermarrying group is much larger than the
usual residence group, but in this literature there is no suggestion
as to its size. Birdsell has asserted that the numbers 25 and 500
characterise the size of local groups and tribes respectively.
These seem to be "mystical numbers" (Hiatt, 1968:245) with little
evidence supporting their being either typical or average figures
(see L. Smith (1976) for detailed criticism of Birdsell's demographic
generalisations). Another view is that of Yengoyan who asserts that
populations must number 1,000 to 1,200 for the sub-section system to
work (1972:92). Meggitt (1968:179) has denied the latter assertion
because subsections are not primarily marriage classes, but presumably
he would accept that below a certain population number the marriage
rules cannot be adhered to. He gives figures for three tribal groups
of 1,570,277 and 54 people respectively. Elkin says that tribal
numbers ranged from 100 to 1,500 (1938:25). None of these authors
is much help in assessing the inter-marrying group. Hiatt says the
tribal group he worked with consisted of 300 people, the largest of
the nine tribes he recorded in the area. "There was a good deal of
intermarriage, particularly around the edges of this largest tribe"
(1968:245). Birdsell (1968:246) himself notes that "Tindale's basic
datum for precontact intertribal marriages was 14.7 per cent, greater
in some areas and less in others".

The vulnerability of small populations, which has been discussed
above should ideally be considered in terms of the size of the inter-
marrying group. However it is reasonable to consider the local interacting groups or tribes, as biological populations. That is, social boundaries did exist, and marriages or other interaction which occurred across these boundaries would be less frequent than those occurring within the boundaries. The fact that conflict occurred between groups defined in emic terms confirms this. Fluctuations in the size of local groups are of importance in specifying the mechanisms of population dynamics, and it is these fluctuations which will be discussed next.

There is plenty of evidence to support the view that residential groups were not stable entities. In times of hardship groups broke up into progressively smaller groups. In the harshest period, in central Australia,

"the typical food gathering unit comprised a man, his wives and children, with perhaps an old widowed mother or father-in-law in their care. Only a group as small as this could operate effectively at a time when the day's catch might be no more than a lizard or two, a few withered yams and a handful of grass-seeds" (Meggitt, 1962:50).

Should such a group consist of two brothers and one young wife who must work for them as well as old people and children, the situation would put considerable strain on the wife. As many men did not have wives such a situation must be at least as common as the one described by Meggitt. Gould, also writing of the harsh central Australian environment, says that tragedies have been known to occur, with groups dying through lack of water (1969:265). Warner reports that
some clans have only one male member each and so are likely to die out (1937:17). Birdsell also gives rather extreme figures of 30% per generation of patrilineages dying out (1968:238). Hiatt reports that a language had become extinct in the Blyth River area, and that several Gidjingali land owning units had become extinct (1965:17).

The instability of genealogical groups will have direct repercussions on the composition of local populations. Where a language has become extinct there is a likelihood that a large group has been reduced to a less than viable size. This population fluctuation would be partly due to random variations, which assume considerable significance in small populations. But there was also considerable fluidity in the identification of groups and individuals with particular areas of land. There has been little attention paid to this previously, partly because the Aborigines' ideology of unchanging and unchangeable identification of individuals and clans with specific areas. Evidence of manipulation of the system of identification of individuals with areas has been collected for the Mangarayi by Merlan (pers. comm.). It is probable that this flexibility she reports among the Mangarayi exists in other areas. Tonkinson's reports of "multiple criteria of attachment to estate" (1978b:53) seems to indicate this for the Western Desert. Avery (pers. comm.) has also recorded changes in land ownership over time in Boraloola. It is not surprising that Aboriginal informants stress the ideal of the unchanging law, as Tonkinson discusses (1978b:112), and in stable situations little change in territorial identification would be observed by anthropologists. Lourandos has amassed evidence from the literature of inter-community conflict over natural resources (Lourandos, 1977:218). These reports
indicate that conflict of various kinds would have exacerbated random fluctuation of population numbers. Thus there is sufficient evidence to support a view of considerable fluctuation in the size and density of regional Aboriginal populations. This is in addition to the regional variation in population density which would be determined by the ecology.

There is another aspect of the small size of residential groups among nomadic Aborigines which is relevant to population dynamics. If the numbers in a local group became small, and particularly if there were an unbalanced sex and age ratio, infanticide and abortion may increase because of the added strains on women who must provide for the oldest, male and infant members of the group. Instead of the reduction in numbers leading to increased reproduction and the increase in numbers leading to reduced reproduction, the reactions may be quite the opposite. I have shown above that due to random fluctuation in birth rates, sex ratios and mortality, small populations are at risk of extinction. But here I am making the further point that at those times when the population is in a state of imbalance and there are proportionately few females in the group, the reactions will be the opposite from the predictions of those who take the homeostatic view of culture. For instance, if several men and their old parents have only one or two young wives, the women will be overburdened and the probability of abortion and infanticide will increase. Also after natural disasters such as described by Blainey, and in times of extreme privation as described above, these things might increase so that the population would be endangered. That is, the fewer people in a hunter-gatherer band, the fewer children would be raised in proportion to the band numbers.
because the less likely it would be that other women would be available to feed the male members of the group.

There is voluminous literature on the relationship between population growth and other social changes especially the beginnings of agriculture (e.g., Boserup, 1965; Spooner, 1972; Polgar, 1972; Cowgill, 1975). Some authors make the fundamental error that controls on population which existed during the Paleolithic ceased to operate with the development of agriculture. That is, it is assumed that hunter-gatherers had sparse and stable populations, and that the change to denser population meant a lifting of the controls on population growth. It has been argued above that among Australian Aborigines fertility was low. If an increase in fertility leading to population growth accompanies (either as cause or consequence) the development of agriculture, then these agricultural groups must have suffered severe and constant population pressure due to the quite massive effect of a small rate of population increase. But while populations are more dense among agriculturalists than among hunter-gatherers, and population pressure certainly exists, there is no evidence that they are less stable. If they are this is a matter for empirical demonstration. It is also important to realise that the differences in density are not absolute. As the figures given by Lourandos (forthcoming) demonstrate, there is a continuum between the highest population density in Australia and the lowest for agricultural groups in Papua New Guinea.

Thus the question which should be asked is not what the mechanisms were which limited populations in pre-agricultural societies, but what determines population stability or growth at any time. As Cowgill says:
"Most societies most of the time do not seem to have had over-population problems, and if some societies some of the time have had these problems, then the reasons are not self-evident, but are a matter for investigation..... Why some societies, and not others, embark on episodes of population growth remains a fundamental problem, and growth, just as much as decrease, needs to be explained" (1975:513-4, Cowgill's emphasis).

There is one more consideration which emerges from this thesis which is relevant here. With the abandonment of nomadism in favour of a sedentary way of life, the one obvious and public justification for infanticide was lost. That is, women in a nomadic situation could not care for and carry another infant when still having to carry a child under four. In settled villages this condition no longer existed. If we accept that men commonly wanted more children than their wives, it is reasonable to suggest that in settled villages they would be able to control their wife's infanticide and abortion somewhat more stringently. With increasing stratification evident in more densely populated settlements a man's motive for increasing the number of his descendents would be strengthened. Woman may also be increasingly bound by this motive. That is, I am suggesting that any difference in population growth rate between hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists, and even more technologically developed societies, can be attributed at least in part to women's lessened control over their reproduction.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION
Dispute in anthropology often hinges on an unrecognised disagreement about the nature of human choice. The dispute is less about whether human beings make choices than about the level at which these choices are important to social enquiry.

Among pre-historians cultures are seen to have arisen, as species have, from ecological constraints interacting with populations whose communal and unselfconscious aim is to adapt and become biologically successful. There is little room in these theories for conflicts within the populations, let alone any conscious self-determination by individuals or groups. In so far as human beings are recognised as making choices, they do so in line with the group's best strategy for survival. The perspective on human choice in social anthropology is somewhat different. In many ethnographies, descriptions of behaviour are loosely related to systems of belief and rules of social organisation, often together with a recognition that there are conflicts which disrupt social life. It is implied that the culture determines the general pattern of life, but that individuals make choices in their own interests as they perceive them within the pattern. The culture itself is treated as determined outside the will of men.

Studies which put disputes or conflict of interest at the centre of enquiry promise greater illumination of dynamic forces operating in social systems. But the analysis of these conflicts is often conducted as if they were merely one aspect of a society of which the essence is located elsewhere. That is, individuals and groups strive to secure their perceived best interests, but they do so within a social framework which is determined by other forces. The
struggle between the interests of different classes is seen, not as the very stuff of society, but as somehow separate from or one component of the social system. I would argue that the overt expression of struggle can only be understood as one manifestation of the systemic struggle which is the essence of a social system.

The various views of man as a more or less helpless victim of social or historical forces contrast with theories that are based on the assumption that man makes his own history. This is not meant to imply that some kind of blueprint is consciously created and followed, but that it is not natural laws but class conflict that is the key to understanding history. The politics, religion and even the psychological constraints on individuals derive their basic form from the struggles that comprise the history of the society. While ecologists and functionalists think in terms of adaptations of the social organism, I argue rather that society is not an organism, but is formed by the struggles of real organisms, people, inevitably involved in class conflict. I will now try to show explicitly how my thesis has supported this view and at the same time show the relevance of some of the ideas of Marx, Engels and recent Marxist anthropologists.

A. HISTORY AND PRE-HISTORY

Earlier in this thesis I took issue with two quite different kinds of theory; firstly theories that see social systems in purely

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1. Of course class-conflict could be described as a natural law. The distinction is between laws which operate independently of man's actions, and class struggle which stems from them.
biological or adaptational terms, and secondly those that take a piecemeal approach to sex relations. Writers within the first framework see infanticide and other "population control behaviours" as simply a response to the needs of the biological population; demography is seen as the study of a biological system. Such a view of population is no different from that of Malthus who wrote 180 years ago

"The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.

By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal.

This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall somewhere; and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind ...." (1926:13-15).

Neither the geometrical ratio of population increase nor the arithmetical ratio of food production can be accepted as universal laws. Both have varied greatly over time. The rate of increase in food production has even outstripped that of population at certain times in history, though because of processes of distribution this was not obvious. The importance of Malthus in the history of thought
is out of proportion to the weight of his ideas. His most powerful
critic was Marx. Weissman has recently summarised the conflict as
follows.

"Back in 1798 - a year in which the French Revolution was still
conjuring up hopes of the perfectibility of man and society -
the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus issued his famous law of
population: mankind's propensity to beget, he warned, would
soon outstrip the earth's capacity to provide.

Half a century later another prophet branded the good parson
"a shameless sycophant of the ruling classes" and "a bought
advocate" of those who opposed a better life for Merrie England's
poor. By arguing that poverty was a natural condition and misery
a necessary check on growing numbers, the contemptible Malthus
was, Karl Marx claimed, simply selling scientific and moral
arguments to selfish opponents of reform. The real problem
wasn't too many people or too little food, said Marx, but that
private capitalists owned the means of meeting men's needs"
(Weissman, in Meek, 1971:ix).

There is no doubt that Malthus' law of population was publicly
reified because it not only provided a popular explanation for the
misery of the poor but also diverted attention away from analysis of
the economic system which necessarily produces unequal distribution
of goods.

Malthus saw poverty, starvation and disease as the natural out-
comes of this situation, and prehistorians similarly believe that the
shortage of food in primitive populations leads to wars, infanticide
senilicide and starvation. There is an unexamined assumption that
the rate of human population increase is natural and unchanging
much the same as among the plants and animals. But as I have shown
above, it is particular historical situations that produce a particular
demographic pattern. Against the accepted view that Australian
Aborigines' population limits were determined by the environment,
given the hunting and gathering method of subsistence, I have given
evidence that the level of physiological fertility of women is
partly determined by their domination and exploitation by men. The
fact that Aboriginal women may be undernourished, or at least
receive less nourishment than men, is not due to pressure on the
available food, but is a result of the system of production and
distribution of food. As well, the conscious and unconscious choices
by individuals are an essential part of the determinants of a particular
level of population fertility. A denser population could be supported
were the men to spend more time on food production and less on
ceremonial pursuits. The motivation that underlies these behaviour
patterns is specific to this society, determined as it is by the
development of individuals within a particular social system.

I have criticised the "adaptation theorists" not only for their
view of society and behaviour but also for their interpretation of
evolution. Genetic evolution is not a simple tale of increasingly
efficient adaptation, a "just so" story stretching into the infinite
past. The debate continues in biology about the nature of evolutionary
forces and the laws of genetic change. Yet teleology is still common
in popular accounts of biological as well as of social evolution.
I have argued that the genetic change that produced *homo sapiens*
was mainly the freedom from exact determination of behaviours that
could be called adaptive. With the development of the ability to learn (which is often vastly exaggerated in scope), man was free to indulge in more maladaptive behaviour. More important, social systems are not necessarily adapted to fulfilling the needs of their individual members. Engels characterised men as distinctively producers whereas animals are at most gatherers. That is, human society developed a disjunction between the getting of food and the consumption of it; between production and distribution; between worker and owner. Man became conscious of himself as a social being and as a result attempted to manipulate his world.

"With men we enter history. Animals also have a history, that of their derivation and gradual evolution to their present position. This history, however, is made for them, and insofar as they themselves take part in it, this occurs without their knowledge or desire. On the other hand, the more that human beings become removed from animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their own history consciously, ..... (but) we find that there still exists here a colossal disproportion between the proposed aims and the results arrived at, that unforeseen effects predominate, and that the uncontrolled forces are far more powerful than those set in motion according to plan (Engels in Meek, 1971:208).

Engels is not saying that it is man's individual conscious will-power that determines social dynamics. Indeed that is the idealist position that he and Marx poured scorn on¹. Rather it is man's

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¹. Derek Freeman over-emphasises the choice making ability of humans and underestimates social forces as determinants of behaviour. The stress on individual choice puts him in the same category as the idealists.
attempts to determine his history that comprise a large part of
the explanation of that history. These attempts have taken the
form of class struggle in post-industrial society. In the same
way it is the unrecognised struggle between men and women which I
am suggesting is crucial to the understanding of Aboriginal society.

B. CLASS, EXPLOITATION AND MALE-FEMALE RELATIONS

The second kind of theory with which I have taken issue is the
piecemeal approach taken by many writers regarding the relations
between the sexes among Aborigines. To be fair such writers were
usually trying to correct the over-simplification of previous
views. Kaberry for instance says:

"In the course of our survey a marked economic, social and
ritual differentiation between the sexes has emerged, but the
factors underlying it are complex and diverse, and there is
difficulty in subsuming them under any one principle ..... we
cannot infer ..... a fixed relationship between the sexes,
which operates throughout the entire social structure (1939:275-6).

In so far as Kaberry is warning against depicting the relation­
ship between the sexes in terms of one practice or belief, of course
I agree1. Nevertheless the anthropologist's task must be to bring
complexity within the bounds of comprehension. I would reverse
Kaberry's view, and assert that the complexity and diversity in the

1. Feil (1978) in his study of Enga women in the tee exchange, has
quoted this same section from Kaberra approvingly. He argues
that the literature on sex relations in New Guinea is bedevilled
by over-simplifications of women's position.
relationship is the surface phenomenon, while the principle underlying them, that is male domination is indeed simple. The complexity arises from the fact alluded to at several points in my argument, that domination is not a fixed relation but is always incomplete, is constantly challenged and reasserted in every sphere of life.

Kaberry would base a description of women's position on their crucial role as collectors, on their degree of conscious control over their own day to day decisions as well as on their overt satisfaction or discontent. But apart from the difficulty of judging such matters this must result in a range of status positions being accorded to women. A great deal of freedom in gathering activities can be contrasted with none at all in first marriages. Kaberry judges women's importance to be high because of their necessary place in male rituals (Kaberry, 1939:273), but we have seen that the manner of their participation demonstrates their inferiority. Thus this approach, while a useful descriptive strategy, cannot depict parsimoniously the nature of women's position vis-à-vis men in Aboriginal society.

My approach has been based on an attempt to identify the definitive aspects of the structural cleavage between men and women. This analysis owes a good deal to the debates on recent Marxist anthropology. However my position would differ from many others in emphasis as will be clear from the way this thesis has proceeded. I do not follow the neo-functionalism of some of the recent Marxist anthropology which stems from only analysing the means of production and the conditions for its reproduction. Such analysis can present a stable structure in which the dominant group (owners of the means
of production, dominant lineage, old men or whoever), have the game tied up. While I do not deny that the emphasis must be on systemic rather than piecemeal analysis, contradictions must be recognised as essential components of the social system.

There are certain aspects of the relations between the sexes in Aboriginal Australia that are suggestive of class relations. There is domination of women by older men, and an incipient struggle between these two categories of people. The view that women form a class in the Marxist sense, which has been mooted for modern industrial societies, is not one I would accept, in the first place because they do not form a specific economic category. However the sexes in Aboriginal society do appear to be potential classes. The dynamics of their interaction display features in common with interclass relations and this results from the economic and political basis of these relations. Though not classes they can nevertheless be understood to a large extent, by looking at them from the theoretical perspective of a Marxist class analysis.

Molyneux takes a similar position with regards the Gouro in her important contribution to the debate on class and exploitation. She focusses on the importance of women's productive labour and criticises Terray's "persistent failure to integrate one of the categories of producers (the women) into his analysis" (1978:56). Terray described the social relations among the Gouro as egalitarian and non-exploitative, much the view that Kaberry and others have taken of Australian Aboriginal
social relations. However in the light of the exploitation of women's labour which Molyneux describes, such a conclusion is surprising from a Marxist such as Terray. Molyneux suggests that "control over women in certain formations functions in an analogous way to control over the means of production in others" (ibid, 69). She does not conclude that women form a class but proposes that "Accumulation of primitive property and the dissolution of communal productive relations on the one hand, and the increasing subordination of women on the other, appear to proceed hand in hand" (ibid, 71). I would assert that the Aboriginal material supports such a position, but an exhaustive empirical study and rigorous theoretical formulation would be required to pursue this question further. Molyneux's masterly article supports my view that it is essential to include women's productive labour in any analysis of an economic system and that women's labour may be exploited in what appears to be a communally organised mode of production.

C. THE IDEOLOGY OF SEX RELATIONS

There are many expressions of the ideological contradictions in Aboriginal society between the high value placed on women as producers and as objects of exchange, and the devaluation of the same women as actors on the social stage. Attention is diverted from women by the

1. Bradby neatly describes a similar situation among the Baruya. "The ideological contortions gone through by this society of men, which would like to pretend that women did not exist while at the same time having to control them and being dependent on their labour, have their own fascination. The greatest act of rebellion that women can commit in this society, it seems is suicide. They frequently do" (1977:138). Unlike the Baruya, Aboriginal women do have significant areas of autonomy and a number of rebellious acts at their disposal.
overwhelming stress on male concerns, for instance the necessity of men to procure wives.

O'Loughlin observed that the structures of male dominance are reproduced by "the functional interdependence of the infra-structure and the super-structure and the ideological mediation of contradiction supporting disharmonic social orders" (1974:317). This accords well with the picture of the interweaving of economic relations with the political and ideological superstructures of the Australian Aborigines, and the social order can well be described as disharmonic. Now it is necessary to say a little more about the ideology. I wish here to emphasise the evaluative nature of ideology. Godelier defines ideology as "the sphere of illusory representations of the real ...." (1977:81). But these illusory representations are not simply ideas and beliefs about what the world consists of. They are also evaluations of actions and objects, establishing prescriptions, proscriptions and priorities. That is, it is a moral code based on values developed in particular social conditions. This set of values must be accepted by both the dominant and the dominated as the real value of things. They must not be seen as social constructs but as inverting in the object or act; as being absolute rather than contingent.

It is clear that in Aboriginal society, women themselves support the ideology that justifies their oppression. Hiatt, in an early work, analysed the opposition of interests, the distribution of power and the value system among the Walbiri of central Australia. The major conflict of interests which he identified was between older men seeking their second and third wives and young men seeking their first wives. He says "the demands of older men in this direction are expressed as one element in a gerontocratic ideology .... notwithstanding the individual hardship and resentments that may be
incurred as a consequence, the view that old men should get young wives and young men old wives tends to receive *general* acquiescence" (1965: pt. 5).

Hiatt has a somewhat different view of ideology from mine, and the major conflict of interest seems demonstrably between men and women. However, I am totally in accord with his main point. The gerontocratic ideology is overtly supported by all and by a religion where mature and old men control the knowledge which is believed to be essential to the well-being of the community.

The superordinate value given to men's ceremonies is a major feature of the ideology of Aborigines. The contrast between male and female ritual activities shows that women's power has a very different context from that of men. The women's ceremonies are surrounded by some secrecy. C. Berndt (1950), in her study of women's secret ceremonies of north Australia, says that during the women's djarada the men stay out of sight though they can hear the songs. The *jawalju* is a more secret ceremony which men must not see or hear. She describes the ceremonies as:

"partly of love magic intent, stressing certain specific wishes and desires — the obtaining of lovers, the retention or recovery of a husband's affections; and they abound in references to phallic symbols and sexual intercourse. But this, although perhaps their most striking and obvious feature, does not represent their sole content and purpose" (ibid, 26).
While love magic is only one aspect of Djarada and other women's ceremonies, it is a significant one for male-female relations. Men believe themselves to be powerless in the face of women's desires and women describe their ability to ensure their husband's or lover's faithfulness in his absence. It seems clear from cross-cultural material that the attributing to women of mystic and dangerous powers is not only compatible with subjugation but is usually an aspect of that very subjugation. Such beliefs can be seen as an ideological justification for other controls and limitations placed on women's activities.

The significance of women's ceremonial life is in dispute. Some researchers would regard women's ceremonies as indicating an active countervailing power base, giving Aboriginal women a position only quantitatively, not qualitatively different from that of men. My view is that while women's ceremonies have certainly been underestimated as a salient part of Aboriginal society, they are, in fact confirmation of the structurally inferior position of women. This is evident from their secondary importance in terms of social function, and is expressed in the fact that men, while impressed by women's power, do not serve women's needs during their ceremonies but do inspect their activities. The women's ceremonies seem to be in every feature, a pale reflection of the men's ceremonies. Two aspects of this will be mentioned.

1. Roheim suggested one advantage of polygyny for women: "As women have no group religion, nothing that can be compared to the ceremonialism of the Australian male, they lack any sublimation for their homosexual trends. Polygamy supplies their much-needed outlet" (1933:256). In fact, women's ceremonies could well fulfil this function if it is a necessary one.

2. Strehlow says that traditional songs take the place of private wealth (1971:677). It is of interest therefore that women own songs in their own right and claim to buy and sell them. Some of the Djarada songs at Goinjimbii had been dreamed by a male relative (the one who inspected the ceremony) and sold to the women and one of the women dreamed a song during the preparations for the ceremony which she claimed payment for. C. Berndt also reports that women dream their own songs (1950:27).
The ceremonies are similar to men's in their structure, but they do not as far as I can discover have the function of teaching a body of knowledge to girls which is essential to their fulfilling their tasks as women. I cannot here go into the details of this structural similarity which is largely based on my own observation of a Djarada ceremony at Goinjimbi in 1976. Briefly, the temporal arrangements were similar as were the responsibilities of individuals. There was a build up of activities over a period of about a month with more people arriving for the ceremony towards the end of this period. During the final three days every woman stayed at the ceremony ground for most of the time, though most of them returned to the camp to prepare their husband's food once or twice. On the final night the ceremony continued all night. Healing and dangerous powers were released by the ritual activities. But just as men at the Gunabibi came to inspect the activities of the women, so at the Djarada the senior man of the moiety came to inspect the ground on the penultimate day of the ceremony. He could not come too close, but sat down about 10 yards behind the row of singers, listened for about fifteen minutes, indicated approval and left. The religious significance of this visit was not clear to me, but the implications for male-female relations seems obvious. Women's ceremonies are subject to male scrutiny because men are ritually superior.

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1. A detailed description of this ceremony with slides and tapes is in the library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
2. One of the complaints after the ceremony was finished was that it had been far too brief. One woman said repeatedly that it should have continued for a month. This is typical of the dissatisfaction expressed after large ceremonies (e.g., Bern 1972).
3. C. Berndt (1950:28) says that women depend on men to make their head-bands for the women's jawalju ceremony in Arnhem Land.
Women's ceremonies are one aspect of what is known in Aboriginal society as "women's business". The separation of "women's business" from men's activities and attention cannot be interpreted in isolation from other aspects of male-female relations. To do so risks equating men's exclusion from women's business with women's exclusion from men's business. These are not equivalent because men and women are not in equivalent structural positions. Women are subordinate to men so that the exclusion of men from "women's business" does not detract from male status.

Another striking aspect of Aboriginal ideology is the widely attested stress on generosity. Generosity is the prime virtue and possessiveness the major fault. This is not merely a formal requirement to give in certain circumstances. There is an all pervasive stress on sharing of resources, and a rejection of ownership. A person who owns things could not be generous. Any form of possessiveness is felt to be shameful, and this extends to the off-hand and careless treatment of objects and the lack of attention to preservation.

Also obligations to kinsmen are the foundation of most social mores. It was possible for Warner (1937) and Meggitt (1962) to describe the norms of behaviour among the Murungin and the Walbiri in terms of the expected behaviour between pairs of kinsmen. Hiatt's (1965) study of conflict among the Gidgingali is couched in terms of the rights and obligations between kinsmen. That is, among Aborigines, all interpersonal relationships can be expressed in kinship terms, and the proper behaviour between categories of kin is laid down. Of course not all of these require a high level of amity; there are avoidance relationships as well. However, by and large the obligations of one
kinsman to another are stressed. Further, co-operation is the basis of the social organisation. Maddock has stressed the "mutual dependence" which is present at each level of the social structure. He says "The practice of bestowal, like the practice of marriage and religion, is thus turned to the purposes of mutual dependence" (1974:50). This dependence of clans and subsections on each other for the continual functioning of the marriage and religious systems, means that there cannot develop one dominant section of lineage. Nor do individuals become leaders in the sense of being a boss.

Roheim depicts the situation as follows:

"It is well known that there is no society which carries altruism so far as that of the Australian native. He will literally give the last bit of "damper" or of meat to his neighbour, and even a baby will pass on the sugar he has got from the white man - just for the asking. But this does not prove that he really wants to do so. The mere fact that there are expressions in the language for selfishness and for liberality shows that there is such a thing as greed amongst them, but social pressure is very strong on this point, and insists on the formation of a highly distributive super-ego. Thrift would never be regarded as a virtue in an Australian community. But fights about food seem to be just as frequent among the women as among the men" (Roheim 1933:208).

But what does this generosity, obligation and co-operation mean in terms of the relations between individuals and particularly between the sexes? Firstly it conceals the actual attempts by individual men to gain at the expense of others. While such attempts are ubiquitous there
is little opportunity for any individual or group to gain ascendency. But more important, the duty to show generosity devolves more often on women. As objects of men's exchange they should submit to being lent or given. As daughters, wives and mothers they must supply many of the daily mundane demands of fathers, husbands and children.

Quite a different function of these values may be tentatively suggested. Allowing children to express hostility to adults, particularly mothers, necessitates a strong compensatory emphasis on obligations to kin, on generosity and on co-operation. The imparting of these values carries the weight of socialising the child particularly with regard to emotional control. Infants can give free rein to aggression but the objects of aggression are progressively limited by the necessity to show generosity to a widening range of kinsmen. Thus the so-called generosity ethic does not indicate an egalitarian society. Rather it counteracts the hostility which children are allowed and even encouraged to express as well as underpinning and disguising the unequal obligations between men and women.

D. WOMEN IN RITUAL

In Aboriginal society men's rights over women's labour extend beyond the appropriation of some of their products to the supply of domestic, sexual and ritual services, many of which have been described in previous parts of this thesis. It seems reasonable that discussion of exploitation should include a consideration of any valued contributions made by one category or class of people for another. For this reason I include here a discussion of women' place in the sphere of men's ritual.
While the religious life could be seen as benefiting all the members of a community, the humiliation of women which is a salient ingredient of Aboriginal ritual life makes such a view untenable. The political role of religious practices in Aboriginal society was precisely defined by a senior Rembarnga man. He said, "Before we had no bosses; we had ceremony". There has been a good deal of literature on women's place or lack of place in Aboriginal religion. Warner said women were excluded because as profane beings, they had no role in religious ceremonies. Others have since pointed out that women do indeed play a part in ceremonial practices even if it is at times in "rites of exclusion". Here I wish only to enlarge briefly on my informant's comment. It seems he is alluding to the role of ceremony in regulating the lives of the community. The imperatives of the religious life command obedience from all. The further implication is that control over major rituals enables senior men to retain their dominant position in the society. Hiatt has recently suggested that it is the control rather than the content of male rituals that defines their function. He suggests that initiation and increase rites may be characterised as "male dominance rites" (1978:14). Bern takes a somewhat different position, arguing that it is in religion that the relations of production are elaborated, justified and therefore formalised (1978 unpublished). I have no quarrel with the substantive points made by either of these men. However the major question of how the content or control of religious practices, or the relations of production operate to suppress young men and women is not elucidated. It seems to me necessary to specify the mechanisms of suppression as well as the structures and symbols of domination. I will describe one such mechanism.
Women are humiliated both ritually and on the mundane level as a part of men's ceremonies. Ritual humiliation occurs during what Maddock describes as rites of exclusion. At the Yabuduruwa for instance, women must sleep near the men's secret ceremonial ground for an hour or two in the middle of the night. They are then awoken and perform some ritual actions. Maddock depicts the situation thus: "Were the women to look now they would see laid out before their eyes the ceremonial ground with all its paraphernalia, the men's rite and the preparations for the daytime rites, sights forbidden to them" (1974:146).

Maddock continues,

"The rite is designed as though to court disaster. The puzzle is solved if we accept that the rite dramatises women's exclusion. The successive stages develop the theme that there are hidden matters that women must not so much as glimpse. How better to teach the lesson than by increasing the visibility of these forbidden things while decreasing their distance from women?" (ibid, 149).

This lesson is clearly being taught to all, but it is men who are doing the teaching and the message is one that humiliates women. At a Gunabibi ceremony which I attended at Dortluk \(^1\) in 1976 the women's part in the proceedings consisted of dancing, singing and some ritual practices which continued through the final night. This took place at the women's camp. During the night the women's activities were inspected by some of the men, who were adorned with ceremonial paint

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1. A ceremonial ground near Bamyilli, N.T.
and down, and displayed a fierce demeanor. The women moved aside and remained silent during this inspection. On the final day the women in a body moved with downcast eyes to the men's ceremony ground. They saw the boys emerge from hiding covered in red paint, and were quickly hustled away again. Later the women were blamed for not providing sufficient food and for mistakes in the arrangements. They spend many hours simply waiting, not knowing when they would be required. The apparent patience of the women was belied by the intense eagerness and speed with which a move was made when it became possible.

There are many other aspects of ritual life which impress the message that women serve men's religious needs. When a boy is being circumcised, his sisters must be cut on the leg and cry and beat themselves (e.g., Warner, 1937:86). Also his sisters and mothers, real and classificatory, must avoid a number of foods to increase the efficacy of the rites. It is overtly stated that after a man has taken part in a number of ceremonies he must be shown respect; his wife must not swear at him. White describes the humiliations women suffer on the mundane level. She says,

"During such a ceremonial cycle, peremptory and inconvenient demands can be made on the women. On two occasions the women and children were turned out of the camp at short notice, presumably so that the men could perform the secret rituals belonging to totemic sites very near the camp. At dusk one evening with no apparent warning the ritual leaders gave the signal and each man ordered his family away shouting to them "to take all the children, not leave that small boy behind, to take all the dogs, to get a move on". With the men shouting, the dogs barking, the children
crying, the women struggling along the narrow track loaded with bundles and babies, and the girls helping the very old women, the scene was reminiscent of refugees fleeing from an invader. The women were upset, but did not actually complain about this treatment, and soon made fires and settled themselves and their children a mile or more away, out of earshot of the men's singing. Two days later the scene was repeated, but this time the women were turned out of camp from dawn to dusk" (1969:15).

White adds that Dr. C. Berndt witnessed a similar occurrence at Macumba in 1944, Berndt (1965:277). Thus the aggressive exclusion of women from the men's religious rituals can be seen as having both an intellectual and emotional component to impress on the women that their concerns and comfort are of little importance.

E. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OPPRESSION

I have argued that Aboriginal women are oppressed in particular ways and that this has certain psychological consequences. While the women enjoy considerable autonomy in their day to day lives, this individual independence is a necessary part of the food quest and could thus be described as a condition of their continued existence as suppliers of subsistence. It can also allow for psychological relief from male hegemony. However, despite the general acquiescence in the ideology of male superiority there is an incipient questioning which can be observed in the actions of women. I would argue that such questioning is endemic among those who are oppressed in any society. Why then do they remain powerless? Part of the answer in this case is
the limit on solidarity among women. Conflict between women's interests is an essential part of their social existence. Often this creates a double bind situation in which there is no line of action which can allow women to follow their own interests. An example is the socialisation of sons. A mother encourages her son's aggression, pride and strength. But when young he should prove these qualities by attacking his mother and sisters. While a mother wants to protect herself and her daughter from attack, she does not want a son who will accept insults such as "hearing" his sister's name. Also mother-in-law avoidance creates barriers between mother and daughter. White has said "If men had intentionally designed a law to prevent women combining against them, then they could have chosen nothing more effective than mother-in-law avoidance which, when strictly observed, has the result of keeping the mother and daughter apart" (1971:101). Of course, the avoidance is not always "strictly observed" but default occurs at the cost of a certain degree of guilt or shame. The small size and interdependence of residential groups also precludes real independence of women. But the separation of "women's business" does allow a certain relief from men's demands which enables women to make some decisions. However another aspect of men's dislike of hearing about "women's business" is that it results, in some spheres, in more fear by women about the results of their actions. For instance a woman must not cry out when giving birth in case a man should hear. A birth took place at Goinjimbi about 25 yards from where a group of men and women were playing cards, but no one knew until it was over. The sense of shame that women have which leads them to obey such rules is again related to their early experiences of avoidance. There is no need for any punishment should the rule be broken. Fear and shame about inadvertently offending men has been firmly inculcated at an
early age.

With little solidarity of action possible among women it is to be expected that there is no development of a women's ideology apart from the acceptance of some behaviour that is publicly disapproved, such as infanticide and elopment. For instance Kaberry remarks that "Women in these matters (elopment with wrong subsection partners) are ready to laugh at their own delinquencies, gossip about those of others and as a rule condone laxities unless they happen to be near relatives, when they show some embarrassment" (1939:128). This embarrassment exemplifies the power of a ruling ideology which does not stem only from the sanctions that can be imposed to support it. These sanctions themselves have a psychological effect, limiting the freedom of participants to question the ideology. I have already mentioned this effect in the case of the beatings which wives sometimes receive. The handing over of a very young girl to an old man places obvious constraints on her idea about herself, as do female puberty rites, avoidance relationships, sexual punishment and wife-lending. A girl can hardly conceive of herself as an independent being or as a member of an independently operating sex. She will be wary of her own power as a mother-in-law, or as a sister, besides the direct fear of arousing her husband's anger (e.g., White, 1975:137). Thus it is that the psyches of individuals are shaped to the structures of the society. It is not surprising therefore that women lack a developed independent ideology.¹

¹ The whole question of the development of counter-ideologies is too complex to be tackled here. I would argue that the seeds of such development are always present and expressed in the actions of the oppressed. But there must be a vision of alternative social arrangements for the seeds to sprout.
While the ideology of male gerontocracy is all pervasive, in no area is domination complete. Aboriginal women's part in decision making has been used by some authors as evidence that Aboriginal women were not oppressed. While women to some extent do take part in the political process, it is not to pursue the interests of women per se. This is because the political processes are largely to do with the manipulation of the younger men and women by older men whose interests are credited by everybody with primary importance. The competition between these older men is a condition of their domination, and the competition between women is a condition of their oppression. This paradox is more obvious in hierarchically organised political systems but is present also in Aboriginal society with its minimal political structures. While the paradox may never be overtly recognised, women become aware of particular injustices. But such an awareness exists only as individual discontent which is seen as due to the particular woman's circumstances. Sometimes it can be attributed to the woman's own fault, and she will be likely to feel guilt or be punished for not being able to fulfill her duties properly. I have described how girls, through the learning about avoidance, suffer shame and embarrassment when confronted with certain men. This is one example of the ideology being bolstered by constraints imposed on the psyches of individuals through the control, manipulation and repression placed on their personality and sexuality.

There are a number of aspects of the emotional consequences of the situation of women which have been described. Polygyny will produce jealousy in women; indulgence of children and men will produce discontent in women; double standards in sexual behaviour will produce resentment in women. These attitudes are not considered legitimate and
their expression may be counter-productive, but they will become apparent with a change in the external conditions; if the restraints that deny expression to these attitudes are removed women will for instance, refuse to become co-wives. A significant number of elopements did occur in the past, and as Maddock has said this "testifies to the oppressive weight of denial and deprivation, but leaves the system unchanged" (1964:63). That is, elopement can be seen to act as a safety valve for the marriage system, as does the respecting of a jealous man's reactions. Elopement can lead to the recognition of the union as a legitimate marriage. Thus the denial of the most significant valued resource to young men, and in a sense to young women (in that they cannot choose their lovers) results in disruption that is contained uneasily by this safety valve. The acceptance of a certain level of adultery and elopement appeases disruptive forces. It appears here that the ideology masks contradiction and denies its recognition while a certain malleability in social arrangements allows conflicts which are engendered by the contradictions to be accommodated.

This work has turned a full circle. Beginning with the control that Aboriginal women exercise over their own reproduction, it has returned to the conditions of that control. The reproductive behaviours of women have been explored as biological actions, as psychological actions and as social actions. I have argued that the Aboriginal social system is premised on the domination of men over women. In the last chapters I have emphasised that the wider questions of population dynamics should take account of social processes if the mechanisms of these dynamics is to be understood. But perhaps more importantly there is a necessity for seeing the relationship between different levels of functioning. Social forces mould the minds of the individuals who
compose the society. At the same time social processes are formed of the actions of these individuals. By analysing these two processes separately the apparent ambiguity is resolved.
APPENDIX A. Polygyny Rates

I will present here some views on changing rates in polygyny. Polygyny seems to have occurred throughout the continent, though with some variation in the average number of wives per man. There are figures for a number of Northern Territory communities, as presented in Chapter 4, but few from other areas and none at all from the south and eastern areas of Australia. But there is evidence that polygyny did exist in all areas. Unfortunately the belief in the existence of "group marriage" that Spencer and Gillen and Howitt held makes their work useless for any assessment of the degree of polygyny, though it is clear from their work that many men did have more than one wife (Spencer and Gillen, 1899:62-3; Howitt, 1904:256). Other early observers who assert polygyny to be common are Palmer (1884:281), N.Q.; Roth (1908:12), Q.; Grey (1841:251-2), N.W. and W.A.; Victorian Parliamentary Report (1858:53); Chewings (1932:39), C.A.; Smith (1880:5), C.A.

Long's figures show a variation in levels of polygyny from 1.94 wives per man in Groote Eylandt in 1940 to 1.04 wives per man at Areyonga in 1961. These average figures hide the variation from a situation where a few men have many wives to one where most men have one wife and a few have two. The vast majority of men who are married have one wife even when some men can obtain five or more.

Rose found a level of polygyny at Groote Eylandt which is considerably higher than in most other places. He emphasises that gerontocracy is the basic factor that makes a polygynous situation possible, and this is an adaptive mechanism in this environment.
"If for some reason amongst a particular group the females were more equitably distributed amongst the males, that is to say gerontocracy and polygyny diminished in intensity, then the women would not receive the necessary protection from living in a group of co-wives for them to nurture and rear the necessary number of offspring to provide replacements in the next generation. In these circumstances, provided the general material conditions remained constant, this group would tend to die out, to be replaced by a group where adequate polygyny existed for the protection of the mothers and offspring. For any particular group of aborigines the intensity of polygyny (and gerontocracy) is determined by the equilibrium between the two conflicting tendencies, on the one hand the younger men striving to break down the monopoly of the older men and on the other, the biological/economic fact that a certain level of polygyny is required to ensure the perpetuation of the species" (1960:175).1

There is evidence to counter both these claims. Firstly the replacement figures that Rose claims are necessary are much higher than any evidence would warrant. Two children per woman raised to reproductive age are sufficient for a stable population. It has been shown in Chapter 5 that low fertility seems to have been the norm. Secondly women could easily provide for themselves and a limited number of children. Women collect most of the food, including substantial protein, and have considerably autonomy in the food quest. But it should also be emphasised that the division of labour and the

1. It should be noted that young men's but not women's strivings, are considered as a determining factor in the situation.
distribution of food do not depend on particular marriage arrangements. In fact there are numerous ways that cooperative child-rearing could be arranged were it necessary.

Because Rose believes that the majority of women had to have co-wives he dismisses evidence to the contrary as indicative of social change. In fact, as can be seen from the table, there are a number of communities where more than half the women are monogamously married. In discussing the fact that Kaberry found only 14% of marriages to be polygynous, Rose does not allow that these groups may have had a lower level of polygyny previously.

He says;

"What however Kaberry is not fully appreciative of, is the effects of detribalisation on polygyny amongst the Kimberly tribes amongst whom she worked. As has already been stated these tribes had been in contact with white people who began dispossessing them of their land and thereby undermining their tribal economy in the early 1880's, that is fifty years before Kaberry did her work. If polygyny flows directly from the traditional mode of production of the Aborigines any alteration in the mode of production must have a direct effect of polygyny" (1960:85).

Rose also compares the reduction in the level of gerontocracy as reported by Worsley for Groote Eylandt with the level reported by Kaberry. "it seems that the Groote Eylandt gerontocracy has broken down further in twelve years than that of the tribes amongst which Kaberry was working had done in 50 years" (1960:97).
The only firm evidence of change over time given by Rose is the contract between his own figures and those of Worsely collected 12 years later on Groote Eylandt (Worsely, 1954; quoted by Rose, 1960: 96). He suggests that the cause of the breakdown is the active endeavour of the missionaries to eradicate child marriage, (ibid, 97), which is somewhat different from the argument above. A ban on new polygynous marriages has been enforced since 1942 on Groote Eylandt (Long, 1970:301) and this could clearly constitute a complete explanation of that particular change. But this leaves the question of Rose's view of the major cause of change, the alteration in the mode of production, unresolved. He does not show how the economic changes makes it less necessary for women to cooperate in the bringing up of children. If it is the food supply that is crucial Rose does not make it clear how more than one wife for the older men and none for the younger men was in the past supposed to protect women who must still supply all the men with staple foods.

In a later work Rose (1965:80-1) explains the low level of polygyny at Angus Downs in 1962 as a result of the economic disadvantages of more than one wife for men in the changed conditions. He gives no evidence about pre-contact polygyny rates in this area. Rose seems to be arguing that the very crudest material considerations motivate men to reject more wives. While I do not deny that such considerations will be one factor in determining men's motivation, there are other equally important factors in the situation. For instance, while it is true that women no longer gather food nor carry equipment, they do cook and provide other services for their husbands. A second young wife is also sexually desirable. Another factor is that women
themselves have attained a certain independence from economic constraints as Rose notes, and, with the protection of European law, are able to exercise far greater choice. As I have shown above women gained little from polygyny.

Meggitt also sees the reduced rate of polygyny as a measure of acculturation. He gives figures showing that three Walbiri settlements have different rates of polygyny and suggests that these rates accurately reflect the degree of acculturation. He argues that, "the variable of acculturation is prima-facie a significant determinant of rates of, and ages at, marriage" (1965:148) and further that "quantifiable changes in several features of the marriage system of inland Aborigines provide fairly sensitive indices of degrees of increasing acculturation (or detribalization)" (ibid, 165). He gives no indication of what the causal connections are nor a definition of acculturation. Figures for the previous polygyny rates are of course not available, and it is possible that Meggitt's figures, instead of representing a change, may reflect the traditional situation. In the absence of historical data it is necessary to develop a more specific theory about the determinants of changes in the level of polygyny.

Long collected figures on polygyny from various settlements in an attempt to test Rose's hypothesis (1970:292). He argues that neither Rose nor Meggitt have provided sufficient evidence to specify the determinants of differing rates of polygyny.
He writes,

"Meggitt's table showing the incidence of polygyny at Yuendumu was reassuringly similar to my own and there is no necessary conflict between his hypothesis that a decline in polygyny indicates increasing acculturation and my own that variations in the incidence of polygyny in different communities may indicate differences in traditional behaviours rather than differences in degrees of acculturation. The difficulty lies in determining what changes have occurred or what the incidence of polygyny was before contact..... Acculturation is a process, one symptom of which may be a decline in polygyny, rather than a factor determining change in marriage behaviour" (1970:296).

He continues the argument;

"The evidence suggests that, at least in the recent past, polygyny was much less common among the Western Desert people of the region now included in the large reserves in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory than it was at Groote Eylandt and among the Walbiri. In this area men with as many as four or even three wives were relatively few and far between. It appears that this relatively low incidence of polygyny was correlated with, and perhaps casually linked with, relatively late marriage of females and a less marked disparity in age between spouses than in some other Aboriginal societies" (ibid, 299-300).

Roheim supports this view when he says that the Pitjantjara and polygynous
in principle but usually monogamous (1974:225). Long accepts that polygyny seems to decrease among Aborigines who are in contact with Europeans, and asserts that

"It seems possible that the mechanisms of change might be primarily demographic. It is common knowledge that Aboriginal populations in touch with European populations decline or have done so until quite recently. It is a widespread, if inadequately explained, characteristic of populations in decline that males outnumber females" (1970:300).

In fact this outnumbering is in the order of .07 (Howell, 1973:253), too few to make any impression in small groups.

Long suggests that in the absence of any direct evidence, differences in the level of polygyny in pre-contact times may be related to the fact that "in areas of extremely sparse population, fighting may have been less frequent and the male mortality rate may have therefore been lower than in areas of relatively dense population" (ibid:302). Now this is an advance on the positions of Meggitt and Rose, in that the determinants of certain traditional levels of polygyny at any time are being sought, as a basis for examining post-contact change. Long's most general determinant is a demographic one. The simple availability of men and women of marriageable age is clearly one most significant determinant of the number of wives a man can marry. But it can hardly be considered a determinant of what is considered marriageable age. The circularity of such an argument is obvious. One could ask why it is that with demographic changes making, say more girls available, the proper age for a man to marry
would not be lowered. This in fact has occurred according to Rose. We must accept Long's view that demographic factors may vary independently and influence the marriage patterns. But the precise effects of this or any other factor would require the weighing of a host of variables.

Long's attempt to specify some of the causes of differing rates for polygyny then, is inadequate. It would also be difficult to sustain Roses' argument that polygyny is an economic necessity, because food production and distribution cut across the lines of polygynous marriages. Polygyny is one aspect of a marriage system which also includes gerontocracy, the promise system, the marriage of very young girls and other features that have been described. This marriage system is in turn embedded in a system of production and distribution which has yet to be fully described. It is because Rose, Meggitt and Long treat polygyny to some extent as an isolated variable that their accounts are unsatisfactory.
APPENDIX B. The Goinjimbi Community

The original Rembarnga country extended north from Goinjimbi, and that is where most of the old people's country is. Some have ties with other areas. The area to the south and west of Goinjimbi was previously the country of the Jauan and Ngalgbon people who, with the development of the cattle stations, were pushed to the town and Government reserve to the west. They maintain ties to the country through occasional visits to ceremonies held in the area.

Most of the present younger people were born south-west of the Wilton River, that is, outside their traditional country. When asked where their country is, many of the younger adults (approximately 25 to 40) name one of the areas to the north as being their real country, "but", they say, "I was born at Mainoru". Thus there is an increasing break with the traditional pattern of attachment to country being reinforced by being born in and/or dying in that area (Maddock, 1974: 27ff, for an exposition of Aborigines' attachment to country). But under stress reference is still made to "own country" even by the young people.

The memory of the oldest Goinjimbi inhabitants is of spasmodic contact which their parents had with Europeans either as vagabonds from their bullets, as workers for the mineral explorations in the area or doing stock work at stations, either at Arafura in the north, at Bulman waterhole near the present Goinjimbi both of which were abandoned, or at Mainoru, to which several of the old men were recruited with some forcefulness. Mainoru Station was first opened in 1916, and gradually over the next decade or so a settled Aboriginal
community developed on the station, the so-called "Black's Camp" one of which was the labour pool for every Northern Territory cattle station. The men and a significant group of the women were trained to do stock work and some women worked as domestics. The "Black's Camp" was supplied with food by the station management. During all these years ties with the country to the north were maintained with regular visits. There were always groups living in traditional ways in Arnhem Land. The ceremonial cycle continued, though with many interruptions from the demands of the station management. Though to a superficial observer the Aborigines at Goinjimbi appear to have adopted many of the customs of Whites, it is clear to me that the traditional beliefs and values are salient. The whole complex of "Blackfella law", is the central concern without which an understanding of the society is impossible. Maddock has said, "Despite tribal fragmentation, economic and ecological transformation and linguistic breakdown there is a vigorous collective life among the Aborigines....." (1965:3). White ways comprise a very superficial overlay of this life.

The Guiperan Pastoral Company began mainly because Mainoru Station was sold in 1969 to an American who told the Aborigines to leave. The people moved 60 Kms north into Arnhem Land and made a determined effort to stay in the area rather than join the large settlements at Beswick or Bamyili. There have been complex and much misunderstood developments since then, during which cattle have been bought and fences erected. The six directors of the company, which the Government set up, cannot write, so it was decided that European advisers should sign the cheques. Thus no director of the company can sign cheques and moreover it is not necessary that the directors be told for what the cheques are to be used.
The European supervisor was envisaged as a teacher and a community adviser, but the man appointed was experienced in running cattle stations with a community of black workers in Africa, and had no experience, education or interest in teaching management skills to Aborigines. His stated aim was to develop an economically viable project and run a profitable store. As primary aims these conflicted with the development of the community's independence. The Supervisor lived in a new house on a hill about a mile from the dusty camp and acted the part of the 'Boss'. The 'Black's Camp' fulfilled its traditional role of being a pool of workers available when required by the 'Boss'.

The Aborigines' supposed status as owners of the property was especially hard to sustain when the government's cuts in expenditure put them all on unemployment benefits. Attempts are being made to resolve particular problems, for instance by arranging meetings, changing the personnel and providing houses, but the basic conflicts between Aboriginal traditions and capitalist enterprise will remain.
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