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THE LAW PEOPLE:

History, society and initiation
in the Borroloola area of the
Northern Territory

by

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Abstract.

Before European contact the Aborigines of the Borroloola area were distributed in small groups of fluid composition pursuing a hunter-gatherer way of life coming together for seasonal ceremonial activities. The territories of populations marked by language and culture coincided with ecologically significant areas where a particular way of life was followed. The Yanyuwa, the main subjects of the thesis, made a highly specialised socio-cultural adaptation to their mainly marine environment. One important factor in this was the annual visiting of Macassan trepangers to the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. They traded dugout canoes, iron tools and other exotic goods to the Aborigines, and this helped compensate for the natural disadvantages of the Islands for the hunter-gatherers.

The seasonal ceremonial cycle still occurs and male initiations draw large numbers of Aboriginal people to Borroloola at the end of the dry season. The initiation ground is a prominent feature of the main camp at Borroloola; and it is argued in this thesis that it represents a central moment in the articulation of social relations as they can be discerned in residential patterns. The semi-moiety organisation participates in the same structure of relations, articulating ritual relations with mainly female reproductivity in the social relationship of marriage.

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PREFACE.

This study is based on fieldwork among Aboriginal people living at Borroloola in the Northern Territory where I lived³ for nearly two years. How exciting this period was for me and the depth of the formative experiences I had with the Borroloola people I am unable to adequately express. Furthermore, without the great kindness and generosity of the Aboriginal people, and some Europeans, my life there would have been very difficult indeed. There are many people at Borroloola to whom I am indebted in one or another way and I cannot acknowledge all of them individually here. However, I must name members of the Timothy, Miller, Finlay, Harvey, Hammer, Simon, Isaac, McDinny, Friday and Rory families. They helped me in practical ways; they were warm companions; and what they taught me provided the basis for this thesis. For all of these things I am very grateful.

I have also to thank the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney who provided financial and intellectual support. At Borroloola I was assisted in many practical ways by John Chudleigh, Jeff Stead and other officers of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and I am grateful to them for their support.

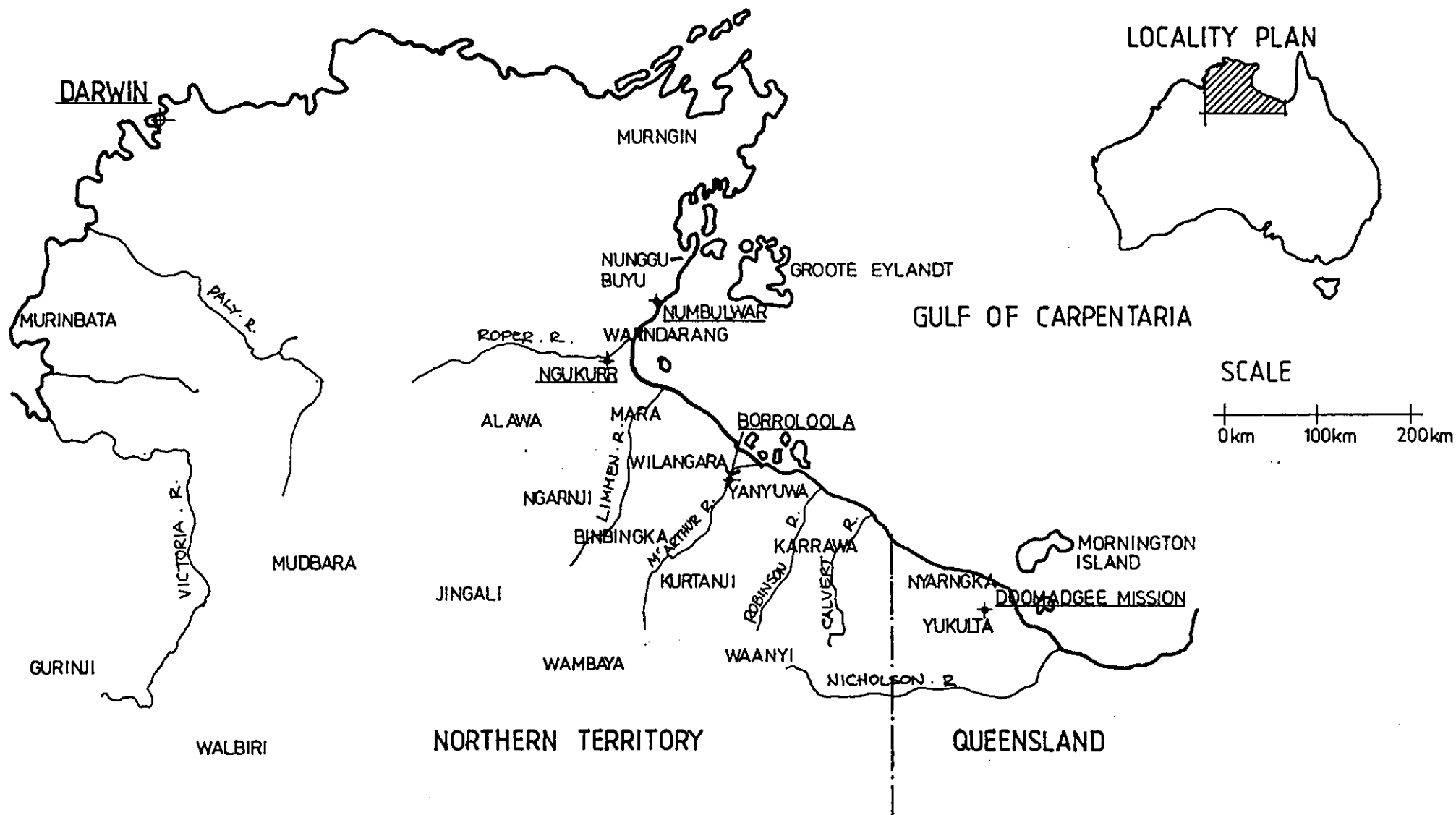
Finally, I am deeply indebted to Dr. L.R. Hiatt, my thesis supervisor. He has been an unfailingly supportive, patient and stimulating mentor.

ABBREVIATIONS

In places I use conventional abbreviations for types of kin as follows.

B: brother	Z: sister	Sib.: sibling
O: older	Y: younger	F: father
M: mother	C: child	S: son
D: daughter	H: husband	W: wife

'MFZDS', for example, is read as mother's father's sister's daughter's son. When 'm.' or 'f.' precedes a kin type string ego's gender is indicated as male or female, respectively.



Map 1 Location of study area and relevant languages

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The subject and main themes of the study.

The main subjects of this study are Aboriginal residents of Borroloola, a town on the McArthur River about sixty kilometres from the southern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory (Map 1). Numbering some 250 people, most are native inhabitants of the littoral and riverine areas on both sides of the McArthur River: traditionally Mara, Yanyuwa and Karrawa speakers. Some others have come to Borroloola from the Barkly Tablelands and a few have come from farther away in the Northern Territory. For reasons partly to do with the course of my fieldwork, influenced by their relatively strong position at Borroloola, I deal most with people who identify themselves as Yanyuwa, whose ancestors once occupied the McArthur River delta and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands.

Borroloola is a major focus of activity for 600 or more Aborigines living east of the Roper River to Queensland and throughout the Barkly Tablelands. From Borroloola the

horizons of Aboriginal social life extend to southern and eastern Arnhem Land, to the main towns along the Stuart Highway from Darwin to Tennant Creek, to other settlements in northern central Australia and eastwards into north-western Queensland. Although some individuals are highly mobile within this area knowledge of others is generally a function of propinquity and diminishes steadily with the distance away from home. However, what may be called the 'traditional world' - the world embraced by traditional knowledge - in particular that conceived in terms of the routes of ancestral Dreaming figures, some of which cross the continent, extends beyond the social horizon to people unknown but in theory linked through the kinship of common Dreaming.

Within the known social world such traditional links cut across differences of language or 'tribe', family, local affiliations and so on. For any of these associations there are complex 'internal and external social structures', to use Stanner's (1979: 48) terms, so that, while they might count as significant indices of status and identity, they do not comprise primary groups or entities such as could be 'natural' points of reference for social inquiry. So it is with the 'law people': they are a particular sub-population within an extended social field focused at Borroloola; they are not strongly defined by internal linkages and they are as much defined in contrast to whom they are not. As the

subjects of this study they are to some extent an artifact of it, but reflexively so because the course of my work was powerfully directed by the nature of my encounter with Aborigines at Borroloola at a particular time, that is, by the 'law people' themselves.

I have called this thesis 'The Law People' because the idea of 'law', of 'Aboriginal law' and of 'European law' in particular, today is dominant in the Borroloola Aborigines' conception of themselves as a people. They mean by 'law' something much more embracing than Europeans would normally think. For them, law practically covers the whole field of culture. Their insistence on this notion is much the same as that of other Aborigines in adjacent areas and it is shared by many others beyond it, particularly in central Australia. I have heard Aborigines from Arnhem Land, from groups historically less in contact with Europeans, use 'rule' and 'custom' where Borroloola Aborigines would have used 'law'. Those alternatives struck me as less emphatic and more relative than 'law' with its particular connotations at Borroloola. For the Borroloola people following the law is highly obligatory and though there are two (main) laws, each said to be valid, Aboriginal law is pronounced as if it were absolute. 'Law', in short, is the most embracing legitimating concept for behaviour both at the local level and for the larger social order in which it takes place. This larger social order includes relations

with more distant Aboriginal groups and, even more important for the self-identity of Borroloola Aborigines, global relations between Aboriginal and European society.

A major tenet of the Aboriginal law is that it has never changed and may not be changed. This hardly alters the fact that Aboriginal society in this region has undergone a century of fundamental changes since the catastrophic years when the pastoral industry penetrated the Northern Territory Gulf of Carpentaria. But although economic, demographic and political changes since then have seemingly left little of the foundations of the pre-European social system, the cultural aspects of the system have survived, if not precisely in their pre-European form, in a form which Aborigines believe is close to it.

Aborigines at Borroloola not only recognise two laws simultaneously, but, with the success of European colonisation of Australia in general, the relationship between them necessarily enters the equation. Conceivably the co-presence of two quite different sets of norms could undermine one or both but, at least in the articulation of principle, this has not occurred at Borroloola. In fact, the meaning of 'law' in the self-identity of the Borroloola people seems closely linked to the presence and status of the 'law' of the historical other, European law. Nowadays at least, 'law' implies a kind of distinction about its

bearer, it is part of the bearers' self-definition, and today the prestige and authority of Aboriginal law resounds from the presence of European law.

The persistence of Aboriginal culture in this area under the rubric of 'law' has been facilitated by the extreme marginalisation of Aborigines under European domination. The Aborigines were never part of European plans. They produced no commodity useful to European development and did not represent a political force European authorities felt necessary to take very seriously. Aboriginal labour, even in the pastoral areas, probably was never critical for European enterprise. Under the umbrella of colonial, and later national, political organisation, settlers could ignore most aspects of the Aboriginal presence which did not constitute an obstacle to development. So, in the remote Northern Territory Gulf of Carpentaria, pastoral settlement alienated most of the land and undermined the basis of the pre-European form of Aboriginal society, but neither the local pastoralists nor the authorities gave much consideration to incorporating the Aboriginal population into the new social order. With some irony it might be said that it was Aborigines rather than Europeans who came to occupy the much discussed **terra nullius** on this continent; and they were left a historical role equally as empty.

It is instructive to consider one of the few concerted

Europeans efforts to orient the self-definition of Aborigines at Borroloola to European conditions, that of Christian missionaries (since about 1949). In spite of their efforts, Christianity has inspired little commitment among Aborigines except for a few who found specific roles to play in mission activities. I doubt that this has had much to do with Aborigines' passive resistance to European ideas. Rather, the basic problem for the missionaries is that Christianity offers a change of heart and mind but is incapable of fundamentally changing the economically and politically marginal status of Aborigines in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Interestingly, during my fieldwork at Borroloola, the Christian slogan 'One way!', meaning 'one law', said with a finger pointed towards heaven caught on for a short time. However, the phrase and gesture were often given a rueful, humorous twist, the joke being that the conditions under which it could be practiced were as remote as the hereafter.

Furthermore, as an exclusive undertaking Christianity requires Aborigines to renounce links with their pre-European past, and to somehow erase their present historical identity. Against 'European law', signifying the dominant social force, and in the absence of a role in the European future 'Aboriginal law' is the sole mark of Aboriginal privilege. Thus the imaginative balancing of the two laws represents a kind of historical consciousness rooted in the

way the present relations between Aboriginal and European societies have historically unfolded.

Saying that the 'law' and the situation of the two laws contains a consciousness of history does not imply that it faithfully records historical processes and events. What it 'forgets', or what it is silent about, is just as important as what it explicitly remembers. The treatment of the memory of the violence of the early days of European pastoral settlement is particularly interesting in this respect. It is especially salient because these events were decisive for the subsequent relations between Aborigines and Europeans and because the memory of them has been maintained largely in silence.

During the 1880s and perhaps later terrible massacres of Aborigines occurred throughout the Gulf littoral and the Barkly Tablelands and this must have shaken the entire basis of Aboriginal society. Such actions by Europeans were strictly illegal although, at the time, they were widely known to the authorities and, to that extent, unofficially condoned, contrary to official policy. This kind of split between the behaviour of local non-Aborigines and the remotely located authority of European society has been a recurrent theme at Borroloola. This is significant because it seems to have informed a tendency of Aborigines to perceive 'Government' as the exemplar of the European law

and as having a benign attitude towards Aborigines.

Only a few massacre sites are remembered and Aboriginal historical memory has retained even fewer specific accounts of what occurred. Of course, there are numerous reasons why Aborigines might have forgotten so much. Witnesses to these events, the survivors, generally are fewer in proportion to their scale; there is a traditional reluctance to speak of the recently dead; the reality is too dreadful to admit, alternatively, violence at that time was so general as to be unremarkable; Aboriginal cultures are not designed to record histories.

Thus, the normal silence of Aborigines about these events in figuring their broad relations with European society could be due to various kinds of filtering through which much of the information has been simply lost. Information loss could play a role in de-emphasising the issue but I believe it goes well beyond this. What is striking is that Aborigines tend to blame their own people for what occurred during these 'wild times'. One fault is that the old people were 'myalls', wild blackfellows, who did not know European law, and this ignorance led in one or another way to the clashes. The old people are supposed to have been so ingenuous at first as to have mistaken a rider and his horse for a single being, and to have used flour and sugar for self-decoration instead of as food. Aboriginal cattle

killing - the old people did not know about cattle ownership - and the whole massive conflict between Aborigines and Europeans in those early days, somehow grew out of this fatal ignorance, which has now been largely corrected.

Another example is the attitude to the perceived decline of their population within living memory. The extent, nature and causes of the phenomenon are not known precisely. The early violence no doubt was significant in initiating the decline, but the most important mortality factor is likely to have been increased exposure to disease caused by the greater geographical mobility of Aborigines and non-Aborigines in European times. What is interesting here is that Aborigines hardly ever point to factors external to their own society. The decline in the Aboriginal population, they say, is caused by Aboriginal people killing one another over their ceremonies, the cult rites which stand at the apex of the law.

Such agonies over ceremonies, and over the demands of the law in general, comprise a regular backdrop to Aboriginal social life at Borrooloola, even today. Death by physical injury, inflicted by spear or club, is said to have been common in the past. Some people, it is said, were simply struck down on the ceremonial grounds and buried there. Others were supposedly stalked and killed by magician-hunters. Still others succumbed to sorcery and magical

poisons. No matter what the proximate causes of death, whether illness, accident or violence, most deaths are attributed to retributive action by sorcery or otherwise stemming from the sphere of Aboriginal law.

The emphasis on the largely imagined sanction of sorcery could partly reflect the subordinate political standing of Aboriginal law within the determinate environment of European law. The principle of observance of law in general authorises compliance with European authorities and reduces the chances of inconsistencies between the two laws resulting in conflict between them. Furthermore, it need hardly be said that Aborigines learned the meaning of the English word 'law' through its sanctions, not through jurisprudence. Calling their own cultural traditions 'law' certainly enhances their force and authority and helps legitimate the position of custodians of Aboriginal law, mostly senior men and women. Indeed, Aboriginal law is said to be more severe in its sanctions and more definite in its pronouncements than the 'easy' and changeable European law. The evidence of sorcery provides continuing proof of this severity.

European social institutions, however, now maintain a monopoly on physical sanctions, a fact underscored by the disastrous episodes of early contact and then by the use of penal sanctions and police powers. This is not particularly

unwelcome to Aborigines at Borroloola but it limits the application of physical sanctions within the sphere of Aboriginal law, and its custodians now rely for their authority on a consensus in favour of the Aboriginal law. In turn, the life of this consensus is drawn in part from the shadow theatre of retributive sorcery, itself perhaps to some extent a projection of the original violence and current political inequality between Aboriginal and European law.

Memories of the early global violence between Aborigines and Europeans sometimes erupt in public discourse. This occurred a few times while I was at Borroloola in ways which indicate the continuing salience of these rarely mentioned recollections the Aboriginal historical consciousness and self- definition crystallised by the concept of law.

Relations between European society and Aboriginal society - between 'European law' and 'Aboriginal law' - were considerably dramatised by events in the later 1970s. The most significant were moves to recognise Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory and land claims by Borroloola Aborigines (cf. Avery and McLaughlin, 1977). At the same time, the policy of self determination for Aboriginal communities was displacing the vestiges of the paternalistic Social Welfare system at the local level, costing local Europeans jobs and prestige, to the benefit of

consciousness preserving the original agonistic elements.

It seems to me that this kind of process is not peculiar to the way Aborigines deal with European domination. There are, of course, very special features of this case, but I suspect that the same approach can be found in many areas of traditional social life and culture. Totemism, as Levi-Strauss (1963) says, articulates social differences by reference to differences in another order of things, especially animals, plants and natural phenomena. This represents the very core of the Aboriginal law (henceforth 'the Law') at Borroloola. Is it the case that the 'two law' conception is totemic logic applied to the unique historical relations between Aborigines and the dominant non-Aboriginal society? If so, does totemic thought at Borroloola similarly mask agonistic relationships among the individuals, categories and groups to which it is applied? More generally, what are the material, historical and other conditions of the particular expression of the symbolic culture, the Law, at Borroloola?

These are the kinds of questions which I will be concerned with as I deal with various aspects of the history, social life and culture of the Borroloola Aborigines. In this chapter I have still to discuss my fieldwork at Borroloola, sketch the sort of life Aborigines live there now, and the existing literature describing aspects of Aboriginal life at

jobs and prestige to Aborigines. Local Europeans felt very threatened by these changes and their hostility was acutely felt by Aborigines, who pursued their advantage nonetheless.

On several occasions the fear surfaced 'They might shoot us'; and, more positively, 'They can shoot us, but ...'. Such statements were the more startling because of the normal silence about such things. Plainly, Aborigines had not resolved the original violence as some kind of an aberration. Some clearly felt that global violence between white and black was an immanent possibility. In a sense this is hardly surprising: 'European law' has not acknowledged that this violence occurred (it was, after all, unofficial) and, of course, there has been no rapprochement on this score.

It seems that, in so marking out the space of Aboriginal privilege, 'Aboriginal law' to some extent reworks the historical relations between Europeans and Aborigines, minimising the element of conflict between them and maximising its own internal dramatics. The drama persists as the background, potency and sanction of every activity undertaken under the name of Aboriginal law. Meanwhile a balanced equation and contrast between 'Aboriginal law' and 'European law' tends to minimise the agonistic relationship between the dominant society and Aborigines.

This is not to say that the formulation of 'law' and the dialectical linkages between 'Aboriginal law' and 'European law' are conditioned only by European domination. On the contrary, Aboriginal law has its own basis in Aboriginal cultural traditions, and in these there is an emphasis on formality, principle and precedent. Justice Blackburn, in his judgement of the Gove Land Rights case, remarked that 'if ever a system could be called "a government of laws, and not of men", it is that shown in the evidence before me' (1971: 267); and he would have found no shortage of similar evidence at Borroloola. The fascinating questions concern the motive force of this "government of laws" and its relation to the "government of men", by which is meant, presumably, the play of self-interest or group interests in the formation of the social order.

The two laws paradigm draws a sharp line between two historical antagonists, and it^{is} being drawn by the subordinate, politically marginal party. In this conception the relationship between the two parties is reified and the issue between them is no longer nakedly one of power, and what has recently come to be assumed eternal proportions. In arriving at this resolution so much of what really determines the relationship is forgotten or, more precisely, repressed and transmuted from the sphere of determinate actualities to that of ideas. Precisely because of that process the reified product becomes a kind of historical

first hand. After that, in Chapter 2, I outline elements of the language of social legitimation and its conceptions - Law and Dreaming - and introduce the semi-moiety system. In Chapter 3 I examine the associations between language group territories and geography and show some of the interrelations among material culture, social life and cultural symbolism which appear to have been structurally significant before European contact. My main focus is on the Yanyuwa people and their life-style among the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the McArthur River delta.

The Aborigines' developing dependence on Borroloola, and the conditions of life in town are described in Chapter 4. Here I describe the residential patterns of the main camp at Borroloola at the time of my fieldwork and analyse its social structure. Chapter 5 deals with the semi-moiety and subsection systems, their different links with local and ceremonial totemism, kinship and marriage and their implications for the structure of social relations at Borroloola. Chapter 5 also discusses apparent connections between the structure and diffusion of the Kunapipi cult, and its analogues elsewhere in the Northern Territory, and social crises precipitated by the establishment of the pastoral industry.

The Kunapipi represents the apex of the Law at Borroloola but the lesser male circumcision rites, the Marndiwar, are

probably more significant moment for the articulation of critical social relations. They are the most frequently held ceremonies and they involve every Aboriginal family with young men. This is the subject of Chapters 6 and 7. After describing the ritual sequence and some myths associated with the Marndiwar in Chapter 6, I examine ^{the} sort of impact the rites have on the initiates, and their implications for social structure at Borroloola.

1.2 Fieldwork and related issues.

This thesis is largely based on information obtained by direct participation with Aborigines living at Borroloola or nearby in the Northern Territory. Most was gained during an initial period of about twenty-two months which I spent living at Borroloola.

This period commenced on 19th December 1974 and lasted until 22nd September 1976. From about August 1975 a considerable portion of my time was spent doing fieldwork for land rights claims by the main groups of Aboriginal people at Borroloola and, to a smaller extent, Aboriginal people from the Barkly Tablelands. This affected the orientation of the work in some ways though mostly it involved doing many things which I might otherwise have done: site surveys and mapping territories, compiling genealogies, investigating tradit-

ional social structures and inquiring into traditional religion. I returned to Borroloola for several weeks in the dry season of 1976 and later in the year immediately before the hearing of the Borroloola Aboriginal land rights claim.

The Borroloola Region Aboriginal land claim (Avery and McLaughlin, 1977) was heard between September and December 1977. Since then I have spent short periods at Borroloola which have enabled me to check some of my material and to observe the changing circumstances of the Aboriginal community. One such visit was made in 1979 to assist with a film, Two Laws (cf. Avery, 1981), which was being made by local people in conjunction with two film makers, A. Cavedini and C. Strachan. Other visits have been made more recently in the course of investigating a land rights claim for Wampaya, Ngarnji, Kurdanji and Jingali people, a group from the Barkly Tablelands who are the closest neighbours of the Borroloola people. I had worked with some of these people while I was at Borroloola but the more recent work with them has sharpened my appreciation of the differences between neighbouring peoples and influenced my interpretation of the Borroloola material.

When I began my fieldwork at Borroloola I tried to divide my time about equally between the three main groups living in the four main camping areas: (1) the 'Rocky Creek' or 'Yanyuwa' camp; (2) the 'Karrawa' camp on the eastern bank

of the McArthur; (3) the 'Tankhouse' or 'Tableland' camp, where mainly Tableland people camped near a corrugated iron water tank which had been converted into a residence; and (4) the 'houses' where a mixed but mainly Yanyuwa group lived in six brick houses which had been built by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. A number of things made it difficult to continue to maintain an even coverage of these groups and led me to concentrate on Yanyuwa people.

I made my first permanent camp to the northeast of the main part of the Rocky Creek camp, which therefore lay between the township and my camp. During two severe floods in the 1974-5 wet season the Rocky Creek camp became isolated from the town on two peak occasions each lasting about one week; and the town itself also had been isolated both by air and by road. For nearly eight weeks food was very short not only because it was difficult to get to the store but because there was little in the store to buy and there was little money available with which to buy anything. Those of us who were able to do so did our best to obtain bush foods and I was cooperating closely in this with my Yanyuwa and Mara neighbours - they had the expertise and I had a four wheel drive vehicle. In spite of the shortages, this was a time of great ceremonial activity with a succession of Marndiwar initiation ceremonies being held in the Rocky Creek camp. Thus over quite a short time I had established close ties with the life of the Rocky Creek camp and with

its mainly Yanyuwa residents and I soon became widely known among the Aborigines of the whole district who had come to Borroloola for the Marndiwar rites.

My vehicle and my services as a driver were seen as a valuable asset at Borroloola. Transport was badly needed, especially during the dry season when people like to go out of town either for daily hunting trips or to camp for periods in the bush. My associations with Aboriginal people were not wholly conditioned by this, but my willingness to transport people for 'Aboriginal' purposes was very important. In particular, it was an important factor in my inclusion in the network of kin. Just how this happened revealed a great deal about the practical aspects of the kinship system.

It was impossible to meet everybody's requests for transport, and it did not seem to me to be my role to do so. At first it was very difficult to refuse anyone but I soon learnt to discriminate between weak and strong claims. I was, however, unused to the idiom of kinship and the flattery of being included as a fondly esteemed relative had an immediate appeal, especially for a lone fieldworker. Nonetheless, it became necessary for me to learn how defend myself within this amiable idiom and to understand the subtle line dividing dissimulation from real expectations. I was claimed by everybody as a kind of relative, but there

was increasing pressure on me to be defined, like anyone else, as being more closely related to some than to others. On my part, though it was a matter of being defined by others, I had to accept these schema and maintain them to the exclusion of other possible configurations of kinship. In this way I was able to negotiate my own interests while the Aboriginal people negotiated whatever value I represented among themselves. Finally, though I had extensive associations with Karrawa people living on the eastern bank of the McArthur, I became defined as someone from a particular Yanyuwa family with a particular constellation of relatives arising from my fictitious genealogy. In particular, I became closely identified with the most senior and respected of Yanyuwa, Tim Timothy, who was - by a twist introducing justice to fate - among the most deprived of transport. Polio had left him unable to walk for the previous ten years or more.

Nonetheless, in addition to my core Yanyuwa relations I formed some close associations within a mixed Yanyuwa/Tableland group and also with some Karrawa people. Particular groups and individuals construed my kinship position differently and I was often asked to assent to formulations which were known to contradict those of another group. In all cases the key question lay in the identity of my mother since maternity at Borroloola is the most exclusive relationship: one could have numerous 'fathers' without contra-

diction as long as they had the same totemic country, but only one 'own mother'.

I visited numerous totemic sites in the area surrounding Borroloola, the Karrawa territory to the east and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. On these trips my companions were mostly men who were concerned directly with the sites. They saw the expeditions as involving an encounter with sacred Dreaming powers, with the sacred past when they were active and with other supernatural forces. There was always a highly serious aspect, though not a cheerless one, to these visits and the conduct of behaviour was constrained by the formal ritual roles (nimaringi being identified with the totemic power or 'Dreaming', jungkayi being custodians and controllers of the power and those things identified with it) and a sense that actions in this context are or will be scrutinised by interested people throughout the region.

However, many of the trips which I was prevailed upon to make were to benefit women intent on the foods which could be gleaned from the bush. Though these trips were always made with other men - husbands, fathers or uncles of the women - on these occasions my vehicle was filled with as many women as could possibly be made to fit, with the children they could not leave behind, their tomahawks, iron 'crowbar' digging sticks and rations for the day's 'hunting'. These women were enthusiastic in this activity and

during the dry seasons of 1975 and 1976 they fired the grass over hundreds of square miles and scoured the land for goanna, blue-tongued lizards, and long-necked tortoises which had secreted themselves beneath it. On the way they collected other things, wild fruits and wild honey especially, and on other occasions they collected roots, corms and mussels from the lagoons, or they fished.

Though I was not always particularly happy to be making these trips since my choice of male company was restricted to the men who came with me, these expeditions enabled me to associate with Aboriginal women more than I otherwise might have done. It is well known that Aboriginal social life is strongly constrained by the division between the sexes. A considerable subtlety of manners is required to cross this barrier and this made it initially very difficult for me to work with women. Initially, the most difficult women to approach at Borroloola were a group of Yanyuwa women who, not being employed in jobs, were the most enthusiastic foragers and I eventually got to know some of these women quite well. Nonetheless, the greatest proportion of my work was with men and on topics in which they were interested. However, women were frequently present when I was working with men and they were often the source of my information.

Since Marie Reay had worked at Borroloola twenty-five years earlier there had been no anthropological research in the

area. A number of linguists had worked on local languages, notably Jean Kirton, but they had close associations with missionary activities and this provided a meaningful context for their work. There was no policy about Europeans with an interest in learning the broad spectrum of their culture, including their religious life. The opposition between missionary activity and Aboriginal religion was understood, and this created a shield of privacy from Europeans around Aboriginal religious activity and about other areas of Aboriginal life. Under these circumstances, and given that Aboriginal religion was graded according to what could be known, people were apprehensive about what I could be told. Having Old Tim as my chief mentor provided a subtle safety-valve in the Aboriginal management of my role. There was no one at Borroloola with a greater religious prestige than Old Tim so when conversations with certain others ventured on delicate ground they were able to refer me to Old Tim who would either discuss the matter with me or fob me off. I should say, however, that this was used quite rarely and I have been informed by a broad range of people at Borroloola.

In writing this thesis I have largely avoided using the names of individual Aboriginal people at Borroloola. There are a number of reasons for doing this. The most important one is that the views of Aboriginal people on their traditions can have significant consequences for them under present circumstances. In particular these could have a

bearing on their rights to land and their powers under the current land rights legislation. It seems to me extremely undesirable that particular statements which people have made to me while I was living at Borroloola should have any weight in such matters. Indeed, the views which I express in this thesis cannot be interpreted as fairly representing the views of Aboriginal people at Borroloola. They are informed by what I have been told by particular people in particular contexts and by what I have observed people doing. However, ethnography is a highly selective process in a social context which the ethnographer does not fully understand and which, as a consequence, the teacher too does not fully understand. Moreover, assembling ethnographic information is a matter of interpretation rather more than reportage and the value orientation of anthropological interpretations of this information are quite different to those of the people who provided it.

The orientation of anthropology, as I see it, is to understand and investigate ethnographic data within the context of a total view of human social and cultural behaviour. This is a tall order put in these terms but in practice the elements of the 'total' context are selected in the light of the demands of particular cases. In the case at hand - the case of an indigenous population focused in a novel way on a small town surrounded by crown land and cattle stations - the context of understanding must have an

historical dimension in addition to a sociological one. This historical sociology needs to be understood in its ecological setting since this remains a major material force in social life. The ecology of Aboriginal society and culture in turn involves its demographic structure and, in particular, the sphere of biosocial reproduction which underlies the organisation of the kinship system. Symbolism, metaphysical ideas and mythology are important factors at the highest levels of social integration in Aboriginal society in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. To some extent these ideas may be understood as ideological ploys but there can be little doubt that they do represent a deeply felt reality to Aboriginal people. This, I think, demands that their psychological dimensions be recognised in addition to their semiotic ones. In this way it may be possible to understand the universal appeal of these ideas in addition to their affinity with the historical, sociological and biological context in which they are held.

1.3 Borroloola today.

In this section I wish only to provide an outline of the character of Borroloola as it was during the time of my fieldwork. The picture will be filled in some more as the thesis proceeds but in the sections immediately following this I will be mainly concerned with the period before the

pastoral industry fundamentally altered the Aboriginal way of life in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria.

Borroloola officially became a town in 1885 though it had existed unofficially for about a decade before. During its first decades it prospered as a port and depot town supporting the traffic from Queensland to the Northern Territory along the Gulf Stock Route and acting as a regional centre for the pastoral stations which had been established in the McArthur River area and the Barkly Tablelands. The development of alternative routes into the territory, the administration of the Barkly Tablelands Stations from Queensland, and the failure of the Stations along the coast by the 1890's halted the early growth of the town. By 1901 its Tattersalls and Royal Hotel were only memories, the plans for a railroad from the Tablelands to a port in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands at the mouth of the River and all of ambitions of the first decades came to nothing. The little town, as Spencer (1928) observed in 1911, was "absolutely dead" and so it remained until recent decades when it became more accessible to the rest of the world.

The town serves no economically important industries. A potentially valuable deposit of currently unrecoverable minerals lies about seventy kilometres to its southwest. Cattle stations surround the town but none of these is very

productive and they employ few people. There is some barramundi fishing and crabbing on a small scale by Europeans but like much else at Borroloola this is desultory and rarely profitable.

The wealth of this town comes in the mail. Those few local Europeans who are economically differentiated from the Aborigines mostly make their living in one or another way through the Aboriginal population. They work for the government in health, education, administration or police; they work at the inn or the Aboriginal owned supermarket, or they otherwise trade their goods and services for Aboriginal monies.

Most of the population are Aboriginal people descended from those who inhabited the area before Europeans came. They are now dependent upon social services supplemented by wages from government funded positions in health, police and local government, and very occasional wages from other employment. A trickle of bush food occasionally supplements the Aborigines' diet but this does not diminish their dependence on cash, the local inn and the supermarket. Similarly, the outstations which have very recently been established on the newly granted Aboriginal lands have not extricated Aborigines from the demands of the cash economy or from their dependence on government funds. For the unemployed, who comprise most of the population, the best hope of

obtaining more than social security pays is to play cards, and the games are virtually continuous camp activities. Players have to risk a dollar per hand, about the price of a can of beer at the inn.

On the fortnightly cheque or wages days, which occur in alternate weeks, the Aborigines - and some Europeans living with them, or like them - receive their money from the "Welfare", a small administrative complex run by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. For some this process occupies nearly the whole day with long waiting periods between transactions filled with gossip, observation, organising transport and meetings with friends and relatives. Debts to the inn, the supermarket or to individuals are then settled, or new ones are contracted with recipients of the money. The older people, who feel secure and reasonably well off with their pensions, give money to their younger relatives, perhaps thereby restoring their affections, and over the day the camps are replenished with new drums of flour, tins of meat, packets of sugar, tobacco and other store goods.

In the late morning circles of card players and circles of drinkers begin to gather in their respective areas; cards in the camps, drinking by the river at the "Boughshade". The cards continue beneath hurricane lamps into the late night and recommence the following morning. The drinking and all

of the intensity and anxiety it engenders run at high pitch for days afterwards, even until the next week's money is dispensed. Both card groups and drinking circles (with rotating beer buying or "shouting") in different ways pool otherwise uninvestible sums of money among their particular sub-groups as it passes the short route from the Welfare to the inn. The sole option for Aborigines to intervene in this economy of circulating cash is to exploit by these or similar systems of pooling or credit the irregularities or uncertainties in the distribution of cash.

The annual round of events is affected by the marked alternations of the wet seasons with the dry. Diagram 1 shows the annual inundation between December and April and the normal drought between may and October.

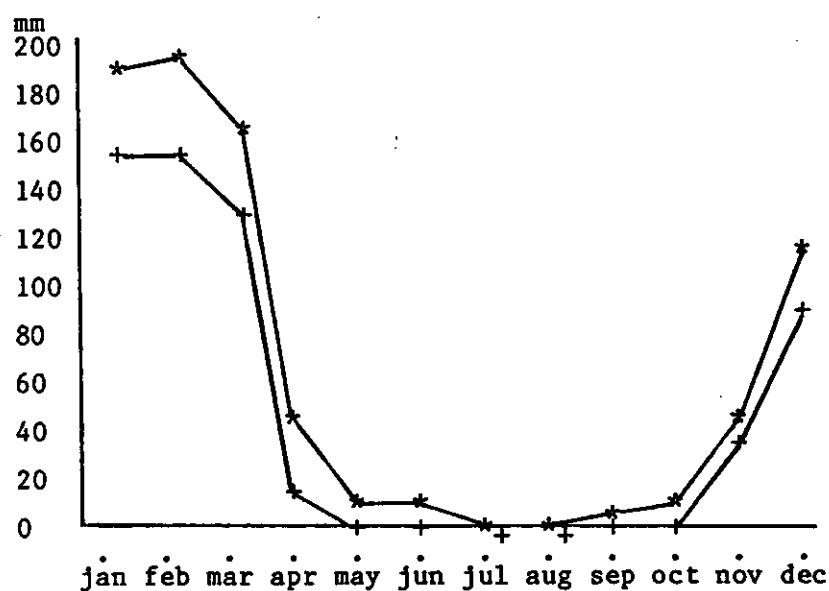


Diagram 1. Average and median rainfall at Borroloola (Aust. Bureau of Meteorology, 1977; 93) [* = average, + = median].

During the wet season the cattle stations lay off their employees and there is an influx of population to places like Borroloola from the stations. Though in the past the dry season was the time for ceremonial activity, seasonal employment has forced this into the latter part of the year when most of the workers have been laid off in anticipation of the very hot weather and the wet season. The annual Borroloola Races and Rodeo, which are held in about late August or early September, which draw Aborigines and Europeans throughout the region, is a major date in the calendar.

If there can be such a thing in a society so divided along racial and class lines, the Races and Rodeo have the appearance of a regional festival displaying the essentials of the collective hierarchy. The Races have the greatest significance for white managers and workers on the pastoral stations for they clearly demonstrate the dominance of the stations and the historical fact that the town has been their servant. Town whites, especially the store keepers, the police and the administrators, join in the organising committee, but over the Races weekend the white managers, head stockmen, ringers and other station workers hold the centre stage which focuses on the livestock. The Races, and especially the betting, are almost exclusively a white interest, and these precede the Rodeo which represent the main attraction for Aborigines. The Rodeo begins on the

morning of the following day with hack events, which are open to those who have brought their own horses, normally the better off whites owning or managing stations. The main event for Aborigines follows with the buckjumping and bull riding. This is supervised by whites or part-Aborigines - men who would normally supervise black labour on the stations and the main participants are the black ringers. On this last day of the Races weekend, the day following the Races (and the all white dance or party) town whites and town Aborigines are off stage. The main drama is found in the nuances of relations among the pastoralists and the various categories of their labourers.

For the Aborigines, whether town or station, there are other concerns. The ones of greatest communal interest are likely to lie in the area of ceremonial life, for 'Races time' marks the beginning of the run up to the Christmas ceremonies. The most important of these, not in terms of the sacred hierarchy but in terms of general interest, are the man making ceremonies which I describe later in the thesis. These are likely to involve people throughout the region including the Barkly Tableland.

The man making ceremonies are staged precariously close to the start of the wet season and, indeed, I too have spent nights by the song men under drizzling skies. The wet season is a period of great discomfort, and often scarcity.

The whole town may be isolated for considerable periods by rain and flooding, as it was during two of the wet seasons I spent at Borroloola, so that both food and the money with which it could be bought were in short supply. It becomes increasingly difficult to travel to places where bush foods can be found and local flooding sometimes separates the main Aboriginal camps - north of Rocky Creek, and on the east bank of the McArthur River - from the stores, making store bought foods difficult to transport.

Some consolation comes with the heavy rains, which open the inland rivers to the sea, allowing barramundi to swim up river to breed and to meet the speckled perch washed downstream by the flood. At junctions of creeks on the McArthur River, such as that of the Rocky Creek near the main Yanyuwa camp, the water boils with barramundi and for weeks the sight of pairs of men with large fish strung on poles between them is an everyday occurrence. At about this time, however, drinking water often becomes polluted, and gastro-intestinal illnesses pose greater risks, especially for the very young and the very old. Accommodation, moreover, is usually inadequate to cater for the swelled population during the wet season and this has meant some people sleeping with almost no protection from the rain. Under these conditions, the wet season increases the threat to life.

The end of a long wet season is therefore greeted with relief, and people look forward to healthier weather and to spending some time outside of the town on day trips or for longer periods. The weather is cooler under the influence of a southeast wind blowing across a dampened landscape and a cold period in May can be expected. Dry season days are clear and warm.

A dry season hunting cycle commences after the first strong southeast winds have flattened the long grass, which grows at a visible pace during the wet season. After this the grass is about dry enough to burn and, as I mentioned above, women are particularly keen to begin foraging. Their principal quarry are sand goannas, blue-tongued lizards and other reptiles but they also collect wild potatoes and other roots and scrutinise the scene above the ground for fruits and wild honey. Later in the season the emphasis shifts to the receding surface waters where, in swamps and billabongs, a variety of corms and roots and, above all, fat long-necked tortoises which have dug themselves in to hibernate in the mud may be collected.

By the saltwater the steadier weather in the dry season makes it safer for men to hunt dugong and turtle with harpoons. The drier and colder weather and the strong southeast wind reduces the mosquito and sandfly populations, making it more desirable to camp close to the seashore and

mangrove areas. In addition to hunting dugong and turtle, men spear fish and stingray as they drift over the shallow sandbars with the incoming tide. When the tide is low women dig crabs out of their holes in the mud and harvest the shellfish beds, otherwise they forage inland or fish with lines.

These generally pleasurable endeavours may be pursued at any time by those who are unemployed and who have the necessary means. However, the dry season exposes many people to responsibilities in a European context which preclude them enjoying these activities. For younger men and their families there may be work on stations nearby or with local organisations which have expanded their activities in the dry season. The school year coincides with the dry season and this binds parents of younger schoolchildren to the town five days each week. The older children go to high school in Darwin or, in a few cases, Alice Springs.

The current annual cycle tends to reverse the traditional one. Whereas in the past the dry season brought the population together from its scattered distribution during the wet season, today the hot weather and the wet season is the time when people congregate for Aboriginal purposes. The ceremonial activity of the dry season has tended to be displaced by the demands of European society and it is now period between the lay off time and the wet season.

Yanyuwa and Karrawa people are the most numerous of the tribes or language groups in the area. Though Borroloola falls south of the original boundary of Yanyuwa territory and west of Karrawa territory the Yanyuwa now control the traditional and religious aspects of the land around Borroloola; and during the 1970's control which Aboriginal people had over the European resources of the township was divided competitively between Yanyuwa and Karrawa people. There are small numbers of other people representing the last descendents of local tribes which were once numerous: Kurtanji, Wilangara, Binbinga, Wampaya, and Waanyi being the most important. In general these people have most to do with Yanyuwa people, the dominant group at Borroloola, but they have little independent influence in local public life. Mara people from Ngukurr, the Aboriginal settlement on the Roper River in southeastern Arnhem Land and west of Borroloola also have close ties with Yanyuwa people by kinship and in the religious cults. In recent years Mornington Island Aborigines have sought, through the Yanyuwa, to be included within the dangerous yet absorbing arena represented by the religious cults of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria inside the Northern Territory.

Though this will be made much clearer later in this thesis, I should say that these 'tribal' names do not correspond to corporate groups, and the boundaries of the groupings to which they apply are flexible. This reflects the

considerable degree of inter-'tribal' marriage and various other processes of assimilation which I will discuss later. It is, indeed, disconcertingly difficult to isolate any social unit larger than the family with any precision. Society at Borroloola is not strongly confined by geographical boundaries and there are no corporate boundaries separating neighbouring populations.

Though there is a core of largely permanent town dwellers varying between about two hundred and fifty to three hundred, the Aboriginal population of the town can vary over the year from as many as six hundred people during the ceremonial period before Christmas to fewer than two hundred when, in the dry season, the men may be employed in cattle work, teenagers are away at school and a number of those otherwise unoccupied have retreated to camps in the bush. Borroloola is a point of focus for a regional population for which it is a limited resource. Some people are so dependent on the town that they have little choice but to live there, but others whom it cannot sustain look to scanty resources elsewhere within their range - cattle stations, relatives at Aboriginal settlements or other places - and they move periodically among them. The town has no charter for a community.

1.4 Records of the Borroloola Aborigines

Flinders' record (1814) of his observations among the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and elsewhere in the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1802 begins the published record of Aboriginal life in the region. This was followed by Leichhardt's Journal (1847) which gives an account of his exploration of the southern coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1845.

The name of Flinders' ship, H.M.S. Investigator, bespeaks the spirit of this enterprise: the spirit of natural science, of panoramic observation and systematic curiosity. Their ship was their mobile laboratory and a vault for their botanical, zoological and ethnographic collections and drawings, their maps and charts, and the results of their minute probings in all directions. Leichhardt embodied the same natural science ideals as Flinders, but his scientific passions were continually thwarted by a lack of material support and, perhaps for this reason, they took a peculiar inward turning: Leichhardt not only wrote, sketched and collected; he seemed to abandon his whole body to the enterprise, as if it were a special piece of apparatus, eating and drinking whatever he found which seemed remotely promising with an experimental curiosity. The records of these explorers are particularly valuable sources for the pre-contact period. Flinders and Leichhardt describe some

very significant features of the material life of the Aborigines though they had little contact with the people themselves.

In 1856 A. C. Gregory followed a course through the southern Gulf of Carpentaria just to the south of Leichhardt's, but in the opposite direction. Gregory also published a Journal (1884) but these do not have much ethnographic interest for the main Borroloola Aborigines. Gregory was the last to record his observations of the pre-contact period. Those who followed him saw an indigenous society which had been transformed by the great pastoral invasion during the 1870's and 1880's. Most of them, moreover, had less of the explorers' detachment and, in one way or another, they were actively involved in the extension of European dominance over the region.

Thus, although the customs collector Alfred Searcy provides material relevant to processes of change in the McArthur River area it is unfortunately distorted by his propagandising in the interests of colonialism. One learns very little of the Aborigines from Searcy because, by and large, he represents them either as an unseen enemy or in ways that are heavily stereotyped. Moreover, his two books (1907, 1911) are incredibly discrepant on major topics, including his own autobiography and checking with other sources reveals other errors.

To cite an example, Searcy describes meeting McLeod, Borroloola's first official store keeper, and the manner in which he was supposed to have disposed of numbers of Aborigines possibly interested in his supplies. Perhaps McLeod did shoot these people and feed them to the crocodiles as Searcy says. But Searcy goes on to lament his death by malarial fever soon after: "Thus passed away a man of real grit - the sort of grit shown by the men who have helped to build the Empire" (1907: 124). By 1901, however, (about 16 years later) McLeod was again well, and he entertained Spencer and Gillen at Christmas dinner with stories of the early days of Borroloola (Gillen, 1968: 351) - grit indeed!

Searcy is not daunted by facts. It is most unfortunate, however, that his records of Macassan trepangers, whose activities formed part his official duties, also cannot be trusted on any points of detail. Some consolation is given by an account of trepanging during its last decades by Daeng Sarro, himself a Macassan trepanger.

The first anthropological account of the McArthur River Aborigines was published in 1893 by Stretton, who spent some time in Borroloola as a magistrate. Though he clearly never became close to the Aborigines, no doubt because of his position, he provides some important factual material and in general his impressions of Aboriginal society are quite

interesting. The period in which he made his observations must have been an extremely difficult one for the Aboriginal inhabitants, since their numbers had been seriously depleted by violence and disease, and much illness persisted. It should be noted that just because Stretton's observations relate to an early date it cannot be assumed that they reflect pre-contact conditions more than later observations.

Spencer and Gillen refer to the Borroloola Aborigines in a number of their works (Spencer and Gillen, 1904; Spencer, 1914, 1928; Gillen, 1968). Their actual work with Aborigines at Borroloola probably occupied them for less than three weeks in 1901 though they were there for a longer period, waiting to return to Darwin by sea at the end of their journey from Oodnadatta to the Gulf. They recorded at Borroloola the same kinds of material which they recorded elsewhere: kinship terms, class systems, myths, ceremonies and material on totemism. All of this is useful and will be discussed in the appropriate place.

No serious anthropological work was done at Borroloola after Spencer and Gillen until 1959 when Marie Reay began fieldwork there. Her 'Sub-sections at Borroloola' (1962) is widely referred to in the anthropological literature of the Northern Territory. A later article (1971) describes the process by which women at Borroloola organised a ceremony. While dealing with these subjects Reay manages to describe

with great clarity the dislocation of Aboriginal society at Borroloola under the 'Welfare' Branch of the Northern Territory Administration.

Finally, Jean Kirton has produced impressive work on the Yanyuwa language over many years. Most of her papers are linguistically technical but they are also very relevant to anthropological issues.

Chapter 2

THE LANGUAGE OF THE WORLD

The purpose of this chapter is to outline basic features of the Aboriginal language of legitimation at Borroloola, that is, the Law, and its associated conceptual structures. This language, this style of legitimation, is a variant of patterns of thought and action which are virtually pan-Australian and which, under the name of totemism, have misleadingly given a unitary stamp of exoticism to all Australian Aborigines. Totemism, as Levi-Strauss (1969) demonstrates, was an invention of European classification of Other types of people, and the problem of totemism in anthropology has largely been illusory. In spite of the risks of perpetuating this kind of error, I propose to continue to use the term to indicate the kinds of things, and the attitudes, which Aborigines would regard as relevant to the Dreaming, this being indeed a diverse and extensive category.

Totemism at Borroloola links people in various and often complex ways with mythological figures of which many, though

not all, are believed to have had animal, plant or other non-human forms, including manufactured objects, meteorological phenomena and inert natural objects. Many figures represented as having other than human forms are also thought of as being substantially human. Aborigines have no anxiety about how these two modes of existence could be resolved in a single figure at one time. The whole matter of these Dreamings is mysterious. Whatever might have happened in the past, today one can point to, say a bird, and say 'That is what travelled through this country in the beginning', even if that bird 'travelled like a man'. Some Dreamings, namely the 'Wild Women' (mararabana) and the 'Dugong Killers' are rarely if at all thought of as having other than human forms. Just as the relationships between Dreamings and their totemic form are left largely unformulated, so there is also vagueness about the degree of consubstantiality between people and 'their' totems. The means by which people are related to totems, by filiation and conception mostly, are fairly clear, but although certain physical irregularities on the body, as well as different parts of the body, are interpreted totemically, the origins of these associations are not specified. It could be said that the accent is on signification rather than substance.

Totemism is closely bound up with ceremonial life, especially the sacred male cults. In these there is no

specific intent to increase the species represented as there is among the Aranda speakers of Central Australia. Rather, the aims are ^{to} remove the 'names' (shades) of dead members of the cult and to initiate new members. However, the correct performance of the cults is said to have a beneficial effect on the environment. Broadly speaking, a good cult performance is felt to reproduce, and thereby invoke, the order-creating events which occurred 'in the beginning'. The magic of the cults and of the Dreamings in general is mysterious rather than instrumental. However, some totems are not represented in the sacred cults and, if there is any ritual associated with these, it is likely to be magically instrumental.

Probably the most distinctive feature of totemism at Borroloola is that, as far as I know, totems are always specifically associated with places and areas of land, and there are no areas of land beyond the influence of totemic sites. On the one hand, all totems are localised; on the other hand, all localities are imbued with the magic of totemism. Accordingly totemism at Borroloola can be called local totemism; and, since the ultimate orientation of totemic values is to the ceremonial life, it can also be described as ceremonial totemism.

Not all Australian totemism is local (or ceremonial) but throughout much of remote Aboriginal Australia routes of

local totems cut across different languages, cultures and types of social organisation, and differences in ecology and climate, while maintaining some degree of consistency in totemic form, traditions and ceremonial associations. For the few individuals aware of this such uncanny universality is further evidence that the Law given by the Dreamings is not that of man, but a manifestation of some deep and immutable mystery.

At the regional level, networks of totemic sites linked by travelling Dreamings cut across tribal groupings to form a regional matrix of localised sites organised beneath the major figures and grouped by semi-moiety, subsection and, implicitly, moiety. These divisions are allied to a smaller number of religious cults, every one of these cults is associated with totemic sites within the local area.

At the same time, individual relationships to sites within this matrix partly constitute personal identity. This psychological element extends also to the ceremonial sphere. Local and ceremonial totemism is deeply rooted in individual psychology. Totemism thus not only underwrites politics at the highest level of integration of Aboriginal social systems represented by the ceremonial life, it taps the deeply felt emotions and attitudes of individuals. In this chapter I discuss these two elements, first the psychological, then a core ceremonial relationship, and

then I return to the issue of totemism as the language of legitimation. I also outline the semi-moiety system, but I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

2.1 The enchanted life-world

"The representation of the dual unity of one body and the libidinization of the separation situation is just the essence of magic." (Roheim, 1969: 177)

The Aboriginal life-world is an enchanted one: highly libidinized, in Roheim's terms, full of magic. An inventory of the various types of supernatural powers, sorcery, ghosts and spirits which are recognised by Aboriginal people in the McArthur River area would be impressively long. Magic is employed in diverse areas of life, such as the quest for food, romance, personal enmities and card playing.

Magic and the supernatural relies on and reinforces the notion that the world is for human beings: that it is intrinsically comprehensible and responsive to human intervention, that there is a natural dialogic relationships between people and the world. Supernatural powers may be dangerous and threatening, but these dangers can, in principle, be controlled by human beings. Indeed, the most terrifyingly monstrous creations of supernature provide more ready proof of human control than many mundane hazards of everyday life, a swarm of mosquitoes for example, let alone

disease, disaster and death.

The enchantment of the life-world is, however, a far more pervasive thing than the supernatural. The mundane features of the landscape, the natural objects found upon it, the species which inhabit it, the space beneath it and the heavenly bodies above it all have a cognitive significance beyond any instrumental values which they might have. Much of this is given by totemism which invests so much of the environment with narrative meanings, and much of the rest is filled in with the meaningful associations between individuals and the environment. By associating all individuals with sites and areas of land local totemism represents a further suppression of contingency so that the regularities of living within the environment, following the seasonal cycle of hunting or movement among other things, are more realisable as meaningful repetition, as fulfilling eternally set patterns.

The imperative to domesticate the environment is revealed, for example, when people go camping at places which have not been used for some time, where people initially do not feel at home. Upon arriving at such a place, the camping area will soon be cleared of grass, fires will be lit and food will be prepared. With an air of expectancy, people of all ages will begin to explore the surrounding area, occasionally returning with man made or natural objects of

interest. They will be careful lest they turn up malevolent bush dwelling spirits, and certain people, because of their current ritual status as recent initiates or widows will have their own reasons to be specially careful.

Older people perhaps will discuss their past associations with the place, and its totemic significance. At sunset or daybreak they normally address past generations of the people totemically associated with the place who now live there as spirits, introducing themselves and others in the camp as kin or as people with specific ceremonial or other kinds of authority for the place. Before this is done it will be difficult to find any food because the country 'shutim up eye longa you', hiding itself, but it discloses itself once proper relations are established. Proper relations between people and 'country' occur only for people who are genuine 'countrymen' for the country and for people under their protection. By these means the the vicinity of the camp is physically recreated as a home, and it is recreated as a narrative environment replete with human associations and humanly oriented supernatural significance.

Of course, this sense of reciprocity and communication between individuals and the non-human environment is the common assumption also of human social life. The social world is not merely a collection of people materially dependent on the same environment: they understand each

other above all as kin, and in terms of totemism. With the extension of familial kin categories to all human relationships, and with such highly structured kinship based totemic institutions as subsections and semi-moieties, the social world has a definite shape both from egocentric and socio-centric points of view. The universality of kinship classification goes hand in hand with the attitude to the non-personal environment I have described in that both manifest a tendency to make everything meaningful to human thought.

This is often described as anthropomorphism but it is not 'man' in the abstract which is used as the model for analogy and attribution. Certainly these processes reflect very general human linguistic and logical capacities. But in this particular case, because of the importance of the idiom of kinship, it is as if the whole social sphere is an extension of the intimate world of the family and its primary affective attitudes. And, working in the other direction, back to local totemism, all human social relationships, even primary ones, are mediated by the cognised environment in the sense that relationships through totemic 'country' enter the reckoning of kinship. How this is done will be discussed in later chapters.

These attitudes are condensed and focused upon totemic, Dreaming sites. Certain geographical features such as

waterholes, rocks, trees, hills and so on, are thought to be the places where the creative Dreaming powers which originally gave the world its shape now reside. These sites form the fundamental elements of a matrix of localised sites which comprise what I have called local totemism. Local totemism forms the basis for the organisation of totemic cult ceremonies but this is an instance of the general phenomenon of localisation as a coding device. It is probably true to say that there is nothing of cultural significance to Aborigines in the McArthur area which is cannot be located within the matrix of local totemic sites. Not only cult ceremonies, but items of material culture, natural species and objects, marriage practices, personal names and, above all, people are associated in various ways with sites.

The powers normally dormant in these places can be communicated with, manipulated and tapped by human beings. This generally entails some element of danger though the degree of supernatural danger attaching to sites varies considerably. Some places are normally safe and may be visited routinely for hunting or camping. Others, however, are always very dangerous, and must be approached with the great caution. Such very dangerous places - such a "bad cold" Dreaming by the Carrington River which can be made to release an epidemic of influenza - are very rarely visited and only the most senior and knowledgeable men could go to

such threatening places. Places which are relatively safe, which are commonly visited but which still have to be approached with ritual respect, are much more common.

Whatever its degree, some ambivalence towards Dreamings and Dreaming places, some degree of tension between supernatural threat and having access to control, applies to every Dreaming site and to every Dreaming tradition. However, beyond this there is a great deal of variation in the attitudes to particular Dreamings and sites and in the content of the lore associated with them. Each locality has its particular configuration of sites with its unique mysteries and distinctive rites.

It is true, as I will later discuss, that the presence of this magical threat and corresponding means of controlling serves to underscore the status and authority of senior people with ritual knowledge, and the variety in the content of attitudes to particular sites secures the status of particular local authorities. In that sense the magical elements constitute a significant part of the language of legitimation for this social order. However, there seems no necessity for legitimation to take this form and it would be difficult to argue that purely ideological legitimation is sufficient to sustain the social order.

In many cases Dreaming sites are thought to embody the fecund power of species commonly found in the vicinity.

Sometimes this kind of power is diffused over a wide area: mawarrbal yams grow in the vicinity of Liwurriya to the west of the Wearyan River mouth and, after these were harvested in the early dry season, sons or daughters of Liwurriya women (the jungkayi, ritual managers) would throw some sand to the winds in order that more yams grow for the next season. Sites of this kind have a primarily economic, as opposed to religious, significance although the prestige attached to having the authority and the knowledge to correctly execute the associated magical rites should not be underestimated. Now that Borroloola Aborigines are not economically dependent on the resources under magical control the relevant ritual knowledge does not have much kudos. Under pre-European conditions such magical powers would have been much more impressive and could be expected to have conferred prestige on the individuals possessing them. It is probable that in those times the control of such knowledge was the subject of considerably more interest than it currently is and that it was vested generally in a particular age or sexual segments. But, again, these pragmatic rites which are the sole remembered function of a number of Dreaming powers illustrate the serendipitous reciprocity felt to exist between humans and their physical environment, and the close entwinement of everyday practice and totemic attitudes in the enchanted life-world.

The Dreamings associated with these pragmatic-magical sites are typically said not to have travelled but to have been "always there". This could reflect the current unimportance of such sites and a loss of interest in maintaining traditions which once attached to them. However, most religiously significant sites are those of travelling Dreamings¹ although some 'stationary' Dreamings on the Barkly Tablelands are among the most sacred. To some extent, whether a Dreaming is travelling or stationary is a matter of style in the motifs by which they are represented. Yet there is an important sociological point in favour of the importance of the travelling Dreamings. A Dreaming localised at only one place poses the problem of exciting the interest of a widely distributed population, whereas travelling Dreamings can more easily unite the people through whose territories they pass.

The travelling Dreamings are believed to have passed over extensive areas, leaving some of their possessions or parts of their bodies at sites along the way. There are about fifteen paths of linked sites affecting Aboriginal people at Borroloola and these form a complex network over the

1. This is not universal in Aboriginal religion. In 1985 I witnessed sacred men's rituals at Ti Tree Station which were performed during the hearing of the Aboriginal Land Claim to the Station. In these the stationary beings were shown to be more important than the travelling ones. These rites were of the misnamed "increase" type, which Spencer and Gillen noted (1904) to be merely vestigial among the northern and coastal people.

countryside. Go to any place, in addition to the likelihood of there being a number of sites of purely local significance, there are likely to be sites of travelling Dreamings not far away on one or more Dreaming paths.

Sites of either kind, but usually those of travelling Dreamings, will be identified with ceremonial artifacts such as body designs, songs, sacred objects, dance steps and ceremonial grounds. All of these things, and the site itself, are held to be the legacy of the Dreaming with which they are associated, and to somehow embody its identity. Borroloola people do not reify this common identity as an essence - the emphasis is on signification rather than substance - but there is a sense of common potency attaching to these things. This common identity among the objects being the legacy of a particular Dreaming at a particular site is also shared with other local ceremonial complexes of the same ancestral figure. Against this background the people associated with a given ancestor can articulate a mystical unity, at one extreme, and, at the other, their particular differences with respect to different local expressions of the cult, and different responsibilities and associations within the local cell of the cult.

Thus, the particular collection of artifacts associated with any site will differ in some ways from those at other sites, even if they lie on the same Dreaming path. For many

travelling Dreamings there are song cycles which describe their travels and, in some cases, the song is divided into sections so that one section is "held" by the people who own the country corresponding to that section of the song while neighbouring groups on the song line hold the adjacent sections of the song. In such cases, though there may be some verses common to the various sections of the song, many verses are unique to each section. At lower levels of resolution, particular individuals can be specially associated with certain verses. The song itself embodies some of the power of the Dreaming and singing it somehow revitalises the country through which it passes.

Human beings are also thought to participate in the mystical identity of the Dreamings. This is expressed in their having names which belong to the legacy of the Dreaming or to their use of ceremonial complexes, especially in imitative rites. Such people are nimaringi for that Dreaming and its sites. Just as individuals can have highly specific associations with certain song verses, so too, in various ways, people often have very particular links to sites, body marks and other parts of the ceremonial complex associated with local Dreamings.

In broad terms, however, strong claims to this identity between individuals and Dreamings is justified in two main ways. Firstly, an individual is nimaringi for the Dreamings

to which his or her father was nimaringi. Such claims are even stronger when the paternal grandfather was also nimiringi. The rule is to 'follow the father'. Secondly, an individual can be nimaringi for a given Dreaming because it is agreed that he or she was spiritually conceived at a place which is under the spiritual influence of that Dreaming. Spiritual conception is believed to occur when a spirit child, ardiri (-ardu = "child"), from a particular Dreaming place reveals itself in a dream or by signs and enters its mother.

Though spiritual conception would appear to be the most direct connection between a person and his or her Dreaming, in practice it is less weighty than patrification as a basis for an individual acting as a nimaringi. Spiritual conception alone is rarely enough to guarantee an individual's rights in ceremonial estates attached to Dreaming sites, whereas patrification generally is sufficient. One might imagine that spiritual conception would lend itself to greater control by women than patrilineal descent, but if this were so in the distant past it does not appear to be so currently.

At Borroloola men seem to have the conception dreams and portray their wives in passive roles. For example, one man recalled his son as a spirit child: the child was playing about spearing cattle dung before asking 'Where's mummy?',

and being sent in the right direction. Later his wife told him that she was pregnant. "That's all right", he replied, "That's all up to you, I've got nothing [further] to do." This particular conception story shows how, by means of men's conception dreams, the rule upon which the Yanyuwa insist, that children 'follow their father', can be ontologically reconciled with the notion that spirit children enter their mothers from the spiritual world. Moreover, the precise associations which child can have to totemic places by virtue of spiritual conception are determined by 'the old people', notably old men.

Nonetheless, spiritual conception is important in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be an important step in the transfer of Dreamings between patrilineal groups and in diversifying territorial allegiances. This was important in the process through which the island Yanyuwa gained control of cults associated with Borroloola and the surrounding land which I describe later. In this case the recognition of spiritual conception and the gift of names brought two groups together, into a "company" (wayurungu = 'one water') relationship, and this preceded exchanges of ritual privileges between two local cults; and the change in political control ensued in this gradual fashion, step by step. In this process the notion of identity through being "one water" incorporated individuals from different patriline into the sets of nimaringi for sites at Borroloola

and among the islands and later generations of patrilineal kinsmen, were able to follow through with their claims, now based on patrification. However, things do not go so far in every case and among neighbouring or spatially close patrilineal groups belonging to semi-moieties of the same exogamous moiety there will be many who are wayurungu through spiritual conception in one Dreaming country. In this case spiritual conception unites individuals across patrilineal groups, tending to form a community of those with close territorial and totemic ties blending with groups of more or less close agnates.

Secondly, within a single "countries", spiritual conception can be used to distribute the individual associations of members of the closely related nimaringi over a swathe of Dreaming sites, thereby marking out the territorial influence of the family and the breadth of their totemic and ceremonial associations. In this way the extent of countries is defined significantly by the dimensions of the groups able to maintain legitimate control of the totemic sites and ceremonial estate of a particular area. Accordingly the size of particular countries and the number of discrete countries within a given area is determined by inherently unstable political factors, and these things are liable to be reported differently by different people or by the same people at different times. However, the totemic traditions associated with particular sites are relatively

stable, the doctrine being that they have been like that since 'the beginning'.

The patriline, and patrilineal descent, nonetheless represent the dominant political form of the nimaringi group. Members of more than one patrilineage can be jointly nimaringi for the same Dreaming site even if there is no demonstrable patrilineal connection between them, but they are likely to hold that they were once genealogically connected in the forgotten past or that they are unified by their common Dreaming and common country¹ and are therefore very close relatives. Thus, in its practical realisation the political form of the patriline mixes the conceptually distinct idiom of lineality by descent arising from kinship and that of spiritual identity characteristic of totemism. The linkage between these is made in ritual, which always has something to do with a mysterious fecundity in mankind and nature, and through sacred sites as the locus of creative powers and child spirits (and also spirits of the dead).

Thus through the Dreaming the life-world including the

¹. As an indication of this solidarity: a liaison was considered a serious case of incest because the couple were related through their mothers who, though they had no demonstrable genealogical connection, belonged to "one country": among other things, the man was beaten with boomerangs by his brothers and he was sent away from Borroloola.

immediate environment, its people, and the symbolic property of the group has an underlying unity and an ultimate relatedness. The quality of this world cannot be illustrated more clearly than by the following extract from a conversation during which a man explained to me the importance of his Dreaming song cycle.

"Old people got that song and give it to young people, all the way, all the way, all the way. That's why people don't want to lose that place got a song for we.

See, when that stone stands up there now, well, we mean it, we sing'im that stone:

dalungarnja dalu
damurdumbili murdumbili...

Well we sing'im that big stone there, where he stand up rock. And little stone, little one, when him go like that, little one, where you knock'im on your foot, you know?

burulmanja wababinya yawaru
burulmanja...

That little one stone, little flat all the way, gravel. All them rock, stone, rockhole, all got song... and antbed... and that kangaroo where you see'im longa road, got a camp somewhere... That's why we don't want to leave them. We like to follow'im grandfather, and father, my father's father. We don't want to leave that song, we got to follow'im rock all the way."

The stone is not the Dreaming, which in this case is mountain kangaroo, but as part of the song resonates with its presence. Notice how this man dwells on the varieties and contexts of rock and stone as if words fail to express exactly what it is that is essential, or as if the words were somehow caressing the objects to which they attach. "Little one, little one, where you knock him on your foot":

as if they are waiting there for him to pass over them, foot and gravel reaching out towards each other. And the rock: does it not seem that "that big stone, where he stand up rock" almost deserves to be congratulated for doing so? Song, place, grandfather - "my father's father" - and rock separate as they seem, are expressed as if they were facets of a single indivisible reality.

These identities in the Dreaming thus join an individual, their "home" country and the previous generations who shared this home in a special unity. It is true that an individual's mother's country, mother's mother's country, father's mother's country, and those countries which share common Dreaming are also part of his or her life-world but, among the various domains of the life-world, those which are an individual's "own", his or her father's or father's father's country, are central. This may reflect the power of successful men to realise their ambition of living in close proximity to their own Dreaming sites. The attainment of this ideal is an important criterion for prestige - prestige of essentially the same kind as the prestige of the Buddhist monk, the Hindu sanyasin or the Brahmin priest - in demonstrably having the freedom, unhampered by material dependencies, to live a life oriented to an "other world" offering the prospect of a sublime unity with the cosmos.

There is, therefore, a powerful affective investment in the

physical life-world cathected with special intensity on the Dreaming object as an object of possessive desire. This love, however, is ambivalent. The other side of this possessive desire is jealousy which is directed to anyone who would improperly intervene between a person and his or her Dreaming. Men - and women - are said to be 'jealous' of their songs and jealous of their estate in the Dreaming in general. When, for example, during the Kunapipi rites which were held at Borroloola the ritual managers showed the Kunapipi nimaringi some sacred objects they stressed: "This is what old people were always killing each other for. This!" However, there was a double meaning in this: one the one hand a rage that people had been murderously jealous over these things and the demand that the same mistakes not be repeated and, on the other, the anticipation that this would not be avoided - and indeed it was not¹.

There is a concern in the relationships between nimaringi and their Dreamings to maintain a fine balance between possession and distance, between the generative and creative

¹. Five men died at the beginning of 1977, allegedly as a result of sorcery. Their deaths were understood to have followed their misdeeds in connection with the 1976 Kunapipi. The demise of one man, who had gone as a kakawarr, a ritual messenger with a sacred Kunapipi object, to bring dancers from Ngukurr was predicted after he failed in his mission. Another man's death had also been mooted; another man is supposed to have paid for his father's mistakes; and two others had offended the main ritual managers in ways only tangentially connected with the Kunapipi.

forces of the Dreaming and the dangerous ones, and between integration and dispersal. These themes recur in the general patterns of the myths of the Dreaming ancestors. Some Dreaming sites are parts of the original body of the Dreaming which were left behind en route or which became separated at the death or destruction of the Dreaming as remembered in mythology. These seem to reflect themes of destruction, dissolution and dispersal. Beneath the diverse themes of myths of the travelling Dreamings there is the common story of emergence, wandering between life and death and the search for a final home: eventually the Dreaming ceases travelling and dies. This thematic analogue of a life is projected on to the lives of individual people: that part of an individual which passes from the Dreaming through patrification or spiritual conception, as distinct from the individual's personal and contingent shadow, returns to the Dreaming place from which it arose. The Dreaming is therefore the source of the power which brings an individual into being, and the power responsible for the fertility and order of the world, but it is also the final resting place of the individual after his or her body has been destroyed (particularly as it was done in the traditional rites).

The life of a nimaringi begins with separation from the Dreaming site and ends with a reunification of the disembodied spirit with the Dreaming. During life the unity between nimaringi and Dreaming is covert, latent or only partial: it is, as Roheim says, a dual unity and the libidinized gulf between the two parts is represented by the

wish which lies at the base of magical ideas. Indeed, sympathetic magic conducted through chains of symbolic similarity and contiguity crosses the gap between the individual and his or her Dreaming: the destruction of a Dreaming site will hasten the death of nimaringi; an individual's hair is the same as his Dreaming site; shark Dreaming people threatened by sharks strike their heads so as to magically prevent an attack; and so on.

The enchanted life-world is thus not necessarily serene and harmonious - in fact it is in some ways a highly disturbing world - but it is a humanly intelligible world. Indeed, this intelligibility relies on metaphorical correspondences between the external world and the realm of immediate phenomenological reality, whose central domain is the human body. I will pursue this matter in more detail later in connection with the Marndiwar circumcision ritual, but it can be noted here that the body, which appears to take its place in a chain of metaphorical connections with the symbolised world focusing on the Dreaming site, is not merely another cognitive representation, but a basic ground of the psychological fact of intelligibility. Cognitive coherence is one thing, but people are not disembodied minds; and the 'mind' is an integration of the whole body which is the subject of experience in action. The life-world is therefore a work of this integration but the manner in which it is symbolised and the ends to which the affect invested in it are employed reflect particular cultural figurations of the self and the relations between self and

other. In the following section I discuss a particularly important set of roles in the symbolised sphere of sacred ritual.

2.2 Action and the sacred: ritual roles

Roheim's notion of the libidinization of the separation between the dual moments of a unity was intended to explain features of Aboriginal religion. For reasons which I explain in a later section on the Marndiwar circumcision ceremony, I do not subscribe to Roheim's psychoanalytic explanation of culture, which is the theoretical basis of this conceptualisation. Nonetheless, this idea has been useful in understanding the attitude to the life-world and it is most applicable to the structure of the sacred in Aboriginal totemism. In Aboriginal religion of the McArthur River area the notion of the sacred is not a metaphysical notion like "Dreaming" in the sense discussed in the next section. Rather it belongs to the sphere of action pursued in relation to values which are grounded in religious concepts.

In Yanyuwa the word which most nearly approximates the meaning of "sacred" is kurtukurtu. Things which are kurtukurtu cannot be handled or approached in the normal way and they may be said to be surrounded by ritual

interdictions. These things are said to be "dear" and they are sometimes also "dangerous". This may reflect some of the supernatural power of sacred things, but not all such things are supernaturally powerful, and these words refer in large part of the seriousness of the interdictions surrounding things which are kurtukurtu. The opposite to kurtukurtu is lamanda, which Aborigines translate in English as "free". All Dreaming sites are "dear" to a degree but the restrictions placed on behaviour in relation to them may be very specific and it is by no means always the case that Dreaming sites are forbidden territory. Sometimes a Dreaming site may be made dear for a period, for example after the death of someone associated with it when the area of the site will be closed for hunting, but after this it will be made free again. A person's head, especially their hair, is "dear" since the head stands to an individual's body in a relationship of identity with the person's Dreaming site which has an analogous relationship to the rest of their country. Thus, though there may be underlying reasons why hair is employed as an object of religious significance (cf. Leach, 1958), making it dear is a means of actualising this latent possibility.

When something is dear this means that the rights to control it are held by particular individuals in the roles of nimaringi and jungkayi, the 'owners' and 'managers' respectively. These people are said to be "bosses" in

relation to sacra though sometimes this word is applied to the nimaringi exclusively, or to the jungkayi exclusively. Nimaringi and jungkayi are bosses in that they share the exclusive rights to the control of the object but their roles are sharply divided. These are ritual roles which are conceived entirely in terms of religious ideas and though they are closely related with roles in kinship they are not kinship roles.

The division in ritual roles can be likened to a division between policy makers and executives. The decisive source of policy derives from the nimaringi and the jungkayi are charged with the responsibility of putting the policy into effect, and maintaining the state of affairs dictated by policy. In the course of doing this jungkayi decide on certain policies, but these tend to be subordinate to the broad policy decisions which stem from nimaringi. For example, nimaringi decide whether to perform one of their ceremonies. They will certainly consult the jungkayi about this but the decision ultimately rests with the nimaringi. Once a decision is made the jungkayi will make all the important arrangements and they will maintain the necessary disciplines throughout the conduct of the ceremony. Nimaringi are expected to pay the jungkayi for their efforts, and jungkayi have the privilege of imposing fines, "charging" people, for breaches of rules. For an example on a smaller scale: a man may decide to have his hair cut. His

jungkayi is the correct person to cut it, and he will receive a token payment for the service. If a man cuts his own hair, or allows someone else to cut it, then the jungkayi has the privilege of charging him. Similarly, the jungkayi is the correct person to paint ceremonial designs on a man's head, he is paid for this or if someone else does the painting he has the right to fine. Nimaringi cannot charge jungkayi but they can, theoretically, "sack" a jungkayi if he does not perform his role properly.

The examples of hair cutting and face painting illustrate the ideological aspects of the relationship between nimaringi and jungkayi. The head is metaphorically identified with its owner's totemic sites, which are also dear. (However, as I intimated earlier making these things dear serves to maintain the metaphor.) Just as a man's head is part of his body such, metaphorically, is the relationship between a man and his totemic sites: a relationship of identity or unity. Jungkayi have no such relationship to their nimaringi's head or totemic country: they have similar relationships to their own heads and totemic sites, but with their nimaringi's things they have no continuity.

Now to the extent that a man's head and totemic sites are sacred, they are, to use Durkheim's language, radically set apart from him, and the jungkayi's field of action embraces

this metaphorical distance. The jungkayi is able to intervene because he does not share in the nimaringi's simultaneous unity with and separation from the sacred object. The jungkayi becomes necessary to the nimaringi for two reasons: firstly, only the jungkayi can bring about the conditions which enable the nimaringi to restore, or enact, their fundamental unity with their sacred things; and secondly, only the jungkayi can prevent a too great identity with the sacred, and maintain the separation between the nimaringi and his sacred things. On one hand, nimaringi fervently desire to assume the identity of their totems, and this takes place in ceremonies. On the other hand, they feel a danger from too close contact with their totems: this can make them sick or be dangerous in other ways. Jungkayi have no such desires or fears in relation to these totems.

The relationship between nimaringi and their sacra follows the theme described in Roheim's terms as a "representation of the dual unity of one body". It appears that the separation of this dual unity which is enacted in the context of the nimaringi-jungkayi relationship provides the ambience for a renewed libidinal investment in the sacred object; and in this context there is a general heightening of the ambivalence and tension between supernatural fears and transcendental love: the one corresponding to needs for separation, the other to a desire for unity. The role of the jungkayi is crucial to the separation, and therefore

also to the quality of the unity, between a nimaringi and his or her sacra. For this reason the role of the jungkayi is also crucial in maintaining the rational structure which arises in connection with things which are "dear".

This, then, is a basic structural element of totemism as a sphere of social action. Within the bounds of this structure action is orientated to either the attainment of unity or the avoidance of danger for the nimaringi - what could loosely be called an otherworldly orientation - but the means by which this is brought about requires the intervention of an outsider who is unable to attain this unity and who is invulnerable to the dangers; that is, the jungkayi. As opposed to the otherworldly orientation of the nimaringi, the jungkayi's role in this is characterised by material transactions: being paid for his work and levying fines for transgressions in the ritual relationship between nimaringi and their sacra. In brief, there is an essential nexus in this structure between otherworldly and material values.

This does not mean that jungkayi are inspired by material motives to work for their nimaringi. Jungkayi are the children of female nimaringi, or the children of men whose mothers were nimaringi. They regard the sacra of their mothers or father's mothers with affection and they see the correct performance of their duties as jungkayi as an

extension of their affections for and duties to their own or their father's mothers and the agnates of these women.

Jungkayi owe their allegiance to the individuals who were leading nimaringi in their mother's (or father's mother's) generation: those with whom their jungkayi relationship was initiated. These nimaringi may now be dead, but their surviving jungkayi will continue to maintain their policies in relation to their sacra and to discipline succeeding generations of nimaringi, who are children of male nimaringi, according to these. It is worth observing here that this does not rest easily with Roheim's general theory that the original separation forming the basis of totemism is the separation from the mother. It is more likely that it expresses ambivalence to the father, which would help to explain why the sacra are both loved and feared.

The relationship between nimaringi and jungkayi is essentially a contractual relationship, even though jungkayi are recruited from the children of female nimaringi, and the essential qualification of jungkayi is that they not be in a position of potential identity with the nimaringi's sacra. There is one ritual context in which a man's sister's sons have a ritual role which is distinct from their role as jungkayi. This is the internment of the man's bones in a log coffin after his death. In this context the sister's son acts as wuwari (principal mourners?) in preparing the sacred log coffin. Wuwari and jungkayi have distinct roles

in this context: the former discharge a specific responsibility to their uncle; the latter have duties in relation to the man's patrilineal Dreaming estate. The fact that jungkayi are selected from among the children of female nimaringi (or the children of sons of female nimaringi) is an additional component of the jungkayi relationship.

The passing of executive control over religious property to jungkayi needs to be seen as a means of maintaining the final authority over these things in the hands of senior nimaringi and as a way of regulating the passage of his authority over the generations. Among nimaringi there is one who is the "main boss for the country" ("nyungku nganji ki awara-wu" or "that (male) countryman for the country (earth or land)"). This man will, with the assistance of his younger brothers, take a leading role in regulating the affairs pertaining to his Dreaming estate: he is the man who "holds the Law" for a particular local Dreaming estate. In the past it was expected that such a man would be subincised for, with this qualification, he is "boss of his own business". For subincised men of this standing jungkayi have an executive role rather than a disciplinarian role: jungkayi are said to be "policemen" but this applies to their role in relation to junior nimaringi and to their duty to maintain the interests of nimaringi against outsiders. In some circumstances women act as jungkayi, and these are not only to do with controlling the behaviour of other

women: an old woman at Borroloola once harangued a group of men who failed to consult her as the most senior jungkayi for a performance of a public mortuary rite. Nonetheless only male jungkayi have authority for secret male "business". I should also point out that, just as there is a single "main boss" nimaringi for a specific local Dreaming complex, so there is a single leading jungkayi for each such complex; and the other jungkayi are bound to follow his advice.

Recruiting jungkayi from the children of the female nimaringi, or the children of sons of female nimaringi, preserves intact the essentially patrilineal structure of the nimaringi group. It does this by making the link from which a different line of transmission may emerge the linkage to a role which is entirely opposite to that of nimaringi. Anyone who has any connection with a local Dreaming complex through kinship does have some interest in that Dreaming, but the fundamental control lies with the nimaringi. Those for whom a local Dreaming complex is their mother's or father's mother's are not nimaringi, they are jungkayi. Those connected to a local Dreaming through their mother's mother are said to be nimaringi by Yanyuwa, but this is a very dilute form of being nimaringi. Among the Jingali and Wambaya people to the southwest of the Yanyuwa these people would be dalnyin and this role is more like that of the jungkayi: dalnyin are supposed to "help"

jungkayi. Yanyuwa disagree with this conception of the place of those related to a Dreaming through their mother's mother for reasons which will become clear when I discuss the significance they attach to semi-moieties.

The discussion of the relationship between nimaringi and jungkayi has so far concentrated on the essential articulation of this relationship in the context of action in relation to a specific Dreaming complex under the control of a group of nimaringi. I have argued that though the jungkayi relationship depends upon matrifiliation it is part of a structure which guarantees the integrity of the patrilineal nimaringi group, the transmission of religious property in the male line, and the authority of the senior males in the patriline. In essence, females are blocked as transmitters of nimaringi-ship by having complementary rights vested in their children.

A very general theme in Aboriginal culture is that men assume roles in culture, and ceremonial life in particular, that seem to parallel the female role in reproduction. The articulation of the nimaringi-jungkayi roles seems to be another instance of this, with the additional feature of making a linkage between female fecundity and the cultural reproduction of nimaringi. Physically, the reproduction of nimaringi, the offspring of men, requires women from distant groups, and female members of one's own group contribute

reciprocal services to distant groups of nimiringi. However, it is part of the totality of transactions involved in marriage and in the recognition and reproduction of culturally constituted groups that the nimiringi with whom one's own group is intermarried create the ambience for the reproduction of one's own spiritual identity. The interweaving of these cultural and reproductive roles is transparent in the semi-moiety system which I will discuss shortly. Before doing so I will discuss the role of the concept of Dreaming.

2.3 The concept of Dreaming as a regulative principle

I wish to focus first on the concept of Dreaming as distinct from the fact that there are particular Dreamings, that is what, after Durkheim (1965), might be called the "totemic principle".

When something is said to be Dreaming this points to its transcendental significance for the world order. The concept of Dreaming is a metaphysical concept which should not be confused with the notion of the supernatural. Dreaming things are attributed a supernatural power, but Aborigines know many supernatural things - spirits, "rainbows", magic, among others - which are not necessarily Dreamings. Just as many Dreamings have the form of animals

and other natural phenomena, some Dreamings are represented as supernatural phenomena, for example, a disembodied spirit Dreaming or the rainbow serpent figure Walalu, who is a Dreaming. The mysterious powers of Dreamings are felt as an ontological force substantiating important aspects of the world order, and inhering in the structure of the life-world. Dreamings are not supposed to have created the world out of nothing for human and non-human species, elements of human culture, and material things all predated the period when the Dreamings were active. The Dreamings are felt to have imposed their stamp on the world by bringing it into its current order. They established the current shape of the landscape, they separated the land from the sea in the way it is now, they divided up the habitats of the natural species and some inanimate things, and they established the plan of human culture. The concept of Dreaming therefore points to the power which has brought a meaningful order into the world.

This concept, then, has two aspects: firstly there is the aspect of meaningfulness; secondly, the aspect of a constitutive power. It is instructive here to note Kant's characterisation of the ideal of the supreme being as:

"... nothing but a regulative principle of reason, which directs us to look upon all connection in the world as if it originated from an all-sufficient necessary cause ... At the same time we cannot avoid the transcendental subreption, by which this formal principle is represented as constitutive, and by

which this unity is hypostatized ... since the unity of nature cannot be prescribed as a principle for the empirical employment of our reason, except in so far as we presuppose the idea of an ens realissimum as the supreme cause, it is quite natural that this latter idea should be represented as an actual object, which, in its character of supreme condition, is also necessary - thus changing a regulative into a constitutive principle." (Kant, 1978: 517).

Durkheim (1965) links the idea of a supreme being with the 'totemic principle' and, indeed, Kant's interpretation of the idea of a supreme being as a "regulative principle of reason" in the guise of a constitutive principle is equally applicable to the concept of Dreaming. Consequently the concept of Dreaming, to which people refer with considerable respect can be seen as a regulative principle of authoritative social discourse (cf. Kant, 1978: 593). Thus Aborigines claim to know of the doings of the Dreamings and this knowledge is cast, not in the forms of mundane communication, but in a special language typified by myth and ceremonial design. These communicative forms themselves are thought both to represent and to have derived from the higher order represented by the Dreaming. That is, in the legitimating discourse of the Law, the concept of Dreaming has a special regulative role.

Knowledge of this kind is, like other kinds of knowledge, evaluated as "straight" or "wrong". Yet though the actions which the myths portray are held to be consequential for present human life, and life in general, and though they are

held to have actually occurred at particular places, they are quite at odds with what is known from everyday experience. The validity of this special knowledge is established, not largely by practical experience, but by the rationality of the discourse legitimated through the concept of the Dreaming. Precisely because it is removed from individual practical experiences, this kind of discourse is liable to be highly conventional in character: it is simply not available for practical criticism. The ontological content of this discourse, its objects, corresponds to the results of Kant's constitutive principle. These objects may be contentious, but the possibility for criticism in particular cases relies on the assumption of a meaningful reality, the regulative aspect of the concept of the Dreaming. In this duality between ground and substance Aboriginal metaphysics associated with the Dreaming is analogous to Kant's science of metaphysics: "a science whose every branch may be cut away but whose root cannot be destroyed." (Kant, 1978: 58).

However, unlike Kant's metaphysics, Aboriginal metaphysics are oriented not to the roots of the discourse but to the branches, and the concept of the Dreaming is not highly rationalised. It serves to mark off the sphere of totemic discourse from other areas of social life and to invest this discourse with a special significance and a special

authority.¹ The rules of the discourse are not made explicit. However, the existence of rules which would serve as regulative criteria in this discourse seems to have been established by recent work on Aboriginal mythology (e.g. Hiatt, 1975) and ceremonial design (e.g. Maddock, 1973) which has shown that these things do embody a kind of rationality and that they do communicate information. The large degree of coherence in Aboriginal mythologies and cult rites is revealed in this work as being due to common themes which are embedded in their structures, rather than in their surface features. These common themes and these structural regularities, which cannot be conceived as issuing from the universal aspects of human thought, would appear to have a role of the regulative principles of the religious discourse of totemism. Perhaps it is these and their repetitions that inspire the numinous associations of Dreamings as order constituting powers.

Thus the social discourse which defers to the concept of the Dreaming is founded on a consensus, not necessarily about substantive particulars, but about the essential legitimacy of the discourse. Perhaps this is the reason why it takes the kind of careful analysis which has been applied to

1. Kirton (1982) distinguishes two Yanyuwa verb suffixes 'ø' and 'ntha' as marking a conversative mood and a recountive mood, respectively. The recountive mood appears when myths are told and in discussion of the 'eternal' aspect of custom, the 'Law'.

Aboriginal mythology and ceremonial design in the works to which I referred above to uncover the regulative principles of the discourse. At more substantive and particular levels, however, ritual and mythology is also the language of competition between individuals and groups. As one moves towards the foreground of the discourse the element of status competition emerges more clearly. There are disagreements about where Dreaming went, what they did and who they belong to and different people may see things quite differently. Within this discourse competing interests and common interests are intimately linked for in the sublimated realm of Aboriginal religion the argument takes place with respect to a reality which transcends particular group interests in its importance, and there is little room for the pursuit of sectional ideologies.

This may be one factor contributing to emphasis on natural species and non-human objects in the representation of Dreaming ancestors. There are two exceptions to this in the mythology at Borroloola: the Kunapipi kilyeringkilyeri "wild women", and the legendary Dugong Hunters discussed in the next chapter. Of these the latter seem to come closest to breaking the rules of the discourse in that they are very life-like representations of the island men who are its nimaringi. Indeed the islanders version of their contest with the mainlanders is disputed by members of the mainland group said to be involved, and it is not difficult to see

this mythology as reflecting the islanders' status interests. The wild women, on the other hand, represent a hypostatisation of women as a natural category in contrast to the ritual reification of masculinity, under male control.

The competitive tendencies in the discourse reflect the horizontal and spatial segmentation of the population whereas the consensual tendency reflects more general interests, and most likely those of that strata of successful men able to live on their own country, oriented to the sublime and other-worldly concerns of the Dreaming; for these men tend to dominate ceremonial life. This general pattern agrees with Bern's view that the religious structures of Aboriginal societies are the determinate structures of domination and that religion represents the dominant category of mature males. He also says:

"The religious structure sets up two different types of alignment. One is primarily segmentary and the other hierarchical. Where politics is operating to maintain the existing order of society, competition is activating primarily the segmentary divisions ... the success of the segmentary groups depends on the results of their competition to control the valued resources of the society at the expense of other like groups. This segmentary competition, regardless of the outcome of specific events, reinforces the existing structure of domination." (Bern, 1979: 126).

The most general form of segmentation represented in Aboriginal culture at Borroloola is found in the semi-moiety

system, though it has much in common with the subsection system as well. In the next section I outline this system, though I discuss it again later.

2.4 The semi-moiety system

As a system, semi-moieties are very simple. The four semi-moieties form a set opposed categories which classify many things in the non-human world with the human beings who are conventionally associated with them. The more common four section system is somewhat similar but whereas section membership is determined for humans by indirect descent - ego ideally belonging to a section different from that of his mother and father - individuals are recruited to semi-moieties by direct descent. There are matrilineal semi-moieties among western Arnhem Land people, and I will discuss these later, but the semi-moiety system which is the main system of sociocentric classes among Yanyuwa and Mara people is based on patrilineal descent. This cannot be separated from the fact that semi-moieties classify totems and totemic identity is given by the totemic identity of the father. The simplicity of the semi-moiety system is that it does no other work than classify the world by quadripartite divisions of totemic identity.

In 1845 Leichhardt recorded "Gnangball", "Nmamball" and

"Odall" as "tribes or families" (1847: 447) on the Roper or Hodson Rivers. These were evidently the current names of the Mambaliya and Wudaliya semi-moieties, if "Gnangball" was actually a misconstruction of "Mambal(iya)". These two names are found throughout the area of named semi-moieties though it is conceivable that these were then moiety names rather than semi-moiety names. However, there is nothing to suggest that the semi-moiety system is a recent invention among Yanyuwa and Mara, and it is therefore most likely that Leichhardt recorded semi-moiety names rather than moiety names.

Spencer and Gillen (1904) first encountered the semi-moiety system in 1901 at Borroloola, and Spencer again investigated the Mara system on the Roper River in 1911. They recorded the following names of Yanyuwa and Mara semi-moieties, and the following correspondence between the two neighbouring systems. These are presented below (with my spellings) with a conventional letter code for the semi-moieties and the patrimoieties (P,Q/R,S) to which they may be said to belong.

<u>Yanyuwa</u>	<u>Mara</u>	<u>code</u>
Wawukarriya	Murungun	P
Rumburriya	Mambali	Q
Wudaliya	Budal	R
Wuyaliya	Kuyal	S

Spencer and Gillen were at first extremely puzzled by the semi-moiety system. They saw semi-moieties as another type

marriage class and therefore as a division of the group which should somehow be consistent with matrilineal moieties, sections and sub-sections which they had encountered on their way between central Australia and the Gulf of Carpentaria. They were surprised to find that the semi-moieties were recruited by direct patrilineal descent and there was no trace of systematic matrifiliation. This made it difficult to discover how they specified intermarriage between the classes. They found that the patrimoieties PQ and RS were exogamous in that P and Q married R and S, and vice versa. But both P and Q individuals married either R or S, and both R and S individuals married either P or Q; and there was no way of specifying in terms of semi-moieties which members of a given semi-moiety would marry from a particular one of the two semi-moieties of the opposite moiety. Their answer was that there was a division within each semi-moiety such as that:

Pa	men	marry	Ra	women	and	their	children	are	Pb
Pb		"	Sb		"		"		Pa
Qa		"	Sa		"		"		Qb
Qb		"	Rb		"		"		Qa
Ra		"	Pa		"		"		Rb
Rb		"	Qb		"		"		Ra
Sa		"	Qa		"		"		Sb
Sb		"	Pb		"		"		Sa

Thus, according to Spencer and Gillen, semi-moieties worked as marriage classes similarly to the subsection system of the southern tribes. In support of this one might note that there are four partricouples of subgroups which each

correspond to the named semi-moieties and two matricycles made up of Ra, Pb, Sa and Qb and Rb, Qa, Sb and Pa; and, indeed, this correspondence is well known to Aborigines. Currently the common correspondences between Yanyuwa semi-moieties and sub-sections (with the female names under the slashes) are as follows:

Wawukarriya
Pa: Palyarinji/
Nulyarima
Pb: Bulanyi/
Nulayinma

Rumburriya
Qa: Pangarinji/
Nungarima
Qb: Janama/
Niwanama

Wuyaliya
Ra: Kamarangi/
Nimarama
Rb: Buralangi/
Nuralama

Wudaliya
Sa: Yakamari/
Yakamarina
Sb: Kangala/
Nangalama

Spencer's and Gillen's views on the theoretical significance of the semi-moiety system remain interesting, though they are grounded in the evolutionism of Tylor and, through the influence of Fison and Howitt (cf. Fison and Howitt, 1885), Morgan. They held to the fundamental antagonism between local and social organisation in human evolution. The local organisation links groups with areas of land and property by individualistic principles whereas the social organisation, which precedes the development of the local organisation, is a division of the originally undivided sexual community. In the long run there is a struggle between the forces of privatisation and the organisation of the communal group.

Among southern tribes Spencer and Gillen saw these two forms of organisation as existing independently of each other represented by totemism on the one hand and, on the other, by the 'marriage classes' and kinship (which in their books they always treat under the heading of "Social Organisation"). They believed, however, that the southern Central Australians, especially the Urabanna, represented culture at or at only one pace removed from 'group marriage' and that there were more sophisticated cultures to the north. This was confirmed by their observations of the Warramungu, whose moiety system they found to embrace totemism, and they saw this as part of a general tendency towards the integration of the local and the social organisation which came with sophistication.

Spencer and Gillen discovered that semi-moieties classified totems at Borroloola, and this, together with their reconciliation of semi-moieties to the subsection system persuaded them that semi-moieties in fact represented the highest synthesis of the local and the social organisation which they had thus far encountered.

Though it has obvious defects, this theory suggests that Spencer and Gillen had observed a connection between the formation of territorial or land-holding groups and the pattern of marriages among these groups. Indeed, the semi-moiety system should be taken as a plan of marriage

alliances within the population although it is not nearly as explicit in this respect as the subsection system. At the same time, the semi-moiety system reflects ritual relations among its categories.

Thus, all members of P and Q are regarded as nimiringi in at least a classificatory sense to any of the Dreamings, countries and ceremonies classified as P or Q, and R and S people stand in a similar way to R and S sacra. At the same level of generality, P and Q people are all jungkayi for R and S people and sacra, and vice versa. An additional point suggests that the difference in precision between the subsection and semi-moiety systems might not be quite as great as it first seems. This is that the generational difference within semi-moieties corresponds to the division of jungkayi into two semi-moieties. For example, the jungkayi (by matrifiliation) of men of one alternating generational category of P ideally belong in R, while those of the other P generational category ideally belong to S. This representation thus expresses the idea that, if men marry according to ideal practices, fathers and sons will not compete for the same women as wives. This is yet another instance of the easing of tension between patrilineal generations of men in the interest of the reproducing the law, the metaphysical immanent order left by the Dreamings in the beginning.

Chapter 3

ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Aborigines from the McArthur River delta call themselves Yanyuwa, they call their eastern neighbours Arrawa, their northern and western neighbours Mara, and their southern neighbours Binbingka and Kurtanji. They, in turn, are known as Wadiri by the Mara and Yanyula by the Karrawa (Arrawa). How they were known by the Binbingka and the Kurtanji is not known. These names refer to major segments of the regional population. These are territorial groupings though they are not land owning groups in a jural sense; populations generally named after languages associated with territories and mostly recruited by descent, chiefly through the father.

Everyone thinks of themselves as belonging to one or more of these groupings and this represents a significant component of personal identity. The variation of the names by which they are called by others and by themselves among the languages, and demonstrates the indexical character of language use and language identity in a regional mosaic of languages and instance the general importance of language

and speech in the construction of social identity in Aboriginal societies. Indeed, there is no formal political organisation at this level; there is little overt language group chauvinism; and there are likely to be as many or more important links with outsiders (if that term may be used) as there are with insiders. However, in this area members of these groups are generally close relatives even though not all of a person's close relatives will have the same group identity. With patrilineal descent being most influential it is likely that one's fellow language group members represent a significant section of one's patrilineal kin and include other relatives in addition. No doubt this accounts for some of the fellow feeling that attaches to common territorial language group identity.

It is not difficult to see human society and culture in this region as closely integrated with the total ecology, and this is particularly plain for the distribution of these territorial language groups. At this level the population appears to be partitioned geographically into a cell structure, as opposed to being more or less continuously dispersed. This is only part of the picture and many factors work counter to this tendency. However, the association of these groupings with ecological divisions suggests they are strongly influenced by ecological factors. In particular, the formation of these culturally marked population groupings indicates the hold which these

populations have on coherent environmental resources. Although these groupings are not direct units of production or consumption or political institutions, and although their functions appear to have been mainly semiotic, these associations among language, territory and ecology would seem to have significance for the Aborigines' use of natural resources and for competition among the larger regional population.

At this level relationships between linguistically marked populations and their territories can appear uniform, but the reality is likely to have been much more complex. The mapping of language groups to ecological environments suggests that ecology could be a determinant (though not the only one) of the character of these relationships. Accordingly, I first describe the ecological distribution of the regional population. Then I explore one particular case, that of the Yanyuwa adaptation to the special configuration of environmental factors found within their territory including the past Macassan presence among the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. In doing so I pay particular attention to the connections between the Yanyuwa way of life among the islands and certain special features of their culture. Finally I discuss the problematic associations between language groups and territories and the significance of these socio-cultural constructs.

3.1 Ecology and territory

With a focus on the McArthur River delta four main territorial divisions of the population need to be considered: firstly, the delta area, which is Yanyuwa territory; secondly their southeastern neighbours, the Karrawa; thirdly the people inland and upriver from the Yanyuwa; and fourthly, people to the west, mainly Mara people. These divisions closely follow the main geographical features of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria within the Northern Territory. These are the major river systems - the Calvert, the Robinson, the McArthur, the Rosie Creek (the most minor), the Limmen and the Roper - which, except for the Roper, run nearly parallel to each other into the sea at regular intervals, about sixty kilometres apart. There are smaller rivers and creeks running into the coast between these but these main rivers extend far in land to an extent of nearly two hundred kilometres. The higher reaches of these rivers tend to be in stony escarpment country. This is the edge of the Barkly Tableland. The Tableland is a much drier environment than the coastal-riverine area and its main river systems seem to spill out towards Brunette Downs, which has numerous shallow lakes and swampy areas in wet years.

Yanyuwa lands extend over about 2,720 square kilometres of land in the McArthur River delta of which about 650 square

kilometres is the land in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. Although the mainland area is the largest part of their territory and it includes some open forest and grassed flood plains, Yanyuwa territory is typified by the numerous mangrove lined meandering channels of the McArthur River delta, by saline coastal flats, by the extensive coastal areas around the Islands and mainland, by beaches and by tidal rivers and creeks. Yanyuwa territory concentrated on this highly specialised environment which in both the Islands and the delta areas on the mainland has a very high density of marine and mangrove resources. Their territory did not extend further than the brackish tidal reaches of the rivers of the McArthur delta or the Wearyan River. However it does include some areas of forest and grassland both on the mainland and among the Islands.

Fresh water is relatively scarce along the saline coastal flats of the mainland and this may set limits to the exploitation of mainland coastal resources in dry periods. Wells such as the ones observed by Leichhardt (1847) at Manangoora Station homestead on the Wearyan River; and others on the eastern bank of the McArthur on the southern extreme of Yanyuwa territory and on the western bank of the Carrington River were evidently important population foci in the native past, but nowadays, and probably in the past, they become brackish and unusable after a few dry years. The Sir Edward Pellew Islands, however, have relatively few

saline flats of the kind found on the mainland coast. The interior of the Islands is mostly covered with light forest and, in addition to freshwater lagoons and billabongs, there are numerous freshwater springs associated with the rocky formations typical of the Island landscape. The capacity of the Islands to support a considerable additional population of Macassans during December, before the actual arrival of the monsoon rains, also suggests that freshwater was fairly abundant and reliable.

In short Yanyuwa territory focuses on the McArthur River delta system of which the Sir Edward Pellew Islands anciently form a part. The mainland parts of Yanyuwa territory are contiguous with, or fuse into, territories of neighbouring language groups, with whom the Yanyuwa have mixed extensively. However, the Sir Edward Pellew Islands represent the heart of Yanyuwa territory both geographically and in the minds of the Yanyuwa people.

I estimate Karrawa territory to be about 18,000 square kilometres. This is approximate since the eastern boundaries of Karrawa territory are unclear and it may include land to the west belonging to the closely related Kunindiri. However, there is also a possibility that I have underestimated the eastern extent of Karrawa territory. However that may be, Karrawa territory is larger than Yanyuwa territory by a factor of five at the very least,

probably six and possibly more.

Karrawa territory embraces land from the coast east of the Robinson River to about the Queensland border where it meets the Massacre Inlet and Settlement Creek area which was once the home of the people now apparently extinct known as Nyarngka¹. From this coastal area Karrawa territory went inland to the escarpment country of the upper Robinson River and Calvert Hills and it covers the freshwater parts of the Wearyan and Foelche Rivers which are Yanyuwa land in their lower reaches.

Karrawa territory seems less sharply bounded than Yanyuwa territory because of their rather fluid boundary with the territory of people speaking a close dialect of Karrawa called Kunindiri. Sharp (1935) conceived of a difference between western Karrawa and eastern Karrawa and Reay (1962) also speaks of this difference. It is not certain that the eastern Karrawa are different from the Kunindiri. What is more likely is that "the Karrawa" were a large population of Aborigines occupying this extensive territory and they were internally differentiated along linguistic lines.

¹. Sharp (1935) places a group called "Yangkala" here. Keen (1983) confirms that these were the same as the "Nyarngka" remembered by Borroloola people. These people are remembered particularly by Yanyuwa people of the Rumburriya semi-moiety who are said to have expected to have married with Nyarngka people. The demise of this group, according to some, meant that Yanyuwa have had to marry elsewhere, and frequently wrongly.

The Karrawa, and the Kunindiri if they are to be considered as different, have a common border with the Waanyi of the Nicholson River area south of Wollogorang. The Waanyi language is also said by Karrawa Aborigines to belong to the Karrawa family. Aborigines describe the differences between Karrawa, Kunindiri and Waanyi in terms of their being relatively 'heavy' or 'light' though the ordering of the languages by this criterion is not always consistent.

The languages of the Binbingka and Kurtanji, whose territories follow the escarpment which forms the high catchment area of the McArthur River, are said by their descendents to have been nearly identical. These people suffered a drastic depopulation in which large scale massacres which occurred on McArthur River Station last century played a significant part and there are few of these people today. With the Ngarnji people to their west they comprise what might be called the escarpment tribes, inhabiting the broken escarpment country which forms a ridge from which water flows southwards to the Barkly Tablelands and northwards towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. Their southern boundaries of the Kurtanji touched the northern edge of the Barkly Tableland. Just as their languages are closely similar so their territories also tend to overlap. Broadly speaking, Kurtanji territory covered the headwaters of the Robinson and part of the McArthur River systems while the Binbingka were centred over the upland areas of the McArthur River,

Rosie Creek and, to some extent, the Limmen River systems. The northern extent of Binbingka land once included Borroloola, and they were the southern neighbours of the Yanyuwa. In general, the escarpment people lived in country well supplied with freshwater from running streams, lagoons and, in the driest times, from the deep pools which collected at various places in the escarpment; rugged land between the coastal and the inland plains. They lived on the Gulf Rivers south of the tidal influence.

The western neighbours of the Yanyuwa are now the Mara but it is unclear exactly how far east Mara territory originally extended. The view among Mara people at Borroloola is that it included the western part of Bing Bong Station and even extended to West Island in the Pellew Group. Heath's (1981: 3) map of Mara territory shows Rosie Creek, which is west of West Island, to belong to the Mara semi-moiety Mambali. This suggests that the Mara see it as their territory but Heath is evidently uncertain about its language affiliation.

The Yanyuwa view is that their territory extended to Rosie Creek and that it is land of the Yanyuwa Rumburriya semi-moiety. However, though Yanyuwa hold the important ceremonies for this place the people who are regarded as belonging to Rosie Creek are Mara living closely with Yanyuwa. These people, however, are part of the Murungun group associated principally with the mouth of the Limmen

River and they have come to be associated with Rosie Creek in recent decades. Two sisters who maintain that they are Yanyuwa are said to belong to this country through their father, still remembered as an important ceremonial leader. However there seems to have been considerable manoeuvring among various people in relation to this country. The interest in controlling this area derives from the fact that the mararabarna or kilyeringkilyeri women who are celebrated in the Kunapipi are said to have emerged from the sea at this place and travelled inland along the Rosie Creek. This is now the most prestigious ceremony at held at Borroloola and the control of these Dreamings are vital to the control of the ceremony.

Quite possibly an extinct group called Wilangara was once at least influential at the mouth of Rosie Creek with their main territory approximating what is now Lorella Station. (The correspondence between cattle station areas and tribal divisions apparently reflects the environmental constraints upon each and the general importance of the drainage divisions for all forms of life in this area.) This agrees with the views of a senior Ngarnji (headwaters of the Limmen River) man who asserted that Rosie Creek mouth was once part of Wilangara country. Stretton (1893) records the Wilangara as a group of 90, his modal number for estimated Aboriginal populations. They were probably critically damaged by Costello's Valley of Springs Station in the 1870's.

It appears that arrival of the present Kunapipi cult coincided with European contact or possibly followed closely on its heels. The destruction of the original owners of Rosie Creek, who may have been the custodians of a different cultic tradition, may have provided Mara and Yanyuwa people with the opportunity to introduce the cult through this lacuna without interrupting their existing cults which are more centrally located within their territories. On the other hand, the cult may have been under the control of people more centrally located on the Rosie Creek. In short, it is likely that until recently the Yanyuwa and the Mara were not neighbours and that other people, possibly Wilangara, extended along Rosie Creek to the coast. In any event the evidence points to a large gap in the Aboriginal population associated with the area between the McArthur River delta and the Limmen.

The associations between languages, populations and territories in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria clearly is changeable, but there is a clustering around environmental resources. Broadly, one can distinguish three main types of environmental resources around which territorial language groups cluster in the region under consideration; namely, marine-coastal (including islands) areas, coastal-riverine areas and escarpment/catchment environments. Marine-coastal environments are most characteristic where they are

concentrated in major delta systems. The McArthur River delta, including the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the Wearyan River mouth, is one of the most developed of these. East of the McArthur the deltas are comparatively undeveloped east of the McArthur until the Massacre Inlet in Queensland is reached. West of the McArthur the Limmen River mouth is the next main delta formation before the Roper River. The density of these marine-coastal resources, which may be gauged by the complexity of the channelling and the island formations, seems to be an important factor influencing the distribution of culturally marked populations.

Yanyuwa territory at least is practically defined by the McArthur River delta and, as I will later explain, the Yanyuwa maintained close cultural links through ceremonial totemism with the major delta areas on either side of the McArthur, especially with the Limmen River people. This kind of environment is relatively specialised and the Yanyuwa, especially the Islanders, appear to have fitted themselves specially to a marine way of life which they pursued most of the time.

The coastal-riverine environments, which embrace both marine and tidal riverine resources, and substantial expanses of coastal savannah is less specialised. This kind of environment accounts for most of the current residents of

the Borroloola region today, and it probably also did in the past, even taking the uneven effects of European contact on the decline of Aboriginal populations. These larger populations, such as the Karrawa and probably once the Mara, pursuing a varied life style which included a seasonal round of exploitation of savannah lands by fire; fish trapping in running waters, and by the coast; emu trapping; and dugong hunting, among a wide range of food getting activities pursued between the beaches and the escarpment, would have been a relatively stable population base for the smaller specialised marine populations. That is to say, the marine life style represented a specialisation and main pursuit of one of a range of techniques available to the coastal-riverine population at large.

The escarpment tribes, effectively detached from the coast and from the tidal rivers and focused on rich escarpment with good supplies of freshwater, had a different set of options. Whereas marine-coastal men styled themselves as dugong hunters, whereas Karrawa men were famed as emu killers, the escarpment people lived with the large euros, walleroos, rock wallabies and the other herbivores of the hill country. They had a largely stone toolkit: stone spear heads, stone axes, and grind stones for wild grasses; they had no need of canoes, elaborate fish traps or the complex preparation of food represented on the coast by the cycad industry.

Cutting across these three main types of environment, each river system of the Gulf tended to be associated with particular language groups. The rivers were the arteries of all life in the region and remained the constant focus of human activity against the vicissitudes of more ephemeral waters, though the latter had great value as resources at certain times of the year. It is obviously easier to follow rivers than to cross the dry land between, and this probably accounts for their importance along the coastal-riverine strip where they are permanent streams in most years. In the escarpment the rivers resolve into chains of waterholes during the dry season. The closeness of the escarpment languages and the historical associations between the escarpment 'tribes' would seem to reflect the predominance of common ecology over common river.

Before Europeans came Aborigines had a sophisticated technical culture, though obviously not as sophisticated as that of Europeans or that of the Macassans who visited North Australia in pre-European times. We do not know how ^{long} humans have occupied this area or what the pattern of that occupation has been. But, presumably, the Gulf of Carpentaria has a human prehistory of at least several tens of thousand years. During this period, which witnessed considerable environmental change, including changes to the coastline, to the drainage systems and to the water

resources in general, Aboriginal culture evidently underwent corresponding changes as the Aborigines came to grips with the succession of problems they faced. Such conclusions can be drawn from the picture of diversity of cultural adaptation and environmental specialisation in Aboriginal ways of life before Europeans arrived.

The Yanyuwa people were probably the most environmentally specialised of these groups and their associations with Macassans fishermen brought them in contact with a technical culture conferring certain advantages for their way of life among the islands and coast of the McArthur River delta. In the following sections I discuss some of the environmental factors which shaped the pre-European life style and culture of these Aborigines and which formed the background to their subsequent life at Borroloola, and to their current self-definition as Law people.

3.2 Islands and mainland in the McArthur River delta

Even with the advantages of European technology the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the coastal areas in general are somewhat risky places for people to live, significantly riskier than places further inland, such as Borroloola or one of the small cattle stations. In Aboriginal times the perils of island and maritime foraging would have translated

to higher rates of mortality and this kind of environment presented disadvantages of other kinds to its human inhabitants. At the same time, this way of life conferred certain unique benefits. In this and later sections the costs and benefits to Aborigines living in the McArthur River delta and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands are considered with a view to understanding the kind of adaptation which they made to their environment.

The risks in moving between the islands and the mainland, and transport in general through the tropical sea, are much greater than anything which has to be negotiated on land. Storms and squalls are notorious in the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria and these can easily overturn a canoe. Stories of such accidents are still remembered. The salt water holds numerous other dangers - sharks, poisonous jellyfish and stonefish, and so on - to which Aborigines could only respond with very simple physical or magical techniques. Many of these dangers are also found in the delta and coastal areas surrounding the islands and others derive particularly from the use of canoes for hunting or passage over the sea.

The islanders could have reduced their risks by staying on Vanderlin Island, relying on terrestrial resources, including the immediate coast, and becoming self-sufficient. Vanderlin Island is probably large enough to sustain a

reclusive inbreeding population over several generations but fluctuations in birth and mortality rates almost certainly would eventually bring about extinction. Whereas on the mainland a local population has a possibility of extending its resource domain into neighbouring areas if its numbers increase, the islands' natural boundaries place firmer limits on the size to which the population could swell. The improbability of this hypothetical isolationism highlights an important theme of island life, that of the need to maintain communications with the rest of the population from which they were somewhat insulated by the perilous sea.

The islanders needed to maintain links with the mainland, if only to find their spouses. Furthermore, the islands of the Pellew Group, as Flinders (1814) observed, are not rich in flora and fauna and therefore could not support a large permanent population. Indeed, Flinders thought that only Vanderlin Island was a permanent home for Aborigines. The relative poverty of the land is, however, offset by the vast resources of the sea, a fact revealed by the many remains of turtle feasts throughout the large and small islands of the Pellew Group which Flinders reports. The islanders had no acceptable alternative to becoming mobile among the islands to use all of its terrestrial resources, to exploit the wealth of the sea, to accept the risks entailed and to adapt their way of life to overcome or minimise the inherent disadvantages of their environment.

Hamilton (1980) argues that over the range of Aboriginal societies, with varying degrees of technical capacity in production, Aboriginal men have been the beneficiaries of gains in productive capacity indicated by, among other things, the relative richness and diversity of their tool kits, while Aboriginal women's tool kits vary little between the extremes of desert and coastal environments. This difference is strikingly represented by the Yanyuwa.

Traditionally the tool of Yanyuwa women were digging sticks - which they now make from steel - simple bark 'coolamons' or other containers, grindstones and, possibly, small stone axes; essentially the same set of tools as were used by mainland women. Yanyuwa men, by contrast, made and controlled, above all, bark and dugout canoes, harpoons and long ropes for harpooning dugong and turtle. This was not only tremendously productive technology, it was also crucial for moving among island and coastal areas.

Unlike the women's tools this maritime technology required a sophisticated technical knowledge to make, considerable labour to produce and maintain, and special knowledge to use effectively. These factors no doubt encouraged the islanders to use these things centrally in their way of life, that is, to become more than occasional maritime hunters, reaping a return on their technological investments. As I will soon explain, this technology and the life

style of the male maritime hunter was raised to the status of a religious symbol.

With their control over canoes Yanyuwa men had access to coastal and terrestrial resources of kinds which on the mainland would more likely have been collected by women. Thus Yanyuwa men filled their canoes with seagull eggs which they collected from smaller uninhabitable islets, and these are remembered to have been a valuable source of food. Of particular interest, however, is that Yanyuwa men asserted direct control over sources of seagull eggs, and possibly other foods, among the islands. Thefts of seagull eggs by outsiders were regarded so seriously by the islanders that they could be motives for homicide. This is indicated by the following story told by a senior Vanderlin Island man about a double murder committed by his brother before the second world war. (I have altered the names of the people involved in the story, and I have made other changes to make the story easier to read.)

Gerry killed one woman and one man, my FMB. He (the latter) had promised Minnie in marriage to Blue (a mainland man), but she did not like him and took off with a whiteman to Roper River.

Peter, Blue's older brother, said: "We will have to go and kill that old man, father-in-law (Minnie's father)." They went from Luriyarti (on the mainland) to Vanderlin Island. They saw a fire there. They saw my FMB (Minnie's father) and sang him to make him come up. Then they speared him and took him into the bush. As he fell he called out and his wife came up. They speared her too.

They made wurawura (sorcery) on them (to temporarily revive them) and said: "Let Gerry kill you, let Gerry kill you!" Blue and Peter went back to Luriyarti.

After one day Gerry went out hunting dugong but something told him to come back. He came back and brought up some wire spears, and told his wife that he was going to hunt stingray. He ran all the way to that old man's camp (i.e. Minnie's father's). Bill, my older brother, and I had told that old man (Minnie's father) that he could eat seagull eggs. But Gerry came up and said: "Who told you to eat those eggs?" Before the old man could reply Gerry killed him with a spear. He speared his wife too. He cut up that old man's body and threw it into the sea.

This is the kind of story often told as evidence of how 'cheeky' or 'jealous' the island men were about their resources and their island home. Although this particular version of this story transfers the blame to the mainland men, other versions relate how Gerry's double murder led eventually to his arrest and imprisonment after a period in hiding among the islands. However, even this version implies that taking seagull eggs without permission could be a reason for murder.

It is said that the Vanderlin Island men in particular did not let "anybody" on their island. This probably should not be taken literally because at the end of the nineteenth century Vanderlin Island was apparently home to a large Aboriginal population including refugees from the mainland. Quite possibly this led to extra pressures on resources which then sharpened the islanders' proprietorialness. Nonetheless, such attitudes towards food resources are not

particularly approved even by the Yanyuwa and mainland people do not portray their own ancestors in this way. It is quite a different matter with religious property in relation to which jealousy is approved.

Although currently seagull have no religious significance, perhaps at the time of these events such jealousy was justified in religious terms. As I observed earlier religious property typically is controlled by jungkayi and nimaringi and it could have been in either of these roles that Gerry committed these murders. The rule of nimaringi and jungkayi is said by Yanyuwa to extend to the following things: jungkayi have the right to control the burning of the grass, an important foraging technique; "the first dugong they killed with a new canoe all the old people would eat. [The jungkayi] for the nimaringi of the canoe would be the main one"; "strangers had to ask the main jungkayi or nimaringi for the country before they could hunt"; "we cut a canoe at Warranguri. Bruce was jungkayi for that place and he allowed my father [who was neither nimaringi nor jungkayi of the place] to do that"; "my [FF] used to cut bark in his own country. My [MF] used to cut it in his own country too but sometimes he cut it in my [FF] country so he would ask him first"; if people leave food uneaten then the ants will take it away and the country will become poor in that kind of food, but jungkayi may deliberately do this if they think that the people are wasting things and not treating the land

with the right degree of respect.

On a larger scale of management, whole areas may be set aside from use for varying periods for ritual reasons, thereby falling more generally under the control of nimaringi and jungkayi. Lake Eames on Vanderlin Island, the largest body of fresh water among the islands and a major terrestrial resource area, is subject to a variety of controls of this kind which could restrict various parts of the area to various categories of people for a variety of ritual reasons. Most other sources of fresh water among the islands, and on the mainland, and other kinds of natural resources have religious or ritual aspects which can justify their being restricted in various ways.

What stands out is the number of resources areas among the Sir Edward Pellew Group which would come under the control of men either because of their control of the critical technology or because of their religious controls. It is probably true that the relative inflexibility of the islands' carrying capacity encouraged the islanders to maintain greater control over their terrestrial resources than was necessary on the mainland. Moreover, given that considerable effort has to be expended to collect remote food resources, rewarding as these expeditions could be, among the islands there would have been an additional incentive to control access to the land. Be this as it may,

men are the clear beneficiaries of this development.

In that sense this material lends strong support to Hamilton's view that men generally have been the beneficiaries of changes in hunting and foraging technology. However, the central point of her argument, that Australian Aboriginal societies are in fundamental ways dual male-female social systems, suggests some supplementary considerations.

Women's hunting on the mainland comes into its own during the dry season as women fire the grass and forage over the plains and by lagoons for a range of small animals, vegetables and fruits which change over the season. This is foraging on quite a different scale to that done by family groups; it is organised by four, five or more women at a time; men have virtually no role; it is very intensive and planned. The technology at their disposal is be simple but the productivity of this activity is enhanced by the exchange of knowledge among women, by cooperation among them and by competition for prestige as foragers.

Among the islands only Vanderlin and West have any substantial areas suitable for this kind of hunting, and much of women's foraging probably took place at the sea shore. Although this work can yield large amounts of shellfish there is very little seasonal variation in the

kinds of foods available. One imagines that in pre-European times Aboriginal women were considerably drawn to life on the mainland where they were better able to pursue the kind of foraging likely to maximise their returns from effort and their chance to sustain themselves and their families. To the extent that men resisted their wives' and female relatives' wishes to return to the mainland they would have to assume responsibility for the support of their families, and for many Aboriginal men this would be undesirable.

The most likely picture would have been of a mobile population around the McArthur River delta of which one part was more or less permanently located on Vanderlin Island. The remainder would have moved around the islands in some seasons, or for particular purposes, while being mainly based on the mainland. In this pattern there would have been a split between the mainland areas as the site of women's social and productive life and the islands as very much men's domain. This would account for the extent to which the island's resources fall under men's control through their ritual roles, and for the reputation of the islands as somewhat mysterious and sacred places.

3.3 Macassans in the Sir Edward Pellew Group

Macassan trepangers began regular visits to the Sir Edward Pellew Islands sometime before 1780 and their visits continued until 1907 when they were banned from Australian waters. There are reasons to suppose that the Macassan presence conferred certain benefits to the Aborigines living among the islands.

In December 1802 Flinders found signs of their presence among the islands "almost as numerous and widely extended as those left by the natives" (1814: 172) and he was puzzled to find extensive matrices of stone work compartments on North Island and elsewhere. These were fireplaces used for trepang processing. A few weeks later he encountered six praus heading into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Pobasso, the commander of the group, told him that they were the vanguard of a fleet of sixty carrying about one thousand men which had come to the north coast of Australia to collect trepang. Furthermore, Pobasso claimed to be among the first Macassans to make regular voyages to Australia and that these had begun about twenty years previously. This dates Pobasso's involvement with the Pellew Island to about 1783.

Macknight (1976) believes that the Macassan trepang industry in Northern Australia started between 1650 and 1750 and he considers the last quarter of the seventeenth century to the

most likely time. From irregular beginnings, he thinks, the industry gradually grew to the proportions observed by Flinders. Thus, if Macknight's favoured date is correct then the industry had a century or more to grow to these proportions and it seems reasonable to think that it happened more quickly. Although they lie near the southeastern edge of the Macassans' range (which extended less frequently to the Wellesley Islands) the Pellew Islands became important processing sites (cf. Macknight, 1976: 62-63) and it appears that the Macassans sometimes gathered there at the end of the season to wait for the southeast monsoon to blow them home. Quite possibly, the Macassans began to visit them regularly by the middle of the eighteenth century, and the Yanyuwa may have known Macassans several generations before they met Pobasso. Unfortunately the archaeological work which has been done on Macassan sites elsewhere in North Australia has not dated the industry more precisely than is possible from documentary evidence, and it is unlikely that similar work on Macassan sites among the Pellew Islands would produce better results.

A systematic survey of Macassan sites in the Pellew Islands could help to indicate the scale of trepanging operations there during the Macassan period. At present there are two documentary sources from first hand observers. Searcy (1907, 1911) claims to have seen four or three praus working near North Island, and he provides some Macassan names for

the Pellew Islands. The most informative and reliable observer was Daeng Sarro, who worked the northern Australian trepang beds in the industry's last years. His (Macknight, 1968: 181-5) account of the Macassan voyages covers working in the Pellew Islands and many of the names he uses are known by island Aborigines as the Macassan (bungkawa, literally 'boss') place names.

Daeng Sarro mentions Daenna i Si'de' (which is not remembered by Aborigines) as a main anchorage among the Pellew Group. From there "short trips were made to such camps as Guru, and Taker of Life, Sampu Bay or Karaeng Mangngemba". Guru is evidently the small islet off the southern tip of Vanderlin Island, which Aborigines know by the Macassan name "Karruwa". Karaeng Mangngemba is a small islet in a shallow bay southwest of Cape Vanderlin which is also known by a Macassan name, "Karamanyura". These are places on or near Vanderlin Island and it is likely that Daenna i Si'de' was closer to Vanderlin Island than to North Island, where it is marked on Searcy's (1907) map, since it is not exactly a "short trip" from North Island to Karruwa. One of the sites Flinders recorded on North Island is apparently Wudangaramba or "Limajarti", the Macassan name remembered by Aborigines which Macknight (1976: 90) translates as "Little Bay". There are other processing sites on North Island and on the other islands of the Pellew Group. The notion of a main anchorage in Daeng Sarro's

account suggests that it was usual for several praus to work in an area. There might in fact have been several main anchorages among the Pellew Islands which were worked by different companies of praus. It seems reasonable to imagine one hundred men or more engaged in trepanging among the islands. Judging by Pobasso's timetable - in Mid february he said that he was late getting into the Gulf - Macassans may have remained among the islands for about a month each year.

Elderly Aborigines maintain that the Macassans were welcome and their acceptance of Macassan place names as naming places which 'belong to bungkawa' is evidence that they saw their presence as legitimate. The variety of goods which they received from the Macassans, from rice in bamboo containers, black sugar, calico to, above all, tobacco, is vividly recalled by a few elderly people who knew the Macassans from childhood.

The early European observers give the impression that during the final decades of last century - a period for which all reports describe the islanders as extremely hostile to whites - the trade between Macassans and Aborigines was quite vigorous. Gillen reports a "great number of blacks who collect tortoise shell and pearl shell for the Malays who ... give them rice, tobacco and ... arrack" (1968: 317). Spencer added that they collected pearls and trepang and

received dugout canoes in return (1928: 568-569). Stretton had earlier observed that the "Vanderlin [Island] tribe are expert canoists, and are possessed of some very fine canoes, made out of solid trees, which have been left them by the Malays. They are particularly fond of tobacco and arrack." (1893: 228).

There is evidence that this trading preceded the European settlement of the McArthur River area. Leichhardt noticed what he believed to be the results of Macassan influence in the sophistication of some Aborigines he met on the McArthur River in 1845. Interestingly, whereas the newly contacted Aborigines he had met before this had either attacked his party or avoided it in terror, the McArthur River Aborigines deliberately hailed him down:

"... they were soon perceived running after us, and, when they were sufficiently near, I dismounted and advanced slowly to have a parley, and was met by an old man with three or four young fellows behind him. As soon as he saw that I intended to make him a present, he prepared one in return; and when I gave him some rings and buckles, he presented me with some ornaments he wore on his person. As our confidence in each other was thus established, some of my companions and several others of the natives came up, and we exchanged presents in a very amicable manner On my inquiring about water, they pointed in the direction which we were going, and seemed to say "It is far, but it is large; Baco! Baco! Umara!" ..." (1847: 413-414).

The Aboriginal words are Yanyuwa (Barku! Barku! Yukumaya!) and they may be translated as "Patience, patience, you wait here". Perhaps they meant Leichhardt to wait until they

returned with more to trade. The men knew the use of firearms and knives. According to Leichhardt they valued knives "so highly that one of them offered a gin for one" (1847: 414).

Macassan goods made important contributions to the technology which sustained the island way of life. Macassan iron was made into harpoon points which were superior to wooden ones, which were used otherwise. Iron tools enabled Aborigines to manufacture a range of items such as harpoon spears and spatulate canoe paddles more efficiently. However, the Macassans' most significant contribution to the islanders' technology were dugout canoes. These are in many ways superior to the beautiful sewn bark canoes which the Yanyuwa made for themselves. Bark canoes, no matter how well made, last only a few trips, and they are fragile enough to be ruined in the course of capturing a dugong or turtle. Dugout canoes are much safer and more durable, they provide a stable platform for the man using the harpoon and they are strong enough to withstand the rigours of hunting. Moreover, they are more seaworthy than bark canoes and they can be rigged with a sail, reducing the energy needed for transport and giving the hunters greater range.

McArthur River Aborigines did not make dugouts themselves until recently, though among indigenous water craft their sewn bark canoes are probably the most sophisticated in

their construction (cf. Davidson, 1935). Flinders (1814) found the remains of one among the Pellew Islands and remarked that it was superior to anything which he had so far seen of Aboriginal technology. He described it as "clinker-built". Spencer and Gillen obtained one of the same type, seventeen feet long made from seven pieces of bark with elaborate internal bracing. This canoe "had just brought six men across from the Pellew Islands in the Gulf to the mouth of the McArthur, and then up the river for fifty miles to Borroloola" (1904: 483). Its owners seem to have put a high price on it. As skilled as they no doubt were in dealing for artifacts with Aborigines, it cost Spencer and Gillen 6 tomahawks, 6 butcher's knives, 6 pocket knives, 4 watermelons and 2 pounds of tobacco. The Aborigines seem to have been happy, for three days later the anthropologists were offered another canoe, which they declined. I have been told that one of these canoes can be made in a day. Judging by the complexity and size of the one collected by Spencer and Gillen this would be fast work indeed though several men working together could achieve this result.

It is necessary, as I argued earlier, to understand the islanders' canoe and harpoon technology as a integrated whole. Although the Macassans may not have introduced either the harpoon technology (though this possibility cannot be discounted) or the sewn bark canoes it is

reasonable to suppose that the technological benefits which they did bring, especially in the use of iron and dugout canoes, added to the sophistication of the existing technology. Thus the harpoon and canoe technology found throughout the Macassan range (Davidson, 1935) is clearly superior to the spear and raft technology (Akerman, 1975) which was used to hunt turtles west of this area. It appears from Davidson's (1935) survey (though he does not draw this conclusion himself) that between the Pellew Islands and Cape York, where more sophisticated Melanesian-influenced canoes are found, bark canoes are less sophisticated. The distribution of dugong hunting technology has not yet been surveyed but it seems probable that this would follow the distribution of canoes (the more sophisticated heavy harpoons requiring sturdier platforms from which they can be launched). In any event, this indirect evidence supports the view that the Macassans were to some extent responsible for a boost to the productivity of the canoe and harpoon technology among the Sir Edward Pellew Islands.

After 1907 when Macassan dugout canoes were no longer available island Aborigines began making them for themselves, or at least making them on a larger scale (cf Warner, 1969: 451). Two island men in particular, one of them with part European or Chinese ancestry, are said to have made the first canoes and are remembered as great canoe

makers. Perhaps it was a little easier for islanders to do this under European conditions since steel axes would have been more available and they may have had more access to the better trees inland than under pre-European conditions. However, these advantages would have been slight and it seems most likely that Aborigines were able to obtain sufficient dugout canoes from Macassans. That they began to make them after 1907 suggests that although they were content to rely on the Macassans for their dugout canoes had become a necessary part of the islanders' technology.

The process leading to this result is not characterised adequately as the diffusion of new technological ideas to a people with a pre-existing technological deficiency. As Warner (1969: 453) says, there needs to be an affinity between new technology and the existing culture before it is likely to be accepted. But, although Warner notes some important material concomitants of dugout technology, he sees this affinity largely in cognitive terms, stressing Aboriginal conservatism as the ultimate cause of the seeming reluctance to embrace new technology and cultural ideas. Implicit in what Warner says is the idea of a cultural deficit to which Aborigines should have rationally responded by quickly embracing exotic technologies, in this case by energetically rejecting bark canoes in favour of dugouts. On the contrary, the value of any given item depends on its possible uses and its possible contribution within the

totality of existing culture, a totality which nonetheless will be altered by the inclusion of new elements. Indeed it seems that the totality of Aboriginal culture in the McArthur River delta was altered by the Macassan presence, but not by the contribution of dugout canoes alone.

As well as boosting the sophistication and the effectiveness of the productive technology used by Aboriginal men and exposing the islanders to new ideas and experiences, Macassans provided them with stimulants, notably tobacco. McArthur River Aborigines used long Macassan-type pipes, malarawa, to extract the maximum benefit from the tarry black trade tobacco they obtained from the Macassans. Several men would take turns on one pipe, drawing deeply and holding the smoke in as long as possible. This is said to have made the smokers "really drunk". The barrels of the pipes were filled with paperbark and when all of the tobacco was gone this would be smoked for the nicotine which it had absorbed. Arrack was also obtained from the Macassans, and possibly opium too, though this is more likely to have come from Chinese, but tobacco appears to have been desired above all.

The Macassans seem to have established tobacco as an important commodity capable of being traded as well as consumed by Aborigines. This has continued to the present day though tobacco is evidently not as important as it was

in the past when it was scarce. Younger Aborigines are amused to hear that earlier this century islanders frequently travelled to Borroloola just to get tobacco. However, the past importance of tobacco is still reflected in the thoughts and behaviour of older people. One old Yanyuwa man described the history of contact in terms of the change in the method of use, type and quantity of tobacco, a change from trade tobacco through various stages to packets of cigarettes. Another man, an islander, bought large amounts of tobacco each pension day - 'plug' tobacco for chewing and pipe-smoking, tins of tobacco for cigarette rollers, packets of cigarettes and even packets of rolling tobacco for the anthropologist! - though he smoked very little himself. Most of his tobacco was distributed to relatives and friends but he maintained a cache. He showed me a bottle which he had filled with fragments of plug tobacco which could be thus dispensed in the exact quantity required. In addition, he had tins of tobacco 'planted' among his possessions. He always had tobacco. When the local store ran out of tobacco, which happened every now and again, he was able to supply his close friends and relatives.

This hoarding of tobacco was partly nostalgic for it really belongs to a past when tobacco was generally scarce and very highly valued. What then distinguished tobacco from other goods, apart from its stimulant properties, is that it is

readily made into smaller or larger quantities and these were used as a kind of currency in personal relationships and for trading in general. Before Europeans arrived the Macassans were the only source of tobacco, and tobacco was scarce indeed. The islanders had the great advantage of a virtual monopoly over tobacco and a range of other foreign goods because the islands were the principal site of Macassan activity.

Thus, in short, the Macassan presence benefited the islanders in two main ways. Their contribution to material culture improved the islanders', mainly men's, productive capacity within their environment and helped reduce some of its natural disadvantages. As well, the islanders held the keys to the trade in highly desirable foreign goods, including tobacco. No longer merely at the far extremity of the land, the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, and Vanderlin as its main living area, became the point of contact for the whole regional population with the vast network of trade to their north. These two factors seem to offer an explanation for why the Aborigines of the McArthur River delta, the Yanyuwa people, were so strongly oriented to the island way of life and how the islands with all of their disadvantages became the centre of Yanyuwa territory.

Relationships between Aborigines and Macassans went much deeper than momentary trading. A form of 'Macassan' was in

use between Aborigines and Macassans, Aborigines were given Macassan names - indeed, the tobacco hoarder discussed above is still widely known by a Macassan name which he received as a child - and Yanyuwa men are remembered to have travelled to Macassar with the trepangers.

Aboriginal women too enjoyed friendships with Macassan men, and within certain customary limits this was approved by other Aborigines. These relationships took on many of the forms of manners which normally attend marriage or at least wife-lending between Aborigines. The woman's relatives - or her husband - expect to receive regular gifts from the man. These gifts bind the woman's relatives or husband to accept the relationship and to support her lover against potentially critical others. Of course, women also stood to gain materially from these associations in addition to whatever sexual or romantic interests they might have satisfied.

An elderly male informant on this matter maintained that no half-caste children were conceived as a result of liaisons between trepangers and Aboriginal women. He asserted that Macassans were like Aborigines and unlike Europeans for whom, he thought, 'one go' was enough to cause conception. As long as Macassans did not exceed the expected limits of these relationships there was no damage. Contrary to this, Stretton (1983) notes that "the Malay cast of feature is

very pronounced, and there are ... several half-castes" among the Aboriginal population. Spencer and Gillen, however, do not support this impression and there is no obvious physical difference between Yanyuwa and other Aborigines today, or any other indication of Macassan heritage.

Sexual relationships between Aboriginal women and Macassans were important elements in a larger framework of relationships between island Aborigines and Macassans. The fact that Aboriginal men, especially young men, visited places in Indonesia or elsewhere in Australia with the Macassans, and the interest that Macassans took in the Aborigines to the extent of naming them, indicates that there was good will on the Macassan side as well as on the Aboriginal side. Clearly the Macassans were ^{NOT} intimidated by Aborigines since, as Macknight (1976: 83) notes, the Macassans usually held the advantage of numbers. Nonetheless, there would have been no advantage in antagonising the Aborigines and good relationships with them would no doubt have had many benefits for the Macassans. Overall, the most important benefit for Macassan commanders would be some guarantee of social order and there is some evidence that this had the highest priority. Thus, Warner reports the following to have been the practice on the coast of north eastern Arnhem Land.

"The various head men of the coastal clans were made "kings" by Malay traders. Usually the brother of a "king" was also made a "king" to assist his older brother - apparently a Malay adaptation of native custom, since the ceremonial leader of a clan usually has his younger brother to assist him. The head men were put in charge of their clansmen in the trepang expeditions. Friendships grew up between the various Malays and aborigines to the extent that the black fathers took their young sons down to the Malay boats and pointed out the men who were to be their trading friends when they were grown up. This indicates a tendency to organise the trade on the basis of the patrilineal line, which again shows that the Malays did not attempt to change native civilization, but merely adapted themselves to the native social institutions." (Warner, 1969: 449).

There is no evidence that "kings" were appointed in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands but in all other respects pattern is the same. I have already suggested various reasons for the reported aggressive territoriality of island men but it seems likely that they were given additional authority by Macassans either formally, as reported by Warner, or by the close relationships which they cultivated with Macassans. The maintenance of authority among Aboriginal leaders would benefit both the Macassans, who would be more assured of peaceful conditions and assistance, as much as it would those Aborigines for whom it guaranteed stability in their beneficial associations with the Macassans.

In the light of these relationships the main anchorage among the islands has an intriguing Macassan name. Daenna i Si'de' means "Si'de's brother-in-law" (Macknight, 1968: 184). It is just possible that Si'de' may have been "Sieden", a Macassan commander who was at Raffles Bay in

1829 (Macknight, 1976: 130) and that his "brother-in-law" was a leading Aboriginal man from the Pellew Islands. Naturally, it is too late to discover what the name originally meant, but it is at least coincidental that it connotes what Aborigines remember to be an important aspect of their association with Macassans.

Thus, as Thomson (1949: 84ff) has argued for Arnhem Land, the Macassan presence seems to have had dynamic effects on Aboriginal social life in the McArthur River delta. Conceivably, before the Macassans started coming regularly to the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, the islanders were a considerably poorer group and they might have included numbers of people who, for various reasons, had been forced away from the mainland. (More recently, one individual, the maternal grandfather of two men in their fifties, was totemically assimilated to Centre Island after parents 'had trouble' on the mainland.) Once the Macassans began their annual visits the islands might have become more attractive to mainlanders: the enhancements to productive technology increasing their carrying viability, and Macassan goods providing an added incentive. The evidence that such a reversal of fortunes did take place does not currently exist. Nonetheless, if it did occur then one would expect to find by archaeological methods evidence of an increase in population, and an increase in the use of marine resources, especially dugong and turtle, during the eighteenth or early

nineteenth centuries.

3.4 Islanders and mainlanders: the ritual dimension

The people living until recently among the islands were predominately, though not exclusively, Yanyuwa speakers of the Rumburriya semi-moiety. Most Rumburriya territory lies within the islands and includes most of Vanderlin, North and Centre Islands. The other Yanyuwa semi-moiety territories, except Wawukarriya territory which is all on the mainland, extend to the islands from the adjacent coast and the McArthur River delta. West Island is mainly Wudaliya and Southwest Island is mainly Wuyaliya, these being the two semi-moieties from which Rumburriya people (in alternate generations) should marry.

Of course, the actual residential population and land users of the islands would have included people from other places and at any given time would not have included all those with semi-moiety territories among the islands. That is, there would not have been a perfect correspondence between this normative identity and group composition. There would, however, have been a systematic correspondence. In general, people are drawn to their totemic countries although they may be drawn away from them for a variety of reasons.

The general significance of semi-moieties as territorial and cosmological units is discussed later in considerable detail but it can be accepted here that semi-moiety identity confers, or expresses, certain materially relevant territorial rights. These are closely bound up with rights in the mytho-ritual complexes of ceremonial totemism and they are justified by predominately religious or metaphysical ideas but Aborigines do not articulate sharp distinctions between religious and secular spheres and between spiritual and material interests. In this section I wish to extend the discussion of the material base of Yanyuwa society and the island way of life to show how closely their material way of life is reflected in their ritual and ceremonial interests. I propose to continue my focus on the island Yanyuwa and to discuss three things which, under indigenous conditions particularly, were materially and spiritually important to them. These are the cycas forests at Manankura, their ceremonial obelisks called kundabira, and the tradition of the legendary Dugong Hunters.

The Manankura cycas. Earlier I noted Flinders' disappointment in finding the islands poor in vegetable resources. He was not to know that extensive cycas forests on the mainland, about six miles from the mouth of the Wearyan River (to the south of Vanderlin Island), comprised possibly the richest concentration of vegetable food in the southern Northern Territory Gulf of Carpentaria.

These were discovered by Leichhardt. He found two main areas of cycas groves about two miles apart, connected by a footpath. He describes finding the second of these as follows:

"[Charley] ... guided us on the footpath ... to a large well, near a much frequented camping place of the natives, under the banks of a magnificent salt-water river. Its banks were covered with a close forest of cycas palms. The well was formed by the natives, who had raised a wall of clay, by which they caught the fresh water which sparingly oozed out of a layer of clay very little above the mark of high water." (1847: 404-405)

This place is easily recognisable from Leichhardt's description as Manankura, the homestead site of Manangoora Station. This is Yanyuwa Rumburriya territory and a part of the larger Rumburriya territory covering most of the islands.

Leichhardt pieced together from what saw around him the processes by which the cycas fruit were being detoxified and prepared. They were first sliced into thin discs, spread out on the ground to dry in the sun and then soaked for a few days in water. After this they were tied up in tea-tree bark to undergo fermentation. The result was "a mealy substance, and harmless; but [it] had a musty taste and smell, resembling that of the common german cheese" (1847: 409-410). According to Aborigines packets of fermenting cycas were stored in pits and were rewashed before they were prepared as loaves baked in the ashes. Cycas was processed

in this and other ways, decreasingly, until it was replaced completely by white flour after the second world war.

Cycas is the only food McArthur River Aborigines stored in a processed form. Manankura cycas was used to support ceremonial gatherings at Manankura but it was also taken in parcels to be consumed among the islands. Manankura cycas evidently supplemented the islands' relative shortcomings in vegetable foods and complemented the large amounts of protein harvestable from the coastline and the sea. Indeed, the Manankura area is probably the richest mainland environment within Yanyuwa territory, and it has quite good supplies of freshwater for a place so close to the coast. It represents the southeastern edge of Yanyuwa territory, the beginning of Karrawa Wudaliya semi-moiety territory being coinciding with the first cycas forest encountered by Leichhardt. It is as if the island-oriented Yanyuwa and the riverine-oriented Karrawa have divided this important resource between them. On the other hand individuals from both groups cooperate ceremonially and, here among the cycas groves, the differences between the two peoples are expressed symbolically as a ceremonial complementary opposition.

The Karrawa Wudaliya cycas is supposed to have been brought to the area by a disembodied spirit (a ngabaya) called Niwunya, who came from the west with a Yabuduruwa (cf.

Elkin, 1972) type of ceremony. The Yanyuwa Rumburriya cymas is supposed to have been brought from Queensland, the opposite direction, by a Shark called Yulunguri who now resides at Manankura. The name is interesting because 'Yulunguri' is very like the name of an Arnhem Land rainbow serpent known as Yulunggur (cf. Warner, 1969) and a strong case could be made to show that the Shark is a variant of the rainbow serpent complex. I will not make this case here but it seems that the Karrawa/Yanyuwa and Wudaliya/Rumburriya contrasts could form part of an embracing metaphysical opposition between disembodied spirits and rainbow serpents which I discuss later in the thesis. In any case, ceremonial traditions of both moieties are represented among the cymas and, if there was sufficient food available, it would not have been uncommon for ceremonies of one moiety to alternate with those of the other during one year, as they sometimes do at Borroloola. In short, there are good grounds for thinking that this area has long been a major focus of Aboriginal population and a major ceremonial site.

The well described by Leichhardt above is very likely to have been Manankura itself. A white gum tree bearing another of the Shark's names, Karijiji, and a large cymas, Mamajabulari, stand near the well. This is where the Shark kujika circumcision song begins and the first three verses "sing" Manankura, Karajiji and Mamajabulari. Sung on the night before the circumcision of a Rumburriya novice, the

song follows the journey of the Shark to Lake Eames on Vanderlin Island. It ends there with verses or 'legs' describing the head, tongue and ribs of the rainbow serpent which resides there, and some which aim to calm the beast. There is some uncertainty about where the Shark is actually supposed to have travelled, and it is often said that this song is sung "backwards". Manankura is the Shark's final resting place, the well marking his entry underground. The uncertainty may reflect a conflict between the mythology of the shark which wishes to mark Manankura, an accessible centre of population with abundant vegetable resources, as the Shark site of greatest importance and the thematic imperatives of circumcision songs. Thus it seems appropriate that such songs would describe a journey from the safety of known society, from kith and kin, to some remote and dangerous habitat of supernatural powers, rather than vice versa; and this is the course of the Manankura song.

Mythology has it that Yulunguri came from Dumbara near Doondagee Mission, that his unusually large penis was mocked by his sons, that he tore out the cycas trees standing nearby and that he took them with him to Manankura. The island Rumburriya today maintain that he left some cycas under the water at Wurrima north of Muluwa, Cape Vanderlin. However, at Manankura a Manankura (as distinct from island) man told me that on Vanderlin Island Yulunguri met a small wallaby, abuluwadi, (which is a Dreaming there) who refused

to let him leave any cycas there saying: "No. I don't want that marnja (i.e. cycas) here, that's from the mainland.". Yulunguri replied "All right! You have no kujika [i.e. song cycle] now." and went on to Manankura, where he left the cycas. This emphasises the singular importance of Manankura for ownership of the Shark song, whereas the islanders' assertions that there is cycas at Wurrilma belong to a view in which Muluwa is an equally important Shark Dreaming site.

Notwithstanding this tension, both fragments imply an equivalence between having the ritual aspects of the Shark Dreaming and the cycas. Moreover, the 'Manankura mob' and the 'Muluwa (Vanderlin Island) mob' overlap considerably in their composition, with some Muluwa people having ties through spiritual conception to Manankura, and their unity is celebrated in the highly conservative medium of the kujika song. The Shark myth's seemingly Oedipal theme, appropriate enough in a myth of a circumcision song, underlines the need to maintain the patriarchal order between fathers and sons within particular families and in the larger organisation of society. Indeed it is the special function of the Shark Dreaming people to 'make men' for their collective patriline and for others of their semi-moiety. This the Manankura Rumburriya have in common with the island Rumburriya but, as I will shortly discuss, the higher religious rites of Yanyuwa of their semi-moiety are attached to totemic sites among the islands.

The cycas was harvested and prepared jointly by men and women though it is not clear which of the tasks involved in the process fell specially to either sex. The fact that both stands of cycas have important ceremonial significance for men suggests that the ultimate control lay with men. I suspect that women did much of the harvesting, slicing and washing and that the end points of the process were most closely controlled by men, particularly to the extent that this involved storage in pits. The contribution of this food to supporting populations gathered at Manankura for ceremonies, mainly men's ceremonies, was probably quite crucial to their success; and in this respect this kind of resource left men far less dependent on women's labour than they would have been if the main vegetable food was wild rice or some other grain. To this extent cycas reinforces the effect of men's gains in productivity resulting from the canoe and harpoon technology. One might expect this to result in a greater structural emphasis on relations among men and for this to be reflected in men's ceremonial structure by a valorisation of intergenerational relations between males and patrilineal descent.

The Kundabira Mortuary Stones. The most distinctively Yanyuwa mytho-ritual complex is entirely a phenomenon of Vanderlin, North and other smaller far islands in the Pellew Group. The legendary Dugong Hunters, who are discussed more fully in the following section, came "in the beginning" from

Wannguluyu, somewhere to the east of the Vanderlin Island, and passed through the islands on their way to the Limmen River. They are credited with a number of creations but one of them, perhaps the most singular, was recorded by Flinders on North Island in 1802.

"Under a shed of bark were set up two cylindrical pieces of stone, about eighteen inches long; which seemed to have been taken from the shore where they had been made smooth from rolling in the surf ... Round each of them were drawn two black circles, one at each end; and between them were four oval patches, at equal distances round the stone, made apparently with charcoal. The spaces between the oval marks were covered with white down and feathers, stuck on with the yolk of a turtle's egg." (1814: 176).

These are kundabira, ceremonial obelisks which are uniquely owned by the Rumburriya island Yanyuwa who received them from legendary Dugong Hunters who deposited the raw stones only at certain places on North and Vanderlin Islands. Like the Dugong Hunters, kundabira are 'Dreaming' (yijan) but they are also sacred or kurtukurtu, a word which has unmistakable connotations of wealth. Kundabira and lala (hollow log coffins, though kundabira are also lala) are all kurtukurtu and they are hoarded in sacred places within the patrilineal territory of the deceased. In this respect they are like the ceremonial stones and boards of the Aranda (cf. Strehlow, 1947), which are also stored in secret places, and, also like the Aranda objects, the number and antiquity of the objects held in these stores reflect the prestige of those who control them.

The secret and sacred mortuary rites of the Boroloola people have now effectively lapsed. Once, the bones of important men were interred in log coffins which were painted with highly potent sacred ceremonial designs representing the deceased's patrilineal totem. Kundabira were designed in exactly the same way. They were used when the bones of the deceased could not be recovered, for example when the deceased died at sea, but they were also prepared as an additional honour for men whose bones were interred in log coffins. The use of these objects conferred prestige on the men acquiring them, typically siser's sons of the deceased, and on the local group on whose territory the object was stored as kurtukurtu.

Individuals wishing obtain a kundabira for these purposes had to provide gifts to the senior nimaringi and jungkayi for the possession of the stones. They had also to pay for certain ritual services from these men who alone held the rights to certain songs necessary for the proper ritual preparations. Only the men concerned with the ownership (including jungkayi) of the Dugong Hunters Dreaming in the Rumburriya parts of the Pellew Islands had this capacity.

The full details of the use of kundabira cannot now be ascertained but the available evidence suggests that the islanders (with their jungkayi) had a monopoly over both the natural resource and the manufacture of these objects,

the sole function of which is to represent wealth and prestige. The use of the stones reflects the interest which a local group, especially members of its agnatic core identified with its local totemic sites, has in perpetuating or increasing its prestige as measured by its stores of sacred objects. However, the decision to commemorate the death of a member of such a group is made by full nephews of the deceased, that is, sons of female members of the patriline. No doubt Yanyuwa nephews would be more likely to commemorate their mother's brothers with a kundabira than others who may be less willing to endorse the ritual 'currency' of the islanders. Nonetheless, the islanders must have had the prestige to sustain the value of these objects and the evident persistence of the kundabira for over a century indicates the considerable standing which the islanders must have maintained over this period and probably longer. Presumably their close relations with Macassans and their hold over the trade in foreign goods contributed to this. Perhaps also, the mysterious value of the kundabira was reinforced by the reputation of the islands as perilous, remote and lonely places, a reputation which may have persisted from pre-Macassan times when it would have been even more applicable.

It is conceivable that control of the kundabira conferred advantages in the marriages of Yanyuwa men. Yanyuwa men are notable for their vigorous espousal of patrilineal

values (cf. Reay, 1962) including patrivirilocal residence which is a widely held ideal among Borrooloola Aborigines. In practice, patrilocal residence has to overcome the interest which wives have in remaining with their own families, the wish of their families for them to remain nearby and the obligations of sons-in-law to parents-in-law keeping them away from their own country. Potentially, islanders could have been less attractive as husbands for mainland women because their patrivirilocal residence among the islands would have meant a greater separation between women and their families, given that most or many marriages would have been between islanders and mainlanders. It would appear, at least, that these factors would have introduced additional strains in relations between husbands and wives and between affines.

The role of nephews in their mother's brothers' mortuary rites reflects the close personal relationship which is often maintained between relatives in this category. However, as I explain in my later discussion of kinship, one dimension of this relationship is affinal: the mother's brother is credited with having provided his sister to his nephew's father. The nephew's mortuary services occurs within a varied framework of relationships which includes this affinal dimension and, indeed, the nimaringi-jungkayi relationship. (The role of the nephew in mortuary rites, the wuwari role, is distinct from, but obviously continuous

with, the role which he would have as a jungkayi of his mother's totemic estate.) Within this framework the kundabira may be an incentive to potential affines, compensating for the deficit in the islanders' attractiveness as sons-in-law with an extra load of ritual duties to wife-giving groups.

The Myth of the Dugong Hunters. The legendary Dugong Hunters were men who lived in their canoes, hunting dugong and turtle with harpoons and ropes. In two places on their line of travel, once among the Pellew Group and a second time near the Limmen River, the same events occur: two of the group go in search of firesticks to cook a dugong or turtle which has been harpooned. After one accidentally falls into a deep hole during the search for fire, his friend returns to get help and the whole group attempts the rescue using a rope (the kind used in harpooning dugong and turtle). However, the man in the hole is too heavy, even for the group, and after he is lifted "halfway" up he falls back, pulling his friend in with him. The two men in the hole declare that they will be all right and farewell the others. The latter continue chasing dugong towards the west until they reach the Limmen River. There they succeed in spearing dugong first, in a race with some Kangaroo people who had travelled from McArthur River Station southwest of Borroloola and southeast of the Limmen. Consequently, the saltwater receded from the land to its current position, a

process which is sometimes perceived as a reversal of the original positions of land and sea.

As the islanders see it, this was their victory - "we been win" - and the mainlanders were left with the disadvantages, to hunt kangaroo and to be chronically short of flesh. The inequality formed the basis for exchange. The Dugong Hunters promise to give meat to the mainlanders and they are allowed to marry mainland women in return. Notwithstanding this outcome Rumburriya islanders perceive the Dugong Hunters, with whom they closely identify, to have been the ultimate winners. (A mainland version of the myth, dealing only with the contest, disagrees with the islanders' version and sides with the Kangaroos. It holds that the Kangaroos merely observed the race to spear the dugong, which was contested by two groups of coastal people, the Dugong Hunters from the Pellew Group and another group from the northwest. The latter are supposed to have won.)

The two falling-into-a-hole incidents occurred after the group had stopped travelling to cook dugong which they had caught, and two men went in search of firesticks. The significance of fire here could be related to its use as a metaphor - the expression "going into the fire", used by men, means to get married - and the lack of fire may be pointing to a lack of women, seemingly an obvious feature of this all-male group. More directly, the lack of fire, or

rather the lack of fire sticks (two sticks, one drilled into the other), was felt because they had raw meat to cook. This suggests the notion of two complementary functions, hunting and cooking, and a quantitative imbalance between them. This theme seems to recur in other aspects of the myth, possibly in the difference between travelling and remaining at one place. Thus the Dugong Hunters travelled in pairs, one pair in each canoe, but their travel was impeded, firstly by the need to cook their meat. This causes the two 'fire-searchers' to separate from the 'meat-havers' but they also separate temporarily after one falls into a hole. At this point one could speak of a process of splitting of pairs having reached its zenith.

The Dugong Hunters are delayed by this because they are unable to leave the man in the hole alone, to use the words of a narrator, "without a mate". Symbolically, the rope bears the tension between the lone man and his fellows, a tension between mobility and immobility and reflects social continuity against the previous discontinuous process of splitting. These tensions are resolved by the second man joining the first in the hole. This allowed the rest of the group to continue on its way since, apparently, the problem lay with the prospect of the first man being alone. Ultimately, it is said, both men grew old and died in the hole, though they are still somehow present to this day.

It is mysterious that the whole group could not lift the man out of the hole. He is said to have been extraordinarily heavy. Perhaps it is implied that his mate was correspondingly light, because he was the only one of the rescuers to be pulled in to the hole. Indeed, the myth has a number of other puzzles, and possible psychosexual meanings in its apparent use of phallic and uterine symbols, which I don't propose to investigate here.

The basic message of the story, which is concentrated in the the falling-into-a-hole incidents, is the recurring imbalance - too much of one thing and not enough of another - arising from social or physical isolation. As a whole the myth points to the problem of a group, no doubt the Rumburriya island Yanyuwa, physically separated from a larger social entity with which it needs to participate and, at the same time, to maintain its uniqueness. The problem is to strike the correct proportions between isolation and participation, between social continuity and discontinuity, and the myth of the Dugong Hunters proceeds to this ideal balance by a progressive - or "dialectical" given its binary character - resolution of these problems as the Dugong Hunters approach the Limmen River.

The myth emphasises, by their origins in Wannguluyu, that the Dugong Hunters, and the people identified with them, are quite different people to the mainlanders. In so far as

this is supposed to apply to the islanders it is literally incorrect. But this, and the representation of the dugong hunters as all grown men (initiated men too, perhaps suggesting that they are men made by men rather than born of women), sets the scene for the contest which brings the islanders and the mainlanders together. This occurs not among the islands but at the coastal mouth of the Limmen River, precipitating the current positioning of the line between coast and sea.

The kinds of problems with which this myth apparently deals are quite specific to those confronting the island Aborigines, in particular the most permanent core of the island population, the Rumburriya people who mainly lived on Vanderlin island. The myth reinforces the view that the islands and the island way of life was very much the domain of men exploiting marine resources with canoes and harpoons. It deals also with the problem of competition for wives and the economic relationship between meat and marriage which is involved in the customary support of parents-in-law by sons-in-law. The chauvinism expressed through this myth is somewhat unusual in the region's totemic mythology but so is the specificity of the myth. It is indeed an unusual circumstance where a totem should so directly represent the material reality and the material concerns of the totemites, and so closely resemble them.

3.5 The Yanyuwa language

There are three points about the Yanyuwa language which distinguish it from the other languages in the region. Firstly, unlike the languages belonging to their neighbours, Yanyuwa has no close cognates languages. Secondly, there is the large number of its noun classes. Thirdly there is the fact that men and women speak different dialects of Yanyuwa. The second and third points highlight the first for no language in the region matches Yanyuwa for the number of its noun classes, and Yanyuwa is the only language in the region with a males' and a females' dialect.

No systematic study has been made of relationships among these languages, but the evidence available strongly suggests that Yanyuwa is remote from the others. Thus Capell (1976: 616) points out that Yanyuwa is the most easterly of the prefixing languages north of a line from the Kimberleys to the Gulf. This distinguishes it from Karrawa and Binbingka though not from Mara. Heath (1978: 10), however, regards Yanyuwa as remote from the Warndarang-Mara-Alawa group, which in turn is genetically "rather remote" from a more northern group consisting of Nunggubuyu, Ngandi, Ngalkbon, Rembarrnga, Ngalakan and Gunwinggu. Together these two groups form a family of languages which are more closely related to each other than any is to Yanyuwa. Since Karrawa and Binbingka are not even within the prefixing

group they would be even more remote from Yanyuwa than Mara.

Kirton (1971) provides a comprehensive treatment of the linguistic aspects of Yanyuwa noun classes. She distinguishes four types of noun and fifteen noun classes according to various syntactical criteria, including prefixation. One of these types and five of the noun classes consist of kinship terms. Proper names form another type and they are subdivided into two classes: personal names, names of some ceremonies and place names. Another type consists of nouns which take a possessive prefix indicating inalienable possession. The remaining type includes seven classes of common nouns. Kirton names these as follows: female, male, feminine, masculine, food, arboreal and abstract. The first two classes distinguish the gender of persons - females and males - whereas the remaining five classes are non-personal. These five classes cover an area which might be described as the environment of discrete objects. The other classes and types, by contrast, fall under the following headings: names, kinship terms, possessive/body-parts (human and non-human), and persons (male or female), all of which suggest connectedness of a human sort, except perhaps for the possessives.

Among the environmental classes the feminine class includes nouns for female members of particular species, whole species of some birds, reptiles, insects, fish and trees,

some natural objects and phenomena, female spirits and some things associated with ceremonial life. Not all of the items in this class are obviously associated with femininity though many of them are, and it seems that whenever non-human femaleness is marked it is marked by the prefixation (and suffixation) appropriate to this class.

The masculine class covers a broader range of items than the feminine class and has the largest number of items. Kirton (1971: 26) notes that of 340 common nouns appearing in her texts, 220 were masculine. All generic terms, most natural phenomena and the broad categories of the physical environment, and key concepts in ceremonial life and mythology are masculine, along with items in similar categories to those of the feminine nouns. It seems that the masculine category is the dominant one, most numerous and most embracing.

The class Kirton designates "food" includes many non-flesh foods but it also includes many items which are not food. It does not include animal species or natural phenomena but many of its non-food items, such as firesticks, are manufactured. As food is also processed, being made could be an underlying criterion of this category. However, not all manufactured objects are classified with the food nouns and, like many of the other classes, the semantic basis of this class is not transparent. One interesting feature of

this class is that it now includes many European items e.g. motor cars, ma-motorcar, money, ma-money, bread, ma-bread. Being marked for this class seems to imply the object is made, ready to be consumed or exchanged.

Kirton's "arboreal" class includes nouns for many items made from bark or grass, things associated with camps and shelters and the residential aspect of camp life, items which are quickly made for immediate use, among other things. Finally, the "abstract" nouns include stems relating to conventionally defined places (e.g. ceremony ground and fighting ground), law, song and noun derived from adjectives or other nouns. This is class has the fewest items.

The types and classes of Yanyuwa noun stems are distinguished by prefixation and suffixation under varying grammatical conditions. The males' and females' dialects employ the same stems and are distinguished by similar means. Kirton observes that the sexual division is one of the basic elements of Yanyuwa social life and she attributes the dialectal difference between male and female Yanyuwa, and the four classes of nouns marked by gender to this fact. This is undoubtedly true although it is equally true for all Aboriginal societies. It is hard to see how sociological differences among Yanyuwa and neighbouring people alone could account for the existence of Yanyuwa sexual dialects

and their non-occurrence among their neighbours. A linguistic basis for the development of these dialects is the extensive development of affixation in Yanyuwa, which has provided the means by which the sexual division may be expressed in the structure of the language. If Yanyuwa had to rely on basic lexical differentiation rather than differential affixation then it would seem less likely that a sexual differentiation of dialect could be managed.

Sociologically, there appear to have been particular factors in the relations between men and women in the maritime environment of the McArthur River delta. For example, there is the apparent environmental split between the masculine life of the islands and their associations with male secret ceremonial life and the mainland, which is probably a better environment for women. On the other hand, the male/female dialects could be a local manifestation of a tendency for extreme sexual segregation manifested by some other island dwelling Aborigines, notably on Melville and Bathurst Island and on Groote Eylandt (cf. Rose, 1960: 19-20). There is no evidence of such segregation today although unmarried men are thought to have much greater access to married and single women's camps than was generally allowed in the region until European times.

It is interesting to consider the sociological factors which could have contributed to the maintenance of Yanyuwa as the

language of the McArthur River delta. The feature of the language which may be sociologically significant is the extent to which semantic meanings are carried by the grammatical structure of the language. The grammatical conditioning of noun stems, especially the common noun stems, narrows their possible meanings and associates them with particular fields of relevance in social life; and this meaning is conveyed independently of whether the meaning of the stem is understood. This semantic processing of lexical items gives Yanyuwa a capacity to synthesise new vocabulary from foreign material, making them work within the structures of Yanyuwa grammar and adapting their significance to the framework of cultural categories.

This ability may be of particular importance to the Yanyuwa for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Yanyuwa were probably one of the smallest groups in the area. They may have been about half as numerous, or less, as the Karrawa, they were smaller than the closely related Kurtanji and Binbingka groups, and they were very probably smaller than the Mara. Moreover, Yanyuwa was not part of a larger population speaking closely related languages. It is striking that Yanyuwa is the most singular language of the region and its principal speakers were the most culturally and environmentally specialised people of the region.

As a small isolate the Yanyuwa probably always had a high

rate^{of} immigration and high rates of extra-'tribal' marriage. Yanyuwa have married extensively with Mara and Karrawa in the past, and the same pattern continues today though Yanyuwa have more recently also found spouses among Tableland groups. Furthermore the Yanyuwa have tended to absorb new members from the Mara population either through the manipulation of local totemic associations or by adoption, a practice which Stretton (1893) also noted to be frequent. It seems that migration and assimilation were important in the renewal of the Yanyuwa population.

The character of the Yanyuwa language may have a particular value in these processes. Thus on the one hand the language can absorb words from migrant and neighbouring languages into its own structures and facilitate communication among linguistically different members of the population by its semantic classification of nouns. On the other hand, while absorbing new material to its semantic categories, Yanyuwa has the capacity to conserve the basic features of the language and the cognitive classifications of its specialised culture. No doubt this capacity was exercised in contact with Macassans. However, it seems more likely that the environmental specialisation of the McArthur River delta Aborigines, and the characteristics of their cultural adaptation, had a conservative effect on their language, encouraging them to retain their language while those around them changed. The sexual dialects could, under this

interpretation, be an ancient feature of Yanyuwa, predating the Macassan presence and reflecting the seclusion of women among the island Aborigines. If this is correct, the custom of female seclusion would have been a factor in the controlled (by men) access of Macassan men to Aboriginal women, and the equanimity with which Aboriginal men recall these relations.

3.6 Territorial identity

The previous discussion has paved the way for a consideration of the significance of labels like 'Yanyuwa', 'Karrawa', etc., and the linguistically and culturally marked populations they designate. These have historically been called 'tribes' but they are clearly different from what are called tribes elsewhere. While this is generally agreed the tribe concept has been highly controversial in Australian Aboriginal anthropology. The case of the Yanyuwa, at least as they were before settling at Borroloola, which I have discussed in greatest detail, cannot serve as a model for comparable groupings in other parts of Australia but it does shed some light on them in the immediate region. However, before considering this issue I will review the main issues in the debate about Australian 'tribes'.

Early Australian Aboriginal anthropology had a 'tribal' view of Australian Aboriginal societies. 'Tribes' were basic social units, collective entities each with its own internal organisation and customs. Spencer and Gillen, in particular, organised their whole research effort in terms of tribes as ethnographic units. They derived their notion of the tribe from theories of group marriage and local organisation which characterised the social evolutionism of their time. Thus, on their way to Borroloola from Oodnadatta they detected evolutionary tendencies, namely the increasing internal differentiation within 'social organisation' and the seemingly greater development of the local organisation. Interestingly, the coincidence of these two movements, which were represented by the sub-section system and by local groups, respectively, reached its highest point and synthesis in the semi-moiety system which they found at Borroloola (cf. Spencer and Gillen, 1904, 1914).

Radcliffe-Brown rejected this kind of theory but not the basic concept of the tribe. His notion of a tribe as a group distinguished "by possession of a name, a language and a defined territory" (1913: 144) remained unchallenged until 1959 when Berndt (1966) reconsidered it in the light of his Western Desert experience. He found the concept could not usefully be applied to Western Desert society and argued that the emphasis on language as a criterion defining social groups was misplaced.

Berndt isolated a number of functionally discrete social groupings - "the dialectal unit, the local group ... the horde, the religious cult unit ... and the wider unit ... of a number of hordes coming together for ... sacred rituals" (Berndt, 1966: 54) - which do not overlap in the ways implied by Radcliffe-Brown's view of the tribe in Australian social organisation. Hiatt's (1962) critique of Radcliffe-Brown's views on local organisation, which formed part of the 'tribal' view, also pointed to the need to unpack the various spheres of Aboriginal social life which had been assumed to coincide. In particular, Hiatt showed that it was necessary to distinguish economic and ritual relations to land.

Ostensibly supporting Radcliffe-Brown, Stanner⁽¹⁹⁶⁵⁾ nonetheless developed Hiatt's distinction, arguing that local organisation has an ecological-territorial and a social, including ritual, dimension. He felt that insufficient attention had been given to the territorial aspect and its systematic interactions with the social. Accordingly, he refers somewhat approvingly to Birdsell's and Tindale's work on the ecological and demographic bases of Aboriginal 'tribes' as complementing social anthropological models.

However, Birdsell (e.g. 1953, 1976) and Tindale (e.g. 1974) have seen themselves as extending Radcliffe-Brown's views on the tribe and local organisation. Briefly, they (especially

Birdsell) see dialectal tribes as largely endogamous populations of about 500 people sharing a common territory and dialect. The size of these units is supposed to be determined by the constraints on the minimum size of breeding populations. Since this is held to be constant, variations in carrying capacity and therefore population density results in variations in tribal territories.

Sutton (1978) has trenchantly criticised the Birdsell-Tindale hypothesis in general and specifically in relation to Cape York Aborigines. I will not reproduce all his argument here, but he is generally critical of the linguistic theory which has accompanied the concept of the dialectal tribe. This is that the pattern of Aboriginal linguistic diversity reflects variations in the density of communication caused by extra-linguistic factors bearing on population structure. On the contrary, Sutton maintains that speech norms have important indexical functions in social life, equivalent in some ways to totemism as a system of indexing difference, and that "dialects have diverged and converged in relation to each other" (1978: 231). Rather than describing the limits of society different languages and dialects are important in defining relationships within the social field. Sutton demonstrates this with material from speakers of the Wik dialects of Cape York and he argues that there is evidence that language has similar functions in Arnhem Land and in the Western Desert.

Indeed, there are notable parallels between Cape York and the Western Desert, and Berndt might as easily have written critique of the 'tribe' from Cape York material. In both places Tindale's 'tribal' names refer to dialectal marks (e.g. wik means "language, words, (totemic) story" in Wik dialects (Sutton, 1978: x)), and there has been considerable flux in territorial associations. In Cape York, Sutton notes, groups who have changed territorial identity have retained their dialectal identity and similar processes have occurred in the Western Desert (Berndt, 1966). However, one difference between Cape York and the Western Desert Aborigines is that in Cape York (and also in northeastern Arnhem Land) dialects belong to local groups, though two or more groups may share a dialect, whereas in the Western Desert dialect appears to mark out identity at a more inclusive level and, generally, with less specificity (cf. Berndt, 1966: 50-1).

Evidently, in different Aboriginal societies language indexes different levels of social organisation and coordinates with other elements of social structure in different ways. That is, there is no basis for assuming uniformity in the relations among languages and group structures. In addition to the differences already noted between the Western Desert and Cape York, one may point to instances of moiety dialects in northeastern Arnhem Land (Tindale, 1974) and to Central Australian cases.

Thus, Walbiri (Meggitt, 1962) and the Arandic languages (Strehlow, 1947) appear to belong to 'communities' or, with Walbiri, to a population divided into four territorial communities. In fact, the situation with the five Aranda dialect blocs described by Strehlow seems to parallel that of the Walbiri except that there is greater linguistic diversity among Arandic languages. This could indicate a longer history of linguistic diversification within Aranda than within Walbiri. If there is indeed a long historical process leading to this result, then the association between language and community is quite marked in Central Australia. Although there is greater linguistic diversity in the Northern Territory Gulf than in Central Australia, the community-language model has some application to the McArthur River area. I will therefore briefly describe this community organisation as Meggitt found it among the Walbiri.

Meggitt saw these communities as the basic units of Walbiri local organisation, consisting of relatively stable populations with defined territories. A community is likely to be divided into several residential bands, though these may fragment into smaller family groups in certain seasons, and will include totemic cult lodges and sub-sections representing all formal divisions of society (1962: 51). Meggitt maintains that members of the four Walbiri

communities have a common, strident Walbiri ethnocentrism. Nonetheless, the 'tribe' is not conceived as an entirely self-sufficient entity and Walbiri have ritual and marriage links with other central Australian groups. Walbiri ethnocentrism seems to be a concomitant of their highly integrated cultural and social system (Meggitt, 1972) which manages to embrace all departments of life in a highly charged religious framework. The sub-section system, traditionally absent in Cape York, Arnhem Land and the Western Desert, seems to have an important role in this integration. Indeed the Walbiri stand out as a group strongly identified with a cohesive social system and as a highly successful Aboriginal population even under European conditions.

Although there are many differences between the Borroloola tribes and the Central Australians, particularly the Walbiri, there are important similarities in 'tribal' organisation. The territorial flux of dialect groups in the Western Desert or Cape York is not apparent in the Borroloola region, and there is less dialectal variation within the languages. There are no dialects of Yanyuwa (apart from the gender dialects); Mara, Alawa and Warndarang are different languages within a family, and there may be two dialects of Karrawa (Karrawa and Kunindiri), the most numerous of the Borroloola 'tribes', with the largest territory. None of these is in any sense an autonomous

social entity and they depend on larger regional populations for marriage and ritual support. From this point of view the whole population of the southern Gulf littoral in the Northern Territory, and the Barkly Tablelands, is the unit of population for Borroloola and for the Yanyuwa in particular.

Notwithstanding this, the Borroloola 'tribes' are consciously associated with territories consisting of adjacent totemic 'countries' belonging to the major social divisions as these are described by the semi-moiety or sub-section systems, and language-identity has a clear spatial expression. Moreover, at Borroloola, though residential groups are mixed because of intermarriage, the two main camps were known as the Yanyula (i.e. Yanyuwa) and the Karrawa camp as well as by other, topographical names and there is considerable 'tribal' chauvinism between these two labelled groups. I have mentioned the aggressive territoriality of the island Yanyuwa and that the islands formed the heartland of Yanyuwa territory. For the Karrawa, the centre of the universe lies around Robinson River Station, where I was solemnly (but inaccurately) told that no Yanyula had ever set foot.

This conflicts somewhat with Heath's (1981) perceptions of the Mara, the immediate western neighbours of the Yanyuwa. He maintains that the 'tribal' names refer to linguistic

differences which are not easily transposed to territorial differences or to any clearcut social grouping:

"Frequently, however, we can say that a particular language was the principal medium of communication within a number of affiliated clans who resided together during a portion of each year (usually the latter half of the dry season, from about August to December). These confederations of clans had no institutionalised corporate identities in ritual, politics, or the exchange of women. Thus 'language group' is a linguistic rather than a social grouping, and in some cases (e.g. where a clan or other unit was strongly bilingual) it is even difficult to demarcate the boundaries among the language groups." (1981: 1)

It is not clear why, if these 'confederations of clans' had no territorial basis, they came together each year. Surely it is not suggested that they did so merely because they had a common language. There is no doubt that at any time of the year one would have found linguistically mixed groups, and multilingual people, in any of the tribal territories and this is currently the situation at Borroloola.

The essential point concerns the status of particular languages within particular territories. Language, as Sutton demonstrates, is not neutral with respect to other domains of culture, to territoriality and totemism in particular. To Aborigines particular languages are felt to be the expression of the same kinds of creative forces which have shaped culture as a whole and which underly its unity. These forces find expression in metaphysical terms emphasising the value of continuity, notably the idea of

Dreaming. One reality which could be behind such ideas is surely the set of environmental forces bearing on populations which shapes culture to a particular state of adaptedness. In this area language groups tend to coincide with ecological divisions and to be identified with locally adaptive variants of the regional culture. Such local cultural variants represent variations of the culture of the whole region, a region composed of more or less specialised, differently scaled sub-populations broadly associated with particular environmentally coherent areas with numerous linkages with neighbouring people.

Yanyuwa territory focuses on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the McArthur River delta and, like those of equivalent groupings, it is ecologically coherent. As an environment for an Aboriginal population, it differs from its neighbours by its concentrated marine resources which could be effectively exploited only by incurring certain costs (such as increased mortality due to marine conditions) and by dealing with certain other environmental limitations (such as isolation and limitations in vegetable resources). The Macassan presence among the islands gave the Aborigines certain benefits, especially in material culture, which may have compensated for some of the disadvantages of their environment and it could have strengthened the marine-island orientation of the Yanyuwa as whole. Indeed, their strong claim to the important vegetable resource at Manankura

suggests that the islanders were influential, and it seems likely that the Macassans contributed to this.

In general, the islanders' adaptation to their environment did not remove disadvantageous factors, such as the communication problem or the physical risks. Rather, Aborigines found ways to live successfully among the islands in spite of them. As with all human plans, adaptive strategies (such as the use of canoes and harpoons) have ramifications other than their main beneficial effects. Thus the great importance of the canoe and harpoon technology could have been conducive to male solidarity and Yanyuwa patrilineality, which is expressed particularly in their semi-moiety system.

Adaptive behaviour can also have non-adaptive consequences which then have to be dealt with. For the Yanyuwa, a high degree of specialisation within a small environmental range seems to have meant a small population compared to their neighbours. Consequently they have relied, not only on marriages with other groups, but on immigration and 'adoption' to maintain their population. The special features of the Yanyuwa language could have been conserved because they facilitate the assimilation of new people to the group in ways which minimise disturbance to the existing 'Yanyuwa' order.

As I discuss in a later chapter, there is a marked regional preoccupation with locality as a cultural code. Practically all cultural artifacts are mapped onto the land at particular sites and human social relationships are mediated topographically. There is virtually no unsocialised space and little unlocalised sociality. This strong focus on locality and territory suggests that all places could have been taken under pre-European conditions though the current population would be fairly thinly spread if people were to return to their pre-European territories. If the pre-European population was fairly stable at the maximum size that could be carried under the cultural conditions which then prevailed, it is likely that local variants of culture, such as that of the Yanyuwa, not only represent a beneficial adaptation to a particular environments but had a role in regulating relations between local segments of the population, including the claims which particular individuals could make to territorial resources.

I should stress that this is not to say these linguistic and cultural 'tribes' are or were corporate groups or discrete population islands. If the island Yanyuwa appear to approximate this more than other groups it is only because their environmental specialisation led to a relatively specialised way of life with its own set of problems. Their own view of themselves emphasises a kind of genetic continuity linking the present generation to the 'beginning'

(wangala) but this is conceived in ways which obscure the actual movements of people. Names (other than nicknames or European names) are tied to territory, so is song ownership, the ownership of ceremonies and ceremonial designs and speaking a language. Enfranchisement in these cultural resources and behaving in the appropriate ways are basic to an individual's identity which is constructed in terms of what was given by the Dreaming. This is supposed to have been passed down by patrilineal descent, but this principle is a highly flexible one in practice. These localised identity claims, which make up much of the Aboriginal Law, have the effect of stabilising the population without freezing it entirely against counter tendencies favouring flux. However the Yanyuwa population is maintained it becomes Yanyuwa in name, language and culture by fitting in to a cultural matrix which is essentially tied to sites within Yanyuwa territory, and which is built around particular environmental assets within the context of a regional society.

One interesting aspect of the Yanyuwa style of life is the split between the islands and the mainland. The evidence indicates that there was a population for whom Vanderlin Island was their home and who adopted a predominately maritime life style, moving around the islands by canoe. At the same time, other sections of the island population had much more contact with the mainland, and some Yanyuwa were

probably mainly resident on the mainland. The precise situation no doubt depended on seasonal factors among others. However, cutting across these differences the islands appear to have earned a reputation as somewhat dangerous and mysterious places, holding numerous sacred sites controlled by men with access to them by canoe. Women, on the other hand, probably had a greater chance of realising their social and economic interests on the mainland.

Chapter 4

THE BIG CAMP AT BORROLOOLA

In this chapter I briefly outline the history of Borroloola and the Aboriginal movement to the town. There is considerable inequality among Aborigines at Borroloola with respect to the resources of the town, and I describe the numbers of the main groups and their relative status. After that I describe the largest camp at Borroloola during my fieldwork and analyse its structure in terms of the articulation of ritual and domestic relations.

4.1 The Islanders go to town.

During the 1890's Borroloola reached the peak of its development. At that time it boasted a Tattersalls and Royal Hotel, two stores (one of which was a customs agent) a forge, a butchery, Chinese gardens, a court house and a police station. Although islanders may have been among the first Aboriginal town dwellers, a large population continued to live on the islands in much the same fashion as before

town was established. They remained a somewhat awesome group until at least the time of Spencer and Gillen's visit in 1901. By then Borroloola had become the virtual ghost town it was to remain for the next half century or more. Island life collapsed shortly afterwards, probably about the time of the last visits of the Macassans in 1907, and the islanders increasingly turned towards the town.

After the expulsion of the Macassans some trepanging, fishing and pearling was carried on by Europeans. Two of the most senior Yanyuwa men, Old Tim and his older brother Banjo, worked for Captain Luff, a trepanger, who took them as far as the Torres Straight islands to the east, and Broome to the west. According to Berndt (1954: 105) Luff was killed by Aborigines at Caledon Bay in 1915. The pattern of trepanging and trading among the Sir Edward Pellew Islands was broken nonetheless, and the islanders lost the advantages which they had gained during the Macassan era. In 1923 the marine surveyor Paradise visited the Pellew Group and left a somewhat dismal portrait of the Vanderlin Island Aborigines:

"The group is inhabited by a more or less nomadic tribe who wander from island to island and at times make their way up the McArthur River as far as Borroloola. There is one family that rarely leaves Vanderlin Island, living as far as I can gather, ostracised." (Paradise, 1924: 7).

The Vanderlin Island family included the men who had worked

with Captain Luff, and some of the older Vanderlin Island Rumburriya. Tim and Banjo remember being in contact with Paradise and assisting him with his surveying tasks. The suggestion that the Vanderlin Islanders were living as an ostracised group is very doubtful: there is no trace of this having been the case. Indeed the Vanderlin Island family was, while I was at Borroloola, the central group in the Yanyuwa camp. Its oldest members dominated the ceremonial life of Borroloola, and its younger people occupied most of the positions created for Aborigines by Europeans. Old Tim's second living son was the Aboriginal Inland Mission's pastor at Borroloola, his two daughters were nursing aides in the health clinic, his younger brother's son was the community advisor, a sister's son was the chairman of the council, another sister's son was the police tracker; and there were other influential members of this family. In short, from the 1920's to the 1970's this family left the obscurity of its island home to become the leading Aboriginal family in the township of Borroloola. To understand how this transition had occurred it is necessary to appreciate what was happening elsewhere in the district.

During the 1920's, perhaps earlier than this, a number of Europeans established the camps which were to become the pastoral stations named Manangoora (Manankura), Greenbank and Seven Emu stations between the Wearyan and the Calvert Rivers. These men became known as the "combos", presumably

because their life style combined Aboriginal and European elements. They ran small grazing enterprises, sometimes with cattle stolen from larger stations on the Barkly Tablelands, farmed peanuts, mined salt, and fished for trepang. In all these activities they required the aid of local Aborigines. For their part, the Aborigines, who were mainly Karrawa people, had access to a supply of European goods, and they were able to renew a life on their own lands which had been traumatically disrupted during the period of the Gulf Stock Route - a period of pastoral activity on a larger scale which, for various reasons, failed.

Relationships between the combos and the Aborigines probably had much in common with those established previously between the Macassans and the island people. The combos were frequently dependent upon the assistance of Aborigines who were living with them; and, like the Macassans, the lines of exchange tended to follow affinal or quasi-affinal relationships. The combos had Aboriginal wives at a time when this was illegal, and east of the McArthur River the combos and the Aborigines pursued these arrangements beyond the official order.¹

¹. The combos came into open conflict with officialdom during trials which came into court in 1934. In 1933 a policeman apparently tortured and killed an Aboriginal woman, Dolly, who had been living with a whiteman, Norris, in the Calvert Hills area. The events are retold at Borroloola by Aboriginal men who were arrested along with Dolly but they are also recorded in newspapers and in

The small enterprises established by the combos have continued and today they are in the hands of their part-Aboriginal children. For many years they were important centres of population for the mainly Karrawa Aborigines east of Borroloola, providing a conduit for supplies of valued European goods outside the township. Unlike the islanders, these mainlanders did not have to vacate their territory to obtain European goods and, until recent decades it was less urgent for them to secure a hold over town resources.

West of Borroloola many of the Aborigines who had survived the early period of pastoral expansion had been drawn to the

Parliamentary reports. The charges against the policeman failed, though he was undoubtedly guilty, partly because there was no apparent motive. This could have been supplied by the combos who must have realised that the policeman had acted out of frustration. Having spent weeks in a fruitless search to arrest Norris for stealing cattle, he arrested Dolly and other Aborigines who had been working with Norris. Though he arrested more on his return journey, the policeman directed his worst violence to the Calvert Hills people, especially to Dolly, apparently because they would not help him find Norris. The policeman probably (rightly) suspected the combos from the coastal places of being involved in Norris' operations since they had long been a destination for stolen cattle from the Tablelands. Frustrated and feeling his authority mocked, he retaliated against the combos by arresting their Aboriginal associates on his way back to Borroloola. They responded to this, and to Dolly's death, with a remarkably resourceful public campaign which forced several official enquiries and two prosecutions of the policeman. Judge Wells dismissed the charges against the policeman and concluded the final trial by castigating the combos, who were accused of going nearly naked at home and "speaking half-blackfellow".

Roper River mission, established in 1908. The singular feature of the Mission as far as Aborigines were concerned was that although its resources were limited, it was set up specifically to cater for their needs. Admittedly those who derived benefits had to concede a great deal in return. Nonetheless, their eastern neighbours did not obtain similar protection and care from Borroloola, and the town was a more meagre resource than the Mission. The first Aboriginal inhabitants of the town, mainly the Wilangara, Binbinga or Kurtanji people who held the surrounding land had born the brunt of the violence of the early pastoral industry and suffered again from exposure to the hazards of fringe dwelling, especially to epidemics of influenza and other illnesses. The newspaper reports of the 1890s (The Northern Territory News) indicate that Europeans perceived illness to be a major problem among Aborigines at Borroloola. The Yanyuwa also suffered disease, though the islanders and others living further away from Europeans might have been more protected than Aborigines living on the fringes of Borroloola during its brief prosperity. The eventual decline of the original town groups through disease and other causes possibly facilitated the islanders' move to town.

As Leichhardt's experience further downstream on the McArthur River indicates, the Yanyuwa were practiced in dealing with foreign peoples. This may have given them an

advantage over others in dealing with Europeans at Borroloola, in addition to their familiarity with the McArthur River delta. Until recently Borroloola was dependent upon shipping for its supplies and islanders, including Banjo, Tim their younger deceased brothers, worked as pilots bringing the cargo boats up through the dangerous waters of the McArthur River. They also gained employment in unloading cargo.

When the Northern Territory Administration's Welfare Branch set up a ration depot at Borroloola in 1949, the Aborigines were brought to live in town on a permanent basis. At about the same time missionaries from the Aboriginal Inland Mission arrived and, somewhat in competition with the Welfare depot (Reay, 1962, 1970), built their own establishment. This was the beginning of the revival of Borroloola as a town. Banjo and Tim worked for the Welfare Branch and helped to build the missionaries a school and church. Though they declined to become Christians, they sent their own children to the school, where they and other members of their generation learnt the rudiments of literacy. At this time the islanders continued to move between the islands and the town, but effectively they were based in the town. These events paved the way for the dominance which the Yanyuwa eventually achieved in European employment at Borroloola.

Changes had also been occurring at another level. The ceremonial authority at Borroloola was a man named Dambalyarma, probably a Binbinga or a Wilangara by patrification. He had been made a "king" by the police at Borroloola; an instance of Europeans adapting their strategies for controlling the Aboriginal population to indigenous structures of power. However, Dambalyarma fell from grace after he cut his wife's throat in a fit of jealousy and was taken to Darwin for trial. The control of Dambalyarma's ceremony passed to Pharoah who is now regarded as belonging to what is said to be Yanyuwa Rumburriya land immediately to the north of Borroloola, though it is possible that he was not Yanyuwa by descent and that the land in the vicinity of Borroloola was held by a different group of people.

Pharoah had been conceived on Vanderlin Island, probably during the 1890's, and he had been given the name "Lawulawu" which is associated with a place on the path of the Dreaming (totemic) Shark mentioned earlier. The islanders, including Banjo and Tim and their "managers", allowed Pharoah to wear a design and dance in their Kundawira (i.e. not kundabira) ceremony, which was still being performed in the islands. In turn Pharoah gave Banjo and Tim marks for his Kunambu ceremony at Borroloola. Banjo and Tim conceived some of their sons at Borroloola and these men were given names to endorse the connection. After Pharoah died the ritual

control of Borroloola and the surrounding land, which was, or at least is now, Rumburriya country, passed to the Rumburriya island Yanyuwa who thenceforth were on home ground. The younger brother of Banjo and Tim, who has only recently died, put these events in the following words:

"Those old people gave us Kunambu because we gave them Kundawira, so we all shared. "All right" [they said] "You three fellas [Banjo, Tim and himself], boss for Kundawira, you can have this country." We came from overseas and we been win this country from our own ceremony. No Karrawa been use our ceremony, Karrawa got no kujika [song]. Alawa people, we don't know them, we only know Mara people."

During Macassan times the island Yanyuwa occupied the southeasterly tip of the region where the maritime civilization to the north, an Asian Mediterranean, intermingled with Aboriginal Australia. With the rise of European power in the south of the continent and its decisive extension to its northern boundaries, the island Yanyuwa maintained their role as brokers between foreigners and other Aborigines. However, the polarity of the political compass changed from the north to the south and the islanders became mainlanders attached to a township as remote from the centres of European power and commerce as the Sir Edward Pellew Group was from the centres of Asian commerce in the nineteenth century.

4.2 Population, residence and employment at Borroloola

During the dry season of 1975 there were between about two hundred and eighty-five and about three hundred and fifty Aboriginal people living at Borroloola. This population can be categorised as shown in Table 1.

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>pop.</u>
Karrawa	121
Yanyuwa	117
Mara-Alawa group	32
Kurtanji-Binbingka group	18
Waanyi and Tableland group	12
Others (Kalkudungu, Walbiri, Jawon, Rembarrnga)	5

Table 1 Language/area group and population
at Borroloola in the dry season 1975.

The categorisation of people by language group is not a particularly reliable index of social status because many people have a number of possible language group identity arising from particular kinship, life-experience and ceremonial associations with others. However, the value of this breakdown of the population is that it indicates the origins and links of the main segments of the Aboriginal population at Borroloola.

Thus, the Karrawa come from east of Borroloola and still have important social connections in that direction. The

Borrooloola Karrawa generally have close associations with the stations east of the McArthur, with the tiny settlement at Wollogorang and with Doomadgee Mission in Queensland, where many Karrawa still live. Most of the Yanyuwa population lives at Borrooloola, which they regard as Yanyuwa country. The Mara-Alawa group have come mainly from the coastal and riverine areas west of Borrooloola, and continue to maintain links with cattle station settlements in this area and with the Aboriginal settlements at Ngukurr (Roper River) and Numbulwar. The Kurtanji-Binbingka group are the remnants of the devastated escarpment tribes who mainly live at Borrooloola, McArthur River Station or on the Barkly Tablelands. The Waanyi and Tableland group consist of people with close historical ties to the large stations on the Barkly Tablelands, particularly Anthony Lagoon, Eva Downs, Brunette Downs and Alexandria Downs Stations.

Members of these groups tend to live close together in the same part of town. There are four residential areas where most of the Aborigines live. The residents of the Rocky Creek camp immediately to the north of the town area (numbering about 150) are mostly Yanyuwa and Mara. The camp on the eastern bank of the McArthur River opposite the town is the 'Karrawa camp' (about 100-120 people). Tableland people not attached to either of these camps (20-60 people) live closer to the town centre in the 'Tableland camp' or 'Tank-house camp' (the latter so called after a dwelling

made out of a water tank bequeathed by one of Borroloola's famous eccentrics, Roger Jose). In addition six houses in the town area built for Aborigines accommodate about fifty people. Around Christmas time the numbers of people living in these areas, and the total population of the town, is dramatically increased as seasonal workers and Aborigines living elsewhere come to the town for the 'man-making' Marndiwar business.

In 1975 twenty-nine people (nineteen men and ten women) had permanent employment in the town. The largest employer was the Municipal Council which employed twelve men in general maintenance work around the town and garbage disposal and water and firewood carrying to the camps. The Department of Aboriginal affairs employed three men and three women, the school employed one man and four women, the health clinic one man and three women, the Police employed a male police tracker, and the Aboriginal pastor of the Aboriginal Inland Mission received a small regular income and the use of the church's premises. There was also a local National Aboriginal Consultative Committee representative who received the equivalent of a small wage with an additional amounts for expenses.

The distribution of jobs tends to reflect tribal identity. Thus, whereas the numbers of pensioners (about 16 Yanyuwa and 13 Karrawa) and the numbers of women receiving child

endowment (about 14 Yanyuwa and 14 Karrawa) tends to reflect the nearly equal distribution of the two main groups at Borroloola, this is not reflected in the distribution of jobs.

In the government built houses six of the nine adult men have full-time jobs and seven of the thirteen women have full-time or permanent part-time (2) jobs. Four of the men are Yanyuwa, one is Kurtanji (though he associates more with Yanyuwa than with the Kurtanji group) and the other, a groundsman at the 'Welfare' is a lone Jawon. Three of the working women are married to the Yanyuwa workers. One of these is a Karrawa woman, the others are Yanyuwa. The other four working women are Yanyuwa and unmarried.

In all, five Karrawa men and a sixth, a Yanyuwa man who resided in the Karrawa camp, had full employment in the town during 1975. Another four Yanyuwa men from the Rocky Creek camp had jobs, two Mara men living in the same camp had jobs and both the pastor and the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee member lived in this camp.

This is sufficient to show the influence which the Yanyuwa have in the available employment at Borroloola. Actually the case could be strengthened by pointing to the close kinship or marriage which exists between many of the employed but the general pattern is clear enough. The

Yanyuwa also predominate in key positions of leadership in organisations representing Aborigines in the town. Notably, the pastor, who attained his position at a time when this was one of the few avenues for ambitious Aborigines, was an island Yanyuwa; the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee representative, although Mara by origin, is one of three brothers who have very close links with the leading Yanyuwa identity from Mara origins; the police trackers have tended to be Yanyuwa families; the president of the Aboriginal Council is Yanyuwa, and the Aboriginal community advisors have been a Yanyuwa man and, more recently, one of the Mara-Yanyuwa brothers.

These thirty wages brought about five thousand dollars per fortnight into the Aboriginal community at Borroloola, about twice the total of all pensions and social service benefits. Social service benefits are paid according to criteria which have little to do with the local political scene. There was a tendency to overlook the more marginal sections of the population but if they stayed in town long enough they would eventually receive any social services to which they were entitled. Most of the social security money came as aged pensions, supporting mother's benefits and child endowment. In 1975, though unemployment was quite high due to low prices for Barkly Tableland cattle, it was not until late in the year that unemployment benefits were paid; and the entitlement to these benefits depended to some extent on

having a history of employment. The effect of these policies was that women probably received more of this money more regularly than did men, it being understood they were responsible for the care of their children.

The 'Tableland mob' is the poorest and the least influential group in the region. Divided between Borroloola, Elliott and Tennant Creek, they have been largely displaced from the Barkly Tableland cattle stations - which are on a much larger scale and are much more developed than the coastal and riverine stations east of the McArthur River - though they often return there to work during dry seasons. Of all Aborigines at Borroloola members of the Tableland mob are the least likely to have jobs on the Municipal work gang or to hold other jobs in the town, the least likely to hold positions in local Aboriginal organisations, the least likely to have a secure place to live within the town areas and the least likely to have beneficial ties with local Europeans.

4.2 The Rocky Creek camp.

During my fieldwork at Borroloola the Rocky Creek camp was the largest Aboriginal residential area. It was also known as the Yanyuwa camp or the 'Big Camp'. It was a descendant of the previous 'Big Camp' at Malandari on the eastern bank

of the McArthur several kilometres downstream of the town, which was the main Aboriginal camp at Borroloola during Welfare times. In the early 1970s the Malandari camp was disbanded. Its Yanyuwa and Mara inhabitants crossed the river and camped close to the current Rocky Creek location but little farther out of town and closer to the river. After this camp was flooded the people moved to the present location between two mission buildings which had been left to Aborigines by the missionaries. One of these was the church, which was occupied by the Aboriginal pastor.

The Karrawa people stayed on the eastern bank of the McArthur but moved upstream from Malandari to opposite the town. There is also a number of brick houses which were built on the town plan area for Aborigines, and there are other small camps around town.

Here I will describe the main features of the Rocky Creek camp as it was in 1975. The aim of this is to show how the central relationships in the structure of the camp. These are depicted schematically in Diagram 2. It should be understood that Aboriginal camping arrangements are highly changeable and that, in this case, while the structure of the camp was preserved for a year or longer (depending on which features are considered basic) there were many small scale changes over that period. Major changes since 1975 followed the deaths of several men and women who had been

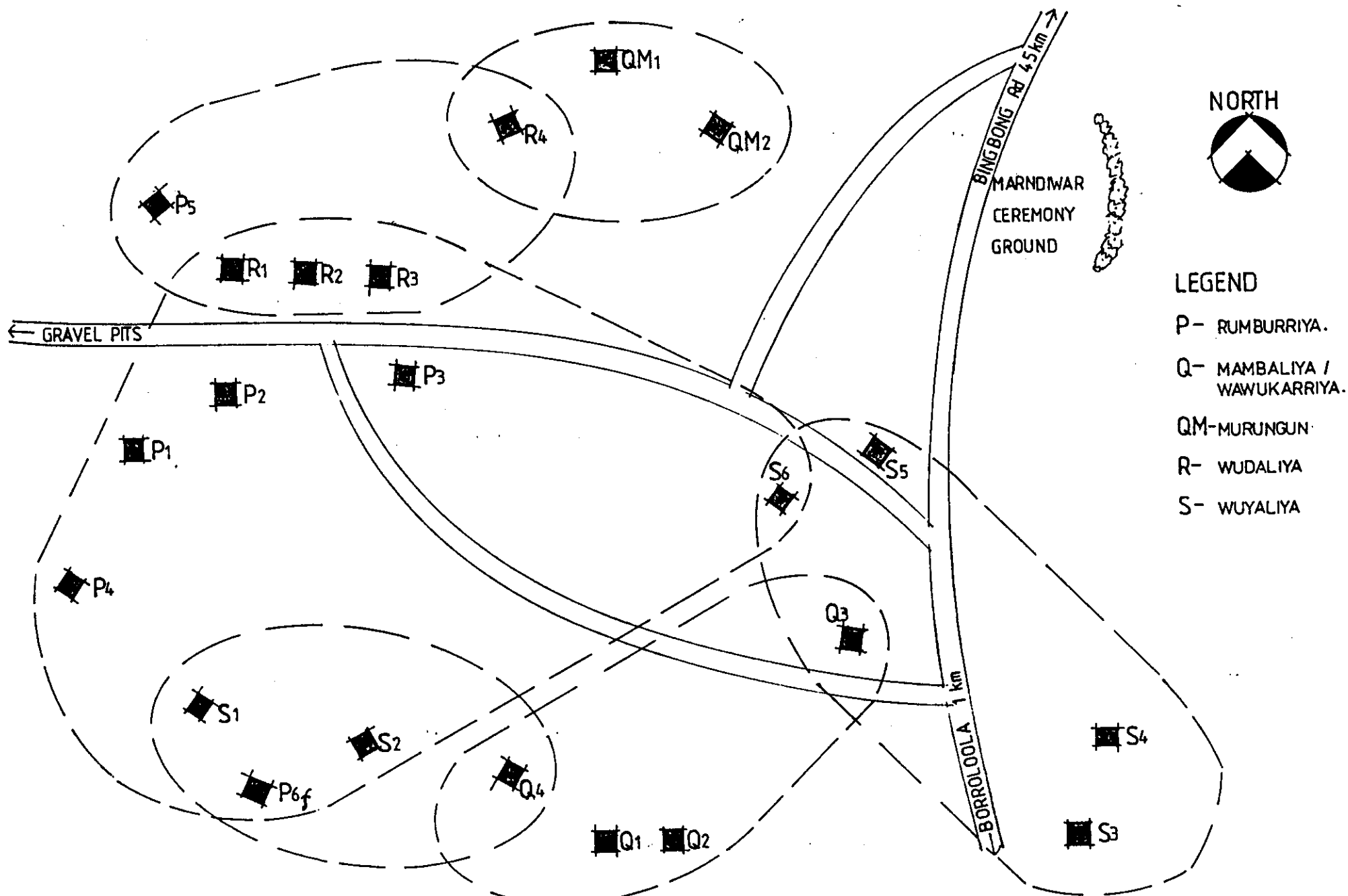


Diagram 2 Plan of Rocky Creek camp, 1975

focal individuals.

The symbols on Diagram 2 - 'P', 'Q', 'QM', 'R' and 'S' - indicate the semi-moiety identity of the individuals who can be regarded as heads of households. These letters stand for Rumburriya, Mambaliya/Wawukarriya, Murungun (Mara), Wudaliya and Wuyaliya, respectively. Mostly these are males, but some, as I will explain, are female. A glance at Diagram 2 indicates the clustering of household heads of the same semi-moiety in particular parts of the camp, and this is why I have chosen to represent households by what is essentially ceremonial status. However, these ceremonial associations are articulated with other domestic and secular relations in the structure of the camp. I will describe some general features of the camp before analysing its structural features.

The camp site is a flat sandy area rising slightly from east to west, with a small number of low trees and shrubs. Apart from the two mission buildings (P4 and QM2 on Diagram 2), the Bing Bong road and the road to the gravel pits, both of which were graded, which were made before the Rocky Creek camp was fully established, the remaining structures were the work of the camp dwellers. The track passing by Q3 and P3 shown on Diagram 2 was worn by vehicles travelling within the camp. There was no piped water in the camp, no sewerage and no electricity. The dwellings were mostly one-room

humpies made of bush timber and corrugated iron. Some single adults or visiting families did not have their own dwellings and lived virtually under the stars with little more than their bedrolls, or in the backs of wrecked vehicles.¹

For all its disadvantages the material poverty of the camp made it a highly flexible living area. When tensions arose between neighbours, for example, it was easy for one or the other to move camp, even to the extent of dismantling and rebuilding the dwelling. The most substantial humpy could be moved within about two days, and sections of humpies could combine or be separated according to the ownership of the materials. Indeed in domestic arguments the humpy itself was sometimes a target with various people claiming their own 'iron' and removing their parts of the building. Furthermore, whenever somebody died in the camp their dwelling and the immediate area was vacated and close kin had to move to other camps. In fact, the the whole camp was continually being changed by its inhabitants in response to

¹. In the 1974-75 wet season Borroloola was twice flooded. It was reported that some Aboriginal people were left with no housing and the Air Force provided some heavy duty tents. Actually, only a few dwellings were directly affected by the floods, and the Air Force tents served to ameliorate a pre-existing shortage of wet season accommodation. Rising ground water was a persistent problem during the wet season because the dwellings had no floors. In general, the wet season brought increased stresses which led to additional morbidity and mortality, particularly in the very young and the very old.

disagreement or deaths, to improve physical comfort, to accommodate the steady stream of visitors who joined it periodically and to adjust to their departure.

The physical arrangements of a camp such as the one at Rocky Creek therefore closely responds to the structure of social relationships among its inhabitants. However, with all the flux there were some highly stable relationships which formed the basic framework for the Rocky Creek camp.

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In a limited sense the domestic family - by which I mean a residential unit consisting of a married couple and their (his/her) children - is structurally central to the residential organisation of the camp. However, the significance of the domestic family lies less in it being a unit of residence than in the relationships which comprise it. Some of the residential units in the Rocky Creek camp do not contain families and some which do have other relatives attached. What is most significant about the domestic family is the nexus of relations between husband and wife and between parents and children coinciding in a domestic unit. This nexus is a problematic one which affects many aspects of the organisation of the camp.

The salience of these relations is indicated by the other regular feature of the individual camps, the domestic cooking fire. A single residential unit can consist of

several dwellings and sleeping areas in association with a main fire place which represents a key distribution point for prepared food. Typically this fire will be tended by one or more women. One metaphor men use for marriage is 'going into the fire', the expression having somewhat ribald connotations relating to regular sexual intercourse with women in marriage. However, metaphorical associations between eating and sexual intercourse represent a common theme in Aboriginal culture; and this particular example seems to reflect rather directly the cultural norm that women have charge of the domestic fire in which food is cooked.

The significance of this is enlarged by the fact that Aboriginal women make a significant contribution, not only to the preparation and distribution of cooked food, but also to its supply. They do this by gathering food from the bush, by buying food from the store, mostly with social security money, and by calling on obligations from other female or male relatives. Marriage for men not only sanctions sexual relations with their wives and the chance to claim the children resulting from their wives' fecundity, but also conveys the benefits of women's labour represented by the domestic fire. Their claims on women in this respect do not amount to a monopoly. Women also feed themselves and their children and these demands can take precedence over the claims of their husbands even when the children are

married.

The situation here is as Hamilton (1975) found elsewhere: food collected by men tends to be distributed by men according to religious rules, and women remain in charge of their own production which they tend to distribute through their offspring. At Borroloola many husbands do contribute to the supply of domestic food bought at the store and some couples pool their resources. But in the domestic sphere women retain control over most of the food supply as it is distributed from the fire.

In the light of this and the clustering of camps by the semi-moiety of household heads, as indicated on Diagram 2, it can be anticipated that the structure of the Rocky Creek camp is resolvable to two sets of relations: relations articulated through the structure of predominately male ritual, and relations articulated with respect to the domestic fire place which are closely associated with women's productive and reproductive interests.

In term of ceremonial authority the men of P1, P2 and P3 held the highest status in the whole camp. These are the senior Yanyuwa men of the Rumburriya semi-moiety from Vanderlin Island. They had, in addition, control over the ceremonial estate attached to the land around Borroloola (as I described earlier); each was highly expert in all of the

Borroloola song cycles used in sacred cult ceremonies and for the men's part of the Marndiwar initiation rites, and they comprised the core of an exclusive group of men who chanted the songs on the night of women's Marndiwar dancing. As well, each of these men had fathered large families and had many grandchildren. The son of the P2 man was the pastor (P4), two adult sons lived in a dwelling attached to his camp with a son of the P1 man and some other single men; and he and his wife had adopted the children of another man who also lived attached to P2. The daughters of the P2 man had jobs in the town and lived in one of the brick houses and his oldest son, a council employee, also lived in a house. This man, one of the few men of his generation who had, like older men, undergone ritual subincision, also had high ceremonial authority.

Thus, although the principal couples of P2 and P3, and the widowed P1 man, were pensioners their numerous employed relatives provided them with additional money. The P2 couple, moreover, received additional social security money to support their adopted children, and the father of these children also contributed to their support. Relatively speaking this couple had access to a flow of cash which they were able to distribute to relatives as cash or in kind.

The female head of P6 was regarded as a close classificatory sister of the P1, P2 and P3 men. She was a

widow of a man of the Wuyaliya semi-moiety but after his death continued to be the focus for the substantial households S1 and S2 headed by two of her sons. Some of her unmarried daughters and their children lived with her camp and a (deceased) sister's daughter was married to the man of Q4. The P6 woman not only was a focal individual for many of the relationships in this cluster of camps, she represented the linkage of this camp with the P2 family. Her sons and daughters regularly visited their classificatory aunt and uncle at P2.

Another close classificatory sister of the three Vanderlin Island brothers was married to a very old man, S6. Her daughter was married to Q3 and they had a large family. The Mambaliya/Wawukarriya men at Q1 and Q2 gained some support from their classificatory brothers' wives (at Q3 and Q4). The wife of the old man at Q1 was old and blind with few relatives in the camp and his younger widower brother at Q1 tended the main cooking fire in that part of the camp. These people were attached to the camp through their married younger classificatory brothers at Q3 and Q4, who in turn were attached by marriage ultimately to P1, P2 and P3, and they provided some of the pension money to their brothers' families. However, the solidarity of this pocket of Mambaliya/Wawukarriya men was reinforced by their ceremonial interdependence, the older men being the senior Mambaliya/Wawukarriya nimaringi. They had control of the song

cycles necessary for the initiation of the young Mambaliya/Wawukarriya men at Q3 and those attached to their mothers at P6.

The position of households S3, S4, S5 and S6 was articulated in a similar fashion. The man at S6 was the senior Wuyaliya nimaringi married to the close classificatory sister of P6. This woman (at S6) was a close classificatory mother of the man at S5, who was married with several young children. His wife's closest relatives in the camp were the old men at Q1 and Q2, her classificatory fathers. The S5 household was structurally attached to the mother-daughter pair linking S6 and Q3. However, the position of the S5 man was strengthened because he was a jungkayi of the Q men, and a close classificatory wife's brother of the Q3 husband. The S3 and S4 households were headed by men whose wives had few linking relatives in the camp but, again, they were senior Wuyaliya nimaringi men of high ceremonial status. The man of S4 was regarded as the leader of the Wuyaliya song cycle. Only the S3 household had children.

Thus, relationships among the P, Q and S camps were linked ultimately to the three brothers at P1, P2 and P3 by ritual links among the semi-moiety groups and links through well-connected females with substantial families. This accounts for about half of the camp. The other half focused on the R semi-moiety. The physical separation of these two halves

was marked by the graded road to the gravel pits.

The heads of R1, R2 and R3 were all senior Wudaliya men of the same generation and with the head of R4, who was in a senior generation and the senior nimaringi, comprised a group of men with similar ritual associations. These were the leaders of the Mara Yabuduruwa in Borroloola although the heads of R1 and R3 usually identified as Yanyuwa.

The heads of R2 and R3 were sons-in-law of P1, whose wife had died. R3's wife had also died and his children were supported by the R1 household and, to some extent, by the P2 household. The R1 couple had no children, the usual avoidance between father-in-law and son-in-law had lapsed between R1 and P1 and both father and husband tended to be fed by the same woman. P1 was also supported by his classificatory daughter at R1.

The households at QM1 and QM2 were headed by two Mara brothers married, respectively, to a Queensland woman with no relatives in the camp and to a Karrawa woman without close relatives in the camp. The men lived near their mother's sister, whom they treated as a mother, and they had close kinship links with the household at R4. The status of this cluster was closely associated with the control of the Kunapipi cult. The head of R4 was then the most senior jungkayi for the cult and the two brothers were two of four

brothers who were the principal nimaringi for the Rosie Creek area, although their main country was further west at the mouth of the Limmen River. The head jungkayi had refused to allow the cult to be held at Borroloola for many years, to the frustration of the senior Yanyuwa men. He died in 1975 and control of the ceremony passed to his younger brothers, who allowed it to be held. The death of this man precipitated a realignment of relationships and the senior brother came to live at Borroloola in close association with P2.

The critical relationship linking the two principal halves of the camp was that between the heads of P2 and R1. It was also the most strikingly ritualised relationship. These men, each heads of families of three generations, stood as father-in-law to son-in-law. The R1 man maintained the strictest manners of avoidance of his father-in-law and mother-in-law though they only lived only a few metres away. He lived his life hidden behind his humpy and sheets of iron which he constructed as a windbreak. Sometimes his father-in-law called out some news or a message, but he could not speak in return.

A puzzling aspect of this relationship is that this man's wife was not the natural daughter of his parents-in-law, but only a daughter by adoption. Her father was a Nunggubuyu man from Numbulwar. She was raised from girlhood by her

adoptive parents. She retains her relationships with her Numbulwar relatives including her mother's full sister.

The son-in-law's story was also unusual. While he was still a baby it is said that he and his mother were taken away by 'Balamumu', i.e. Blue Mud Bay people or north-east Arnhem Land people, and that he spent his early life in that country. When he was an adult he and his mother returned to the McArthur River area. There he argued with and killed a classificatory father's brothers, his "youngest father". His classificatory fathers, and his real father under one interpretation, were 'mixed' Yanyuwa-Mara men who belonged to the Yanyuwa Wudaliya country on the western side of Yanyuwa territory. Some people said his 'real' father was a Balamumu. Following the murder, he was gaoled in Darwin but was released with other prisoners during World War II. He then found his way back to Borroloola. There are, therefore, a number of points on which his status at Borroloola, including his status as Yanyuwa Wudaliya nimaringi, was open to question. It is possible then that his attachment to his 'father-in-law' was motivated in part by a desire to be securely incorporated in this community.

There are some additional aspects of the relationship between these two families which I should mention. One of the sons of the P2 couple, deceased in 1975, had married a daughter of the R1 couple. Evidently the marriage was

violently opposed by both sets of parents because it was too close, the marriage of a man and his "own" sister's daughter. A few years after the marriage the husband was killed in a fight and his widow then married another of the brothers, the pastor. This marriage was also opposed, on the same grounds. One of the P1 man's sons married another of the daughters or R1 and though this marriage was also disapproved it has been tolerated and the couple live at P5.

The structure of the Rocky Creek camp can be described in terms of approximately six overlapping domestic domains roughly indicated by the broken circles drawn on Diagram 2. These approximate the semi-moiety blocs although each includes other households linked by marriage or matrification. The pattern seems to be that men choose to live close to men of similar status as nimaringi. This seems to be influential in the composition of the clusters of Mambaliya/Wawukarriya households (Q), the Wuyaliya (S) households in the southeast of the camp, the Wudaliya (R) households and the Rumburriya (P) households. However, men whose wives have few close female relatives in the camp appear also to align themselves with actual or close classificatory mothers. This was the case with S1, S2 and S5; and the male heads of these households maintained their links with the P2 families through these mothers who were classificatory sisters of the male Rumburriya heads. In fact, the basis of siblingship cannot be specified in

genealogical terms. The sisters of the P men were sisters through 'one country'. That is, they belonged to the same local totemic estate as the brothers.

These structurally important relationships were thus constituted by relationships based on the sisters' maternal relationship to their children and the mystical kinship which their 'brothers' legitimated by their command of the Rumburriya ritual estate. This interplay between matricentric kinship based on natural female reproductivity and male ritual fecundity is evident in a different way in the roles of the Q men for the 'man-making' Marndiwar rites of the young Mambaliya/Wawukarriya men of Wuyaliya women at P6 and Q3; and in equivalent roles of the senior Wuyaliya men for the young Wuyaliya men of Mambaliya/Wawukarriya women at S1 and S6 and of the woman incorrectly married to the man of S2.

Women with relatives in the camp, especially actual or classificatory mothers, seem to choose to live in close association with them, and they do not show the same kind of concern with ritual relations as do men. These associations among women in the Rocky Creek camp form the basis of women's foraging groups and card playing circles, though the men of the camp also play cards with the women. The women of P6, S1, S2, S6, Q3 and Q4 regularly participated jointly in these activities. The P2 woman and her daughters often

participated with them in foraging, but they did not play cards with them. Another group of women foragers were drawn from R1, R2, P4 and P5, with the P2 women sometimes joining them. Women without such connections foraged much less. Although I have not been able to document the cooperation within these associations of women in other aspects of the daily life of the camp the sharing involved in hunting expeditions and the pooling implicit in the constant card playing among them suggest that they cooperate in a wide range of activities in daily life.

Thus, as anticipated, the articulation of men's ritual relations and domestic maternal relations can account for much of the structure of the Rocky Creek camp. Two main ways in which these different types of relations are linked have been identified. Firstly, there is the mystical association of classificatory siblings through 'one country', which is linked to relations of kin based on the natural reproductivity of the women. Second, there is the male 'man-making' function which employs as its raw materials young men who have already been nurtured by their mothers.

The relationship which still needs to be discussed is that between the P2 and the R1 families, especially that between the male heads, father-in-law and son-in-law respectively. This, as I noted above is quite critical to the coherence of

the camp for it is the main link between the northern Yanyuwa-Mara and the southern mainly Yanyuwa (but also Karrawa) halves of the camp.

Of all the relationships of the camp, that between these two men was the most publically ritualised. However, this ritual has no explicit symbolic function comparable to the series of 'man-making' rites which I discuss later. Yet it did serve to emphasise the parental relationship between the P2 couple and the R1 wife, though this relationship was partly fictional and certainly not exclusive. The R1 woman had little to do with maintaining this relationship because she was not constrained by the presence either of her parents or of her husband. In deed, her freedom in these respects meant that she could do little to affect the structure of relationships between the camps. However, the P2 woman appeared little concerned by her 'son-in-law's' strict manners of avoidance and referred to him by name in casual conversation. In short it seemed that the import of this relationship was most appreciated by the men.

The P2 man enjoyed the prestige which this perpetual deference implied, but the value which the R1 man attached to it is unclear. I suggested earlier that it could have been motivated by this man's need to fit in to the community and to a particular local totemic part of it, which the P2 man could sanction. However, this practically unresolvable

question can be put aside in favour of a more significant one. This concerns the significance of this relationship to other people in the camp. That is, the meaning of this ritualised relationship is not only to be found in the dyadic relationship between the men involved, but it had a meaning for others.

To begin with, it was the very model of correct behaviour between father-in-law and son-in-law. In fact, it was one of few instances of a son-in-law living next to, but avoidantly with, a father-in-law and the only one which endured more than a few months. Many wife's fathers and wife's mothers are not avoided, either because the marriages are 'wrong' in the sense of being between the wrong type of relatives or because they are 'too close'. Certainly, this father-in-law and son-in-law were not closely related and they stood in the correct kin categories. This relationship exemplified 'straightness' and the power of tradition; but what was the intrinsic meaning of this tradition?

This question cannot be fully answered at this point. However, a number of preliminary observations can be made. The relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law represents a critical moment of the 'man-making' circumcisional rites, for the father-in-law is the circumcisor who thereby makes the man. To understand the significance of this it is necessary to look at the symbolism of the rites

themselves and at the criteria for distinguishing fathers-in-law from other categories of relatives, which I do later in this thesis. But on this last matter, one point is highly relevant to the present discussion.

This is that, in a society which extends kinship very far indeed, the father-in-law/circumcisor, not necessarily a man's actual wife's father, occupies a very distinctive position. The father-in-law is the ultimate Other, or at least a figure of the very boundary of the social group; he is a non-relative. This is brought out in the avoidance relationship, by the symbolic castration of circumcision and the entire 'controlled attack' which the son-in-law/novice suffers in his name. Yet, on the other hand, the father-in-law works a kind of miracle on the son-in-law by 'making a man'. That is, this is a relationship between two men who represent the extremes of otherness but whose whole relationship turns on the ritually dangerous, magical transformation from child to man. There is an implication in this relationship of a magic even more fecund than that of the song man and the initiate, a relationship devoid of naturalistic kinship, a relationship of the magical kind underlying men's society. It is the very essence of male solidarity and male magic.

Thus, to conclude this section, these aspects of the father-in-law/son-in-law relationship suggest how this relationship

could bridge the gap between the two main parts of the camp and why it forms the key structural relationship of the camp. The fact that this relationship was adopted between men who were unrelated by kinship and who were, in fact, practically unrelated by marriage (because of the R2 woman's other family) merely highlights its essentially symbolic character. Even more than the song cycles which men sing during the initiation of young men, the sons of their brother's wives, the relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law embody the power which men have to make society according to their own design, that is according to the tenets of the Law from the beginning. This relationship at the centre of the Rocky Creek camp stands as living proof of the power of culture over kinship, a power represented by the Marndiwar ceremony ground visible to the east of the camp. Ultimately, that is the place where the structural relations between mothers and fathers, parents and children, kin and affines, and male and female are laid down; and it is therefore integral to the structure of the Rocky Creek camp.

Chapter 5

SEMI-MOINETIES AND THE SUBSECTION SYSTEM

In Chapter 2 I outlined the formal aspects of the semi-moiety system and showed the correspondence discovered by Spencer and Gillen between the subsection and semi-moiety system conceived as marriage classes. Spencer and Gillen explained the system in terms of the advance of the local organisation represented by totemism into the domain of the social organisation, which they thought originally derived from a situation of group marriage in which the tie to the mother was primary. To the extent that the conflict between the local organisation and the social organisation reflects the articulation of men's ritual, with its themes of spiritual fecundity, with relations based on the reproductive nurturance of women, this account is interesting, although the notion that one system has an evolutionary relationship to the other cannot be entertained.

In fact, it seems that the subsection system was adopted by Yanyuwa people at Borroloola relatively recently while the

semi-moiety systems had been established there for a long time. Moreover, the formal correspondences between these two institutions can create the impression that one could be a substitute for the other, their differences amounting to degrees of complexity. This, I think, is misleading. The semi-moiety system is more than superficially different to the subsection system and it is necessary to understand the particular socio-cultural contexts in which one or the other operate. Thus, semi-moiety organisation is particularly relevant to the local scene whereas the subsection system, at least at Borroloola, provides the terms upon which local community organisation can be integrated with society on the larger regional scale; and as Reay (1962) states, semi-moieties at Borroloola are used as ritual categories while subsections are used, to some extent, for the regulation of marriage.

If the subsection system was adopted only relatively recently at Borroloola it is interesting to consider how and why it was taken on. Although the evidence upon which a reconstruction of the pattern and conditions of the diffusion of the subsection system does not warrant any firm conclusions it nevertheless is substantial enough to justify such a task. After doing this I will describe the distribution of named semi-moieties, give an account of their role as cosmological classes and as ritual categories. Following this I will reconsider the status of semi-moieties

and subsection in relation to marriage.

5.1 The subsection system as the plan of a community

All adults at Borroloola are aware of the subsection names, especially their own, and nearly all have a grasp of correct subsection marriage and the ordering of subsections in ensuing generations by matri-filiation and patri-filiation. A few people have discerned something of the formal cycling of subsections among the four patri-couples and the two matrilineal cycles. However, subsections are not commonly used as personal names at Borroloola and the system seems much less important than it does among other Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory.

Certainly, one gains quite a different perspective on the subsection system seeing it among Walbiri where it seems to have a vital place in community structure. I witnessed this as the anthropologist assisting the Aboriginal Land Commissioner hearing a land claim by Anmatyerre and Walbiri people to Ti Tree Station. The difference between their universal use of subsection names in ordinary life and the use of subsections by Borroloola and Barkly Tableland groups, who rarely include subsection names as part of their personal names, was very striking. In those communities there is a very close correspondence between patterns of intermarriage among local groups and the formal patterns of

the subsection system, but this is far from being the case at Borroloola or among the people of the Barkly Tablelands who do not have semi-moiety names. Quite possibly the Barkly Tableland people with subsections use them in ways more similar to the semi-moiety system than the Walbiri usage. Nevertheless, it is still instructive to consider the role it has among Walbiri communities as an aid to understanding the significance of subsections at Borroloola.

Meggitt's (1962, 1972) account of the Walbiri describes an Aboriginal people with a vigorous community life and expanding territorial influence. By the community life I am not only alluding to Meggitt's account of local organisation in terms of four territorial communities, though this community identity is an important feature of their social organisation. What is really striking about Walbiri society as Meggitt (1972) portrays it is the density of sociocentric structures and the manner in which these, especially the subsection system, integrate Walbiri society into a system embracing all the departments of life. In particular, the manner in which the system integrates the highest religious values with ordinary life at the level of kinship and the family - which is the point of Meggitt's (1972) sub-title 'kinship system or cultural categories' - suggests that the Walbiri have managed to charge all of their institutions with religious charisma.

However, in Desert People (1962) Meggitt added his support to Stanner's (e.g. 1936, 1979) view that the subsection system had no important functions in the Aboriginal societies into which it had spread in relatively recent times; and he agrees with Stanner's finding that desire for prestige provided the motive for the system's diffusion: people did not want to remain ignorant of the sophistications of their neighbours. Stanner was particularly anxious to contradict the earlier evolutionary doctrines, including those of Spencer and Gillen, which saw section and subsection systems as 'marriage classes' which had developed from primitive group marriage. He, and Meggitt, wished to dispel the view that these classes were major determinants of individual marriages, and that they were indeed marriage classes in this sense.

They maintained, correctly, that it created no new divisions between moieties, generations or other possible categories, and subsection criteria were never either sufficient or necessary in the allocation of ritual roles or rights in marriage. However, this leaves unexplained why Aborigines should attach any prestige to the subsection system. Why, moreover, should the Walbiri give the system so much prominence that they use subsection terms as names and as terms of address and reference in ordinary life?

In fact, as I think Meggitt (1972) later shows, the

subsection system is used by the Walbiri as an integrating formula for a community. The subsection system, rather than adding to the structure of social relationships, places them in a highly coherent structure of relations. The patrilineal moieties and semi-moieties (patri-couples) implicit in the subsection system embrace segmentary differences between men in patrilineal lodge groupings; matrilineal and matrilineal moieties highlight the structure of certain social relationships through women; alternate generations in subsections reflect real divisions between generations in society; and the symmetry in the subsection formulae for marriage suggests balanced reciprocity in the allocation of spouses and integrates djuralja marriage alliances. All of these structures are brought into a single system through the subsection system and the general use of subsection terms within a community continuously asserts its potency.

5.2 Demographic catastrophe and cultural readaptation.

In Desert People the Walbiri emerge as a growing, organised and expansive people who had been left intact after the great pastoral expansion to the Northern Territory had ravaged their neighbours. Clearly the integrative potential of the subsection system has played a role sustaining their strong sense of Walbiri identity and cohesion. The situation with the people to their north and northeast,

whose territories were turned into cattle station is rather different. The effects of pastoral expansion and increased immigration on them have been catastrophic and it appears that their pre-contact social orders have been remodelled in an attempt to recover their communities.

From about the 1870's to the early years of this century - but especially the 1880's - pastoralists and European residents of Borroloola, apparently assisted by local tribesmen and some Queensland Aborigines, shot or poisoned large numbers of the Aborigines around the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Barkly Tableland, either in reprisal for specific Aboriginal hostilities or in an effort to exterminate them. The Wilangara and the Binbinga who lived to the west of Borroloola were all but wiped out during the years that Costello held Valley of Springs Station over the land from the Roper River to the McArthur (Costello, 1930); the Kurtanji people were devastated on McArthur River Station in the 1880's and 1890's; and the Barkly Tableland tribes - especially the Wampaya from Brunette Downs and Anthony Lagoon - were shot in large numbers as they clashed with the pastoralists. Karrawa and Yanyuwa people were also shot and poisoned though the coastal people may have suffered less than those who inhabited the inland area where the larger, more valuable and more permanent stations were established.

The extent of the catastrophe is difficult to gauge. Aborigines remember when 'all the blackfellas got shot' but only the close relatives of the victims feel entitled to speak of specific incidents and a great deal may have been forgotten. The only European account of "hunting the blacks" in this area was given fifty years after the event. A number of men set out from McArthur River Station with this aim but they unexpectedly came upon a group of Aborigines on the Broadmere outstation. Their own Queensland Aborigine apparently defected to the locals and was shot. The Aborigines retaliated with a shower of spears and killed one of the whites. A retaliatory expedition cost sixty-four Aboriginal lives, wiping out a whole group in the escarpment on McArthur River Station (Northern Standard 1/6/1934). These may have been Kurtanji, Binbingka or Wilangara people.

It is now impossible to say how many massacres there were on this scale and how many Aborigines were killed in lesser events in conflict with the pastoralists. It is not clear how long the period of intense conflict continued. Conditions were calm at Borroloola itself from early on. As early as 1890 it was reported that:

"relations between black and white out here are very close, blacks being employed by everyone about the houses and stores" (Northern Territory News 5/12/1890)

The same report noted, however, that Aborigines had been

spearing cattle in "large numbers" and it is unlikely that this was calmly accepted by the pastoralists. The same report mentioned that leprosy had been found among Aborigines. The next report described the Aborigines participating Boxing Day sports - the "niggers" climbed the greasy pole and threw spears for a prize of a pipe and tobacco - but, again, the correspondent noted leprosy and yaws among the Aborigines, and he called for urgent "philanthropic assistance". In 1892 (4th March) influenza was reported at Borroloola affecting the natives who otherwise were "behaving well". Such general pronouncements about the behaviour of the Aborigines suggest that the conflict between Aborigines and pastoralists was still precipitous although perhaps the systematic killing of Aborigines was less frequent. Disease, however, was working to the same effect.

The epidemics of influenza, malaria, leprosy, yaws and other diseases known to have ravaged the Aboriginal population could have accounted for more deaths than violence. In any case, the combined effects of these were probably unparalleled by anything which had preceded it for a very long time and the effect on indigenous social life and culture must have been catastrophic. This could have been caused increasing conflict within Aboriginal society; for the early years of the century are remembered for intense conflicts, including staged battles between different local

Aboriginal groups. The Aborigines remember this period as "wild times".

Similar events occurred elsewhere in the Northern Territory. Wherever the stock routes went, wherever the big stations, the towns, and the mines were established the indigenous societies, if they flourished beforehand, ceased to flourish. The original stock routes from Queensland into the N.T. brought cattle through and into the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Barkly Tablelands, and over to the Victoria River district and elsewhere in the northwest of the Northern Territory. Compared to this the pastoral development last century in the southern areas around Alice Springs was minor, and elsewhere little occurred. Within fifteen to twenty years the whole strip of land across the northern central Northern Territory from the Victoria River and Wave Hill to Wollogorang in the north and Lake Nash Station in the south next to the Queensland border was occupied by pastoralists whose activities sharply conflicted with those of the Aborigines who also occupied the land. The Aboriginal societies gave way to the greater force in the hands of the pastoralists and to their desires for certain European goods, and eventually the local Aborigines either were absorbed as part of the cattle station populations or they gathered at missions and other European settlements.

It was during "wild times" and the period of dislocation following it that the subsection system and certain new religious cults seem to have spread to various parts of the Northern Territory.

5.3 The diffusion of subsections

Spencer and Gillen (1904) noted the spread of the subsection system from the north into Central Australia and they felt that this was part of a general evolutionary drift of more complex cultures from the north into the Centre. However, Stanner (1933) observed the diffusion of the subsection system together with certain forms of legitimate marriage and totemism, and the Karwadi cult to the Daly tribes; among people whose population had also been devastated by contact with foreign people, Europeans and Chinese. This new culture came into the area from the southeast, through the Victoria River district, possibly from the central Northern Territory or the Roper River district.

Arndt (1965) tells a similar story for the Victoria River region where the indigenous tribes were severely reduced over about forty years since 1884. There, he says, the original religion was lost or abandoned and it was replaced by cults of the Kunapipi type found at Roper River. Though Arndt believes that the Karwadi belonged to the earlier

religion, and it may indeed have existed there in an earlier form, the Karwadi is essentially the same kind of cult as the Kunapipi and the Gadjari of the Walbiri. Anthropologists have noted the recency of the Kunapipi type of cult in various parts of the Northern Territory and various guesses have been made about its origins and the paths of its diffusion. Mostly, these involve the pastoral lands of the northern central Northern Territory, from the Roper River area on the southeastern corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Victoria River (cf. Elkin in Berndt, 1951, and Meggitt, 1966: 86-87).

There appears therefore to be an association between the pattern of pastoral settlement and the diffusion of the Karwadi/Kunapipi cults with their associated cultural innovations, including the subsection system. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that part of the attraction of these cults and social practices was that they offered the possibility of reforming the shattered communities. There are a number of features of these cults which suggests that they could be interpreted as social movements of this kind.

Thus, according to Stanner (1933, 1936) the Karwadi cults were imported to the Daly River area at a time when the older segmentary culture based on a highly localised patrilineal totemism was in decay: "The evidence is somewhat screened and recessive, but it is unmistakable.

Disintegration and degeneration have long been active"
(Stanner, 1933: 378).

Moreover, the Karwadi/Kunapipi cults place a strong emphasis upon social unification. These cults seem far less oriented to the fine tuning of social relationships through local totemic differences than the old culture, emphasising instead sociocentric moiety and semi-moiety divisions. The subsection system, and matrilineal (non-local) totemism (cf. Sutton, 1983) which was part of the culture absorbed by the Daly River tribes, similarly emphasise social incorporation. This drive towards reintegration could also account for the erotic practices associated with these cults as a means of redirecting psychic resources to the new order. These erotic practices appear to vary considerably from place to place and probably from time to time (cf. Berndt, 1951) indicating, perhaps, that these elements were carefully managed by the custodians of the rites.

The orgiastic aspects of the cults indeed seem to have affinities with the prevailing sexual life of the Daly River tribes. Stanner notes that "sexual licence, and certain conventions of love-making ... tend to induce psychic unrest" (1933: 16) and he reports the unwillingness of young men and women to undertake the traditional forms of marriage. For men in particular, the bride-service duties were an obstacle but Stanner speaks of overall difficulties

between men and women.

The subsection system defines a structure of relations among totemic status, marital rights and matrilineal links through female reproductivity. Totemic status reflects the continuity of the totemic complex and the reproduction of the system at this level while marital status and matrilineality are intrinsically linked to processes of biological reproduction. The subsection system thus defines the conditions for social reproduction as a whole. Tied to an a powerfully emotive religious cult oriented to social integration the subsection system could have appealed to people whose populations were decimated by violence and disease.

The subsection system was taken on early this century by the Yanyuwa and the Mara at Borroloola, probably in the early years of this century. Reay (1962) believes that the Welfare Branch officers' wish to record group names may have consolidated the Yanyuwa acceptance of the subsection system but she does not hold that this was their original or main motive for adopting the system. Reay also points out that the Yanyuwa had long been in contact with the Binbinga and their neighbours on the escarpment and the Barkly Tablelands whom Spencer and Gillen record as having subsections at the turn of the century and with the eastern Karrawa. There is no direct evidence indicating by how long the subsection

system had been among the escarpment people of the McArthur River region or among the Tableland people. They have no other named classes today although it is possible that they had named patri-moieties like the Jingali and Warramungu.

There is a possible vehicle for the spread of the subsection system to the McArthur River area and the Barkly Tablelands. This is the Black-headed Python Dreaming which follows the path described by Arndt (1965) from the sea north of Wyndham in western Australia to Murrarnji waters, and from there to Tennant Creek to Djun-gurra-gurro (cf. Spencer and Gillen, 1904: 299 for "Tjinqurokora"). There is, however, an easterly branch which takes the Black-headed Python to the McArthur River escarpment and beyond.

This Dreaming is associated the Karwadi cult of the Victoria River area and east of there along the McArthur River escarpment the 'Old Woman' left another Karwadi/Kunapipi variant, the Burrkuwala. East of the Stuart Highway she travelled through Jingali territory (south of the Alawa) and then through Ngarnji, Binbingka, Kurtanji and Waanyi territories before passing in to Queensland. The Burrkuwala is now defunct but it still has a deadly reputation, being credited with the near total demise of the escarpment and Tableland populations. A contentious aspects of the ceremony was the expectation that jungkayi were payed, not only in goods, but by the sexual services of young women

from the group for whose ceremony they worked. Even one of the remaining 'bosses' (nimaringi) described the Burrkuwala as "dirty business". The Kunapipi by contrast is "quiet" and "happy".

At Borroloola the Kunapipi is associated with two main Dreamings. The Walalu Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone follows a path through the coastal strip north of the Black-headed Python and in the opposite direction, towards the west and northwest. Interestingly the Walalu kujika song cycle which is sung in the Kunapipi has some songs in common with songs associated with the Black-headed Python Dreaming. Moreover, though one is represented as an olive or green swamp python, a freshwater dweller, and as male while the other, a female, is represented as a dry-land dwelling black-headed python, there are obvious parallels between them, including a great potency to destroy the world. It is possible that the Karwadi/Kunapipi/Burrkuwala type of cult was brought from the west and then reattached to the Walalu Dreaming taking it along the coast.

The other principal Dreaming of the Borroloola Kunapipi is the Kilyeringkilyeri or mararabana who enter the coast at the Rosie Creek and travel to the upper reaches of the McArthur River on the Barkly Tableland. This seems to represent a different Kunapipi tradition to Walalu, its likely origins being the Roper River area. Accordingly, the

Borroloola Kunapipi combines traditions originating in separate areas in each ceremonial performance. These require the cooperation and coordination of people throughout the Northern Territory Gulf region, the Barkly Tablelands and southern Arnhem Land who are called upon to participate in various roles. At Borroloola the Yanyuwa and Mara nimaringi of the mararabana are expected to alternate with the Karrawa and Yanyuwa Walalu nimaringi as the primary and secondary holders of the cult, and people from Numbulwar, Ngukurr and the Roper River cattle stations are called to attend. In turn, Borroloola people participate take their song cycles and go as dancers to participate in performances held at these places. Through participation in the cult the people from this large region are integrated into a larger social network.

There are other important cults which are shared in similar ways but they are less inclusive. Thus the Yabuduruwa which is closely integrated with the Kunapipi in southern and central Arnhem Land (Maddock, 1979) has local variants at Borroloola and on the Barkly Tablelands and this kind of cult is less transportable than the Kunapipi. For example, when a Yabuduruwa from Ngukurr was staged at Borroloola in 1974 it caused a great deal of controversy and bad feeling between the communities. Some of the Borroloola people resented the staging of this ceremony when they had their own version, the Wambuyungu, and when some of the Ngukurr

participants died shortly after the ceremony Borroloola people were blamed. Similar troubles attended a Kunapipi held on the Barkly Tablelands, in Burrkwala territory, but it is still true that the Kunapipi represents a unifying force throughout the region.

It is at this level of social life that the subsection system becomes the relevant guide to social relations. The various communities within the region have their own local customs and forms of organisation but the subsection system is capable of transcending the differences and expressing the overall coherence in the essential structures of social relations. These communities, many of which are still depleted and suffering the effects of European domination, have not acquired the coherence exemplified by the Warlbiri communities but they have at least a common public language of social order in the subsection system.

5.4 The distribution of named semi-moieties.

Named semi-moieties are currently used among western Karrawa, Yanyuwa and Mara people at Borroloola, and Maddock (1969b: 66) records them in use among a mixed group at the Beswick reserve including migrants from the Roper River, southeastern Arnhem Land and central Arnhem Land. Spencer (1914: 64) gives semi-moiety names for the Nullakun whom he

places south of the Roper River adjacent to the Mara. Except for the Nullakun ones, semi-moiety names are very similar between the different groups which have them, suggesting that they originated from a common set.

The semi-moieties of different tribes are supposed to be equivalent. In practice, there are problems establishing the correspondences though the ambiguities are confined within pairs of semi-moieties corresponding to the Arnhem Land patri-moieties Duwa and Yirija. I will therefore set out the semi-moiety names under the heading of the moieties though I share Reay's (1962) view that semi-moieties are badly so called and they should not be approached as subdivisions of moieties.

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>Duwa</u>	<u>Yirija</u>
Karrawa	Rumburrumburr Mambaliya	Wudalarmba Wuyalarmba
Yanyuwa	Rumburriya Wawukarriya/ Mambaliya	Wudaliya Wuyaliya
Mara	Murungun Mambali	Budal Guyal
Beswick (Maddock, 1966)	Walugar Mambali	Budal Gujal
Nullakun (Spencer, 1914)	Jobal Mangaralli	Ulakaraninni Gindar

Table 1 Semi-moiety names and correspondences

Except for the Nullakun names the semi-moiety names under 'Yirija' are variants of the same stems. 'Mambali' is found consistently except among Nullakun. 'Walugar' and 'Wawukarriya' are evidently variants of the same name. 'Rumbur-rumburr' is the Karrawa equivalent of the Yanyuwa 'Rumburriya' and it is most probably derived from the Yanyuwa name since the Karrawa seem to have adopted the semi-moiety system from the Yanyuwa. Murungun is the name of a Nunggubuyu clan which has ceremonial connections with the Mara Murungun people. Curiously, the Yanyuwa Rumburriya, though they also have close relations with Mara Murungun at the mouth of the Limmen River (the destination of the legendary Dugong Hunters) deny the equivalence between Murungun and Rumburriya. Instead they equate Murungun with Wawukarriya. This is consistent with the equivalences recorded by Spencer and Gillen (1904) except that nobody at Borroloola is willing to follow the implication that would equate Rumburriya with Mambali(ya). In fact, Mambaliya is often used to refer to Wawukarriya, though Wawukarriya is not so often used to refer to Mambaliya. These apparent oddities will be explained later.

Spencer's Nullakun terms seem out of place in the list, with one exception. 'Ulakaraninni', which Spencer found equated with the Mara Budal, sounds like a local variant of the Yanyuwa 'Wawukarriya' and the Beswick 'Walugar'. (-(n)ini is a suffix which frequently turns up in place names of the

escarpment tribes from the Kurtanji north and westwards.) If this is the case then the Nullakun semi-moieties do not observe the moiety distinctions observed consistently by the others. In view of this, and the lack of any other similarities in nomenclature I am inclined to think that Spencer was mislead in regarding these names as representing named semi-moieties among the Nullakun. Quite possibly Spencer's informant was searching for something equivalent to the Mara semi-moiety division. Such can be found throughout a large area of which the semi-moiety naming area is a small part.

5.5 Semi-moieties as cosmological classes.

Quadripartite class systems appear to have a role as cosmological classes, classifying a wide range of environmental phenomena. Von Brandenstein (1972) asserts this to be the function of the section system, and he claims that section classification of species is resolvable to two binary oppositions, cold/warm-blooded and active/passive. R.M. and C.H. Berndt found four Gunwinggu matrilineal semi-moieties which classified almost "any animal or natural feature - with a few exceptions, mostly things like small insects or grasses that were regarded as unimportant" (1970: 65). The Gunwinggu maintain that this classification was established "in the beginning" and they have no other explanation for the way different things are classified.

R.M. and C.H. Berndt did not discover the ordering of this classification either, but they suggest that this could be found in ritual, "in the complex of myth-djang-territory-sacred sites, with its patrilineal implications" (1970: 65). Merlan (1980) describes this as the basis of Mangarrayi semi-moiety totemism, which is patrilineal like the named semi-moieties of the western Gulf.

Mangarrayi call 'semi-moiety totems' marragwa and distinguish these from creative 'Dreamings', warrwiyān. The latter, Merlan says, are associated with particular subsections rather than with the subsection patri-couples comprising semi-moieties. Merlan found the semi-moiety classification to be "nearly cosmic" though Mangarrayi were surprised to find that certain common and important items, including white ochre and ibis, were not classified by semi-moiety. The semi-moiety classification of marragwa, according to Merlan, is determined by their associations with the creative warrwiyān who are depicted as having left the marragwa behind on their travels, as having used them or, in other ways, as having brought them into meaningful relations with the world. The warrwiyān are also responsible for the human social world, in particular the local totemic associations of patrilineal groups. Marragwa and humans are both conceived by Mangarrayi as the legacy of the warrwiyān and they are conceived as consubstantial: "your marragwa is/are your body" (1980: 91). On this basis Mangarrayi

restrict the consumption of marragwa species, or certain parts of them, to members of the opposite moiety and transgressors are fined for their peccadillos.

This is very similar to Yanyuwa semi-moiety totemism though they do not articulate the warrwiyan/marragwa distinction. Borroloola Aborigines do not restrict the consumption of ordinary items classified by semi-moiety but they do restrict consumption of certain ceremonial Dreamings. The rationale for this is that these Dreamings are important ritual emblems. However, some ritually emblematic species are not subject to restrictions while others are. Thus, there is no general restriction on the sand goanna, which is an important Yabuduruwa and Wambuyungu Dreaming, while groopers which are also Yabuduruwa are restricted. Similarly, restrictions apply to olive pythons but not to king brown snakes though both are important Kunapipi emblems. The pair groper/olive python, however, seemed particularly important in the articulation of a patrimoiety division within the main camp at Borroloola. On one occasion a man killed an olive python at night thinking that it was a king brown snake and all of the nimaringi for the Kunapipi, comprising the semi-moieties equivalent to Duwa, had to pay money and goods to the jungkayi from the other patrimoiety. Similarly, a European fisherman caught a large groper and gave it to an Aboriginal man who happened to be its jungkayi and the brother of the man who had killed the

python. This time the other moiety paid - it again making no difference who or how the animal had died - and the jungkayi men ate the fish! The restrictions on these two species seems designed to highlight the symbolism of their emblematic functions for moieties rather than following from semi-moiety ideology. Gropers and olive pythons seem very suitable choices to represent the complementary opposition between the moieties: against their obvious differences, they are both scaled, cold-blooded and passive predators who swallow their victims live and live in water.

Kirton and Timothy (1979) have described the Yanyuwa concept of "skin" or ngalki, the conceptual basis of semi-moieties and, by extension of subsection, as an inalienable identifying essence. Possession of "skin" is marked syntactically as inalienable possession along with names and body parts. "Ngalki" is also the smell or taste of a flower or of food, the tune of a song and the sweat from under the armpits. Armpit sweat is given - "ngalkingunda" - in a variety of ritual contexts and signals the transmission of ritual privileges. For example, when a man acquires the right to use a sacred object from another, the object is first rubbed under the established user's armpits.

"Ngalkingalki" means the sound of the voice. The qualities associated with ngalki are subtle ones which aren't easily specifiable but it seems that things having the same ngalki are imputed a common essence.

There are considerable similarities between Mangarrayi and Yanyuwa in respect of this basic theory and in their rationale for semi-moiety classification. Yanyuwa semi-moiety classification is very general though there are some things which are said to be 'nothing'. The explanation for this classification is that things belong in particular semi-moieties because of their associations with active Dreamings or because they are found within territories associated with major semi-moiety Dreamings.

Song cycles (kujika) are particularly important sources for semi-moiety classification. Each cycle is regarded as having been given by one or a small number of creative Dreamings who 'sang' all of the land through which they passed. Thus the song is imbued in the territory and both are primary forms of semi-moiety ritual property. Seemingly the power of this singing, which men do in ritual, is that it is the ngalkingalki (voice) of the Dreamings which brought order into the world by their actions and by naming the places, things and people of the countries through which they travelled.

These known associations between creative Dreamings and lesser things classified by semi-moiety are important in that people do advert to them for semi-moiety classification. However, this still leaves open the question of how particular items come to be associated with particular

Dreamings and particular semi-moiety territories. The generality of fourfold classifications in Australia raises the possibility that there is a logic in semi-moiety classification which is independent of the specific associations between major Dreamings and classified items. Conceivably, systems like the Mangarrayi and the Yanyuwa represent the joining of a cosmic fourfold classification with the patrilineal local and cult totemism, systems which are quite distinct among the Gunwinggu and among peoples with sections.

My impression is that mature Aboriginal people have a certain feel for a semi-moiety classification which is distinguishable from their knowledge of particular Dreamings and their songs, but there is no obvious rule behind the classification that anyone could articulate. However, the assumption that the semi-moieties do classify things in a rational way is implied in the attitude which Aborigines have to apparent anomalies or obscurities. When it is asked why a particular species belongs to a particular semi-moiety the answer is likely to be put in terms of the continuity which the species has with other things of the same semi-moiety. When, on the other hand, it is asked why two seemingly similar things are classified differently, then the explanation is likely to allude to a systematic contrast. For example, when I discovered that Rumburriya had a Shooting Star Dreaming, Shooting Star or paripari

being a kind of sorcery being as well, which I knew to be Wuyaliya, it was explained that the Wuyaliya one was a kind of paripari which acted at night while the Rumburriya one acted during the day. However, although there is some evidence of a thematic contrast between Rumburriya and Wuyaliya as day is to night, this does not account for all cases and the association is only partial. On the other hand if there was no assumption of order in semi-moiety classification there would be no need of explanations.

Semi-moiety classification, being a nearly comprehensive, is unlikely to be reducible to simple contrasts comparable to those which von Brandenstein believes himself to have discovered in Kariara sections. It seems that Yanyuwa semi-moiety classification is informed by a very general metaphysical contrast but that it is also grounded in practical experience. Later, in a discussion of some myths relevant to the Marndiwar rites I argue that there is in semi-moiety classification a highly general opposition between rainbow serpents and disembodied spirits. This opposition, which is based on contrasting supernatural beings rather than observable objects, involves the polarities of life and death which represent one of the general themes of Aboriginal culture. And, rather than accounting for semi-moiety classification, it seems more relevant to a contrast between unnamed moieties.

The semi-moiety classification, however, seems closely connected to the seasonal cycle and common environmental associations. Thus Wuyaliya is associated with the cold weather and the dry season; Wudaliya is associated with the later dry season and with dry season rain. Rumburriya seems to be associated with the hot weather and with the monsoon wind from the north; and Wawukarriya (and Mambaliya) is associated with the later wet season, with cyclones and with floods. Moreover, Wuyaliya, having fire, goanna and dingo as important ceremonial totems, among others, has definite associations with plains and grasslands; Wudaliya has less definite associations with the preparation of cycas and emu hunting in dry areas; Rumburriya has very strong associations with marine environments; Wawukarriya is associated with fishing by nets and weirs, and with pelagic fish, while Mambaliya seems oriented to freshwater environments.

Thus, the Yanyuwa semi-moiety classification, like that of the Mangarrayi, seems to work at two levels. At one level things belong to semi-moieties because they belong to the cults of the major semi-moiety Dreamings, but at another level the semi-moiety classification seems to depend on environmental associations which would be understood in the course of living in the bush.

5.6 The structure of the semi-moiety system

The rather ephemeral nature of semi-moiety classification based on the elusive quality of ngalki is indicative of the way they are constituted as social groups. They are groups of people affiliated by patrification to a territorial corpus of ritual property. The main items of common property are the kujika song cycles used in male initiation and sacred ceremonies and the ceremonies themselves. Ceremonial designs, sacred ceremonial objects, log coffins and particular sacred sites also belong to the body of common semi-moiety property but these things are often the property of particular individuals within the semi-moiety. Because they are defined by reference to ritual property, semi-moieties can include one or more groups of agnates and there can be significant social distinctions between them. On the other hand groups who are socially united as agnates can be divided as to semi-moiety. Thus, although semi-moieties are composed as if they were patrilineal descent groups (cf. Reay, 1962) they are essentially constituted in relation to the control of ritual property.

This partial disjunction of social and ritual structuring accounts for certain features of Borroloola semi-moiety organisation which otherwise seem confusing. Thus the members of the Yanyuwa Wawukarriya semi-moiety are also Mambaliya, but not all Mambaliya are Wawukarriya. That is,

Wawukarriya have a distinct corpus of ritual property in the Brolga kujika and kulyukulyu mortuary ceremony which they do not share with Mambaliya but which they have in common with the Mara Murungun semi-moiety with whom they are identified. However, Wawukarriya belong among the group who control the Mambaliya sacra. Hence Wawukarriya are both Murungun and Mambaliya, but Murungun are not Mambaliya. To this extent these groups which regard themselves as groups of actual or classificatory agnates resemble patrilines allied in various ways to ritual.

However, the Yanyuwa Wuyaliya and Yanyuwa-Mara Wudaliya people regard themselves and are regarded by others as a single group of close agnates but they are divided as to their ritual property and ritual functions. They explain their agnatic links as the heritage of a time when 'their old people ran together', living as one group.

The fact that these Wuyaliya and Wudaliya are regarded as a single group of agnates does not mean that they are regarded as one group by members of the other semi-moieties for the purposes of marriage. That is to say, if a Rumburriya man's mother is Wudaliya, he is not precluded from marrying her close Wuyaliya agnates. From the point of view of marriageability Wuyaliya and Wudaliya are distinct. In that sense semi-moieties are marriage categories as well as ritual groups. The connection is explicable in terms of the

ritual functions of semi-moieties.

These mainly concern the life-cycle of their members. In particular each semi-moiety has its own kujika which is sung for the initiation of their young men in the Marndiwar rites. On this point the semi-moiety people differ from the the non-semi-moiety Tableland people, who have one song for all categories of initiate.

The semi-moiety system thus shows the same articulation of ritual relations with female reproductivity and nurturance which appeared in the structure of parts of the Rocky Creek camp. That is, men's dependence on their wives' reproductivity and productivity is matched by their wives' dependence on men's ritual powers, specifically those of their husbands' semi-moiety, to make their sons men. Their daughters may not marry members of that semi-moiety, the rule of semi-moiety exogamy working to preclude a possible counterdependence. This means that men in adjacent generations of the semi-moieties, standing as fathers to sons, marry into different semi-moiety groups thereby appearing not to compete for the same pool of women as wives.

Each single semi-moiety thus exercise its ritual man-making powers on the sons of women of two semi-moieties, and the men of these semi-moieties perform reciprocal functions for

the women of the semi-moieties with whom they marry. Thus the semi-moiety system does not express relations of exchange between groups in the fashion of the subsection system and they are less useful for framing guidelines of marriageability. Rather semi-moieties are constituted as the articulation of men's ritual fecundity with women's reproductivity in marriage.

Chapter 6

THE MARNDIWAR: THE ROAD FROM MOTHER-RIGHT TO FATHER-RIGHT.

In this chapter I describe the Marndiwar circumcision ritual held at Borroloola. As I have already indicated, these rites represent an important moment in the articulation of structurally central social relationships and need to be described in detail. I also discuss two myths relevant to the symbolism of the rites, but I will reserve further analysis of the social structural features of the rites until the next chapter.

My own information on the Marndiwar male initiation ceremony comes from observations of over twelve different sequences and a very large number of discussions about it with numerous informants. There is one part of it which I was not able to witness at first hand. This is the night when the women dance for the novice. The only men who attend on this night are three or four old men who sing the Wulayinba cycle for the women. As an anthropologist I should perhaps have pressed my case, but I also had a duty to respect the Law in my own behaviour. On two occasions, in fact, I had

approval from women to attend but I withdrew at the last moment. Even the old men are supposed to avert their eyes from the proceedings as they chant.

There are other matters for which I have to rely on second-hand information, but these are not so central to the sequence or rites as the women's night. The fate of the foreskin and of the blood which is collected on paperbark is hard to observe since their treatment does not recommence until after the major sequence has come to a close, and their disposal is not very public. For this and some other matters of detail I have had to rely largely on what I have been told.

The description of the Marndiwar which I give below is not a description of a particular sequence. It is a construction of an ideal sequence of rites according to the information which I have at hand. Nonetheless it is very close to what I have actually seen occur. Furthermore I do not claim that my description is complete in every detail. The Marndiwar is full of complexities, all of which I have not been able to explore, and some of which, for reasons of space and relevance, I cannot include in my description.

In the course of describing the sequence of rites I offer some explanations of their symbolism. This is necessary to prepare the reader for the discussions which follow the

descriptions. Some of this has been interpreted to me by Aboriginal informants but much of it has not. My impression is that informants are sometimes unable to appreciate the point of my questions about the meanings of symbols because it is very far from the kind of interest which they take in the rites. Their interest is more in the performative aspects of ritual than in the explanation of its symbolism for a naive observer. Meanings frequently do not strike them as a problem, probably because these are deeply embedded within their views of the world order. It is probably only when people perceive that things might be different that this kind of question becomes relevant and interesting. To understand this symbolism it is necessary to appreciate the wider field of cultural meaning in which it is located and I have interpreted some of it on this basis. It is not always easy to say exactly how I have arrived at these interpretations, and sometimes doing so would require a detour from the main line of description which could not be justified by the significance of the point. Sometimes I do make short detours of this kind, and I try to indicate the degree to which I am confident in my interpretations.

The earliest description of the Marndiwar male initiation ritual, or some variant of it, at Borroloola was made by the resident Special Magistrate W.G. Stretton (1983: 231-3). Among other things, Stretton claims that novices were

subincised immediately after being circumcised. This is quite at odds with subsequent investigations, including my own. Either the events observed by Stretton represented an unusual case or he did not observe them at all, but rather deduced them from other material. There are other unusual features in Stretton's account, which for reasons of space I will not discuss, which point to the same conclusions. My impression is that Stretton, probably because of this position, did not get sufficiently close to the ceremonies, or the Aborigines, to be able to appreciate what was happening. This impression remains even as I concede the following two points: firstly, the structure of ceremonial life may have changed during the early contact period; secondly, that any two sequences of initiation ritual will differ according to a range of circumstantial factors, just as, perhaps, two sentences may differ in their surface structure and yet have the same meaning.

Spencer and Gillen give two "accounts" of ceremonies similar to the current Marndiwar following their visit to Borroloola in 1901. One is an "account of what took place during the initiation" of a Binbingka boy, the other of "what took place during the initiation" of a Yanyuwa boy (1904: 364-374). Gillen's Diary (1968) does not record that he or Spencer actually witnessed these events, and in view of what is recorded it is very doubtful that they saw any more than a fraction of this type of ceremony. Over the afternoon of

the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd November 1901, they recorded "full particulars of Anula [Yanyuwa] Initiatory ceremonies". Their accounts of these ceremonies are evidently compiled from the descriptions of the people they interviewed. Nonetheless they did remarkably well within these limitations and their information remains of some interest. Unfortunately it is not possible to decide whether the differences they recorded between the Binbingka and Yanyuwa ceremonies were real, or whether they arose because of differences in the way informants interpreted their customs in the interviews. Another limitation is that they were predisposed to interpret social relations in terms of classes, particularly subsections. They even described the organisation of Yanyuwa initiation in terms of Binbingka subsections because Yanyuwa semi-moiety terms cannot easily be adapted to the purpose! In fact, classes have very little to do with the organisation of the Marndiwar.

Spencer and Gillen record that subincision took place "some time" after circumcision, in association with the interment of bones in a log-coffin. Following this, they say, the young man enters a ceremony which is evidently a Kunapipi. This sequence - circumcision, subincision and log-coffin ceremony, Kunapipi (or Wambayungu, Yabuduruwa) - accords with what I understand to have been the traditional ideal. It disagrees, of course, with Stretton's understanding. Spencer and Gillen also support my own second-hand

information about the length of the novice's journey prior to circumcision. They record a journey being made between Borroloola and Anthony Lagoon, which are separated by about two hundred miles. These journeys on foot are no longer made.

Neither Spencer and Gillen nor Stretton give "Marndiwar" or any other name for the rites they describe. Warner records a "Marndiella" ceremony among the Murngin which he says is only used as an expedient "when the Djungguan ceremony is considered too long for the time at their command" (1969: 319). Elkin also regards the Marndiella as a shortened Djungguan and he equates it with the "Roper River tribe's Mandiwa" (1972: 35). He cites a myth recorded by Capell to argue that the "fusion of the two rituals are clear" (ibid.). In this myth a goanna, its principal figure, and the chicken hawk make two "roads", one for the Mandiwa and the other for "Yabuduruwa or (D)jangguan" (ibid.). However Capell (1960: 208) makes it clear that the Jungguan" of this myth "shows no actual resemblance to the Djungguan described by Warner". This myth, moreover, would not support the fusion of the Marndiwar and the Yabuduruwa, or Jungguan since it describes them as a result of two different roads, one "for dancing", the other "for making men" (1960: 209). Within the Borroloola tradition both the Marndiwar and the Yabuduruwa ("Wambayungu" at Borroloola) are ascribed to the creative acts of a Dreaming goanna, among others, yet they

are quite different types of ceremony.

The Djungguan described by Warner does not resemble Borroloola Marndiwar, though there are elements common to the latter and to Warner's Marndiella. The Marndiella appears to be a shortened Marndiwar and it may have achieved its secondary status among the Murngin after being supplanted by the Djungguan. The poverty of the Marndiella among the Murngin and elsewhere in Arnhem Land may well have followed from these events. On the other hand the Marndiwar may have achieved a relatively elaborate form at Borroloola as a result of the decline of other ceremonies. According to Heath (1980: 275) the "mandiwala" circumcision ritual performed at Rose River is supposed "strictly speaking" to be modeled on the Wandarang and Mara "Mandiwa". Sometimes, he says, men are brought in from the southern areas to lead the singing of the "appropriate songs" but there is a tendency for local men to replace the "traditional circumcision songs" with "public, didjeridu-accompanied clan songs". Warner's description of the Marndiella indicates that there are special songs for this ceremony and that clan songs are not used in this ritual among the Murngin. This would conform to what Heath suggests is the case among the Mara and Wandarang. At Borroloola there are some special Marndiwar songs, but these are relatively unimportant compared with the kujika song cycles. The latter are the Borroloola equivalents of clan songs though, in conformity

with the southern style, they are accompanied by boomerangs, not didgeridus.

It seems likely that Marndiwar held at Borroloola are variants of a single ceremony which is distributed over the riverine and coastal areas of the Northern Territory Gulf of Carpentaria, the Barkly Tableland and adjacent areas in southern Arnhem Land. Possibly it spread from there to the Murngin who incorporated it into their ceremonial repertoire, or it may be one of the older items within it. The Marndiwar and its cognates are in turn similar to other circumcision rites, and to some post-circumcision rites, found wherever circumcision is an established initiation practice in Australia. A close study of these would probably show that certain features such as the pre-circumcision journey, the use of hair belts and fire, associations with rainbow serpents and dingos, the involvement of brothers-in-law in the circumcision "table", among others, are widely distributed over the continent, or found over very large areas of it, while other features have a narrower distribution.

6.1 The sequence of rites.

A central location of much of the action of the Marndiwar is the "ring place" or jamangki (cf. Spencer and Gillen, 1904: 304, "thamunki"). This is an approximately circular area about twenty metres in diameter. A windbreak about two metres high, made of leafy messmate gum boughs, is built around the eastern third of the circumference of the ground. Otherwise the ring is clear: it is swept clean of weeds and debris and the earth is frequently softened to make it ready for dancing. The ring place is a permanent feature on the eastern edge of the Yanyuwa camp, about one hundred and fifty metres from the nearest dwelling to the west. To the east of the ground, immediately behind the windbreak, there is a thick stand of mango trees which form part of a wall of trees between the Yanyuwa camp and the McArthur River. Men use the privacy of the mango trees to paint ceremonial designs on bodies. Between the mango trees and the river there is an open expanse of gently sloping land. A small shelter is built within this area but well away from the river (since the water poses a threat to novices after their circumcision). This is where the novices are circumcised and recover from their wounds.

There is an important sociological distinction in the Marndiwar between banbayi and bilibilayi. Banbayi (actually li-banbayi is the plural) are the close cognatic kin of the

novice, plus all who address the novice as a sibling. Female banbayi, but not male banbayi, dance for the novice. Bilibilayi are other people from the region among whom the men are entitled to dance for the novice. I will say more about this later.

For simplicity I describe these events as they would concern a single novice, though it is more common for two or three boys to go through the rites together. In that case it sometimes happens that parts of the ritual are truncated or modified. Hence only some individuals pass through the full sequence in the ideal way. In 1979, for example, seventeen Mornington Island men, some of whom may have been as much as forty years old, passed through a single ritual sequence. For numerous practical reasons parts of the ideal sequence were severely compressed, and other parts were improvised. Nonetheless, even in this most unusual case, there was an effort to at least simulate all the elements in the ritual sequence. The extent to which a novice passes through the ideal sequence of events in the correct manner depends largely on the organisation, prestige and power of the novice's banbayi. A large and widely connected family will draw a correspondingly larger bilibilayi to the initiation of its young boys than a less well placed family.

I interpret some of the symbolism associated with particular stages of the rites as I describe them. This is done in

preference to a complete divorce between description and interpretation since this would demand too much cross-referencing of the reader.

A. The novice as wild gin.

1. Consulting the parents
2. Decorating the notice
3. The journey
4. The return

1. The clearest sign of a boy's readiness for initiation is the appearance of his beard. However, he will be considered ready if he has become "a little bit big", if he appears to have begun his adolescent growth. A boy may be suggested as a candidate early by others who would wish him to be included as a novice in another ceremony which is being organised and the parents will be asked for their permission. If they consider him too young then they may nominate a later date for his initiation. This will set in train the required organisation. From my observations mothers resist the initiation of their sons more than fathers, but once the boy is clearly old enough they cannot but agree to it. Nonetheless, they must give their consent for their son to be initiated, unless perhaps the boy should volunteer himself. (No local males have freely volunteered but some Aboriginal men from Queensland where the rites have lapsed have sought to be initiated at Borroloola.)

Where the boy's father is unavailable, an early decision has to be made as to who will play the role of father during his initiation. Whoever does will be his father for all important purposes; thereafter the boy will stand to inherit his rights and powers in a territorial estate. The issue is important nowadays since a significant number of children are offspring of non-Aboriginal fathers and they stay within the Aboriginal community. In pre-European times acting as a boy's father may have been important in facilitating and publicising adoption. Maternity is less frequently in doubt than paternity, but when there is a doubt, perhaps because of adoption, abandonment by the mother, or the latter's early death, it is not as critical an issue for the purposes of the Marndiwar. This is because the Marndiwar makes a transition in control from the mother to father.

The other issue which needs to be settled at this time is the boy's "skin". For the Yanyuwa this is resolved with the previous question of paternity, since they "follow the father for skin" where the parents are married "wrong". Where the child of a wrong marriage has a parent from another group which follows the mother the issue is more complicated for the reason, among others, that both maternal and paternal relatives have to co-operate in the Marndiwar. I have not followed these cases very closely so I cannot say how the disputes are settled in practice. The general subject of determining the class identity of the children of

wrong marriages is addressed in detail by Reay (1962). I might point out that a core of Yanyuwa men seemed to have considerable power in these matters as a result of their having indispensable functions in singing the songs of the Marndiwar, and by having the Marndiwar ground within the ambit of their camp. The questions of the novice's maternity and paternity, and secondarily, his class need to be settled before the boundaries of his banbayi and bilibilayi can be established.

2. With the agreement of the parents the novice is taken by his mother's father or mother's brother to a central location in the camp. He is first painted in charcoal by a mother's mother. A brother-in-law will then wind a roll of hair string, perhaps thirty metres in length, around his waist to form a hair belt. Meanwhile the novice's agnates chant sections of their Marndiwar cycle (kudjika) and his close female cognates, including his mother who carries a hooked boomerang and clutches her breast (her "milk") perform a dance.

This dance consists of a series of short hopping movements in which, with each hop, the women separate and then slap their thighs together. As they do this they make a high pitched cry something like "wu-wu-wu-wu-" in time with their steps. After about twenty steps over a distance of a few metres, they retreat and start again. In this fashion they

emulate mararabana, the legendary "wild women" associated with the Kunapipi.

Once the hair belt has been tied the novice remains in the hands of his mother's father who decorates him. His body is hatched with red ochre and, in addition to his hair belt, he wears a women's breast harness over his chest, a women's pubic tassel around his neck, and a spray of white cockatoo feathers on his head. I have also seen novices wearing engraved pearlshell pendants which have been obtained from southern areas. This is the novice's adornment for the journey.

The charcoal which is applied by the novice's MM is the end point of fire, and fire is associated with women and sexuality. "Going into the fire" is a metaphor for marriage or sexual intercourse, fire is a metaphor for marriage and women's reproductive capacities in some myths, and it is a matter for caution on the part of menstruating women. The latter should not wash in waterholes. They should burn their menses and extinguish the fire with water, otherwise their body will "get hot". They must ^{not} allow their cooking fire to be scattered and they may only give cooked food or fire to MMs, or MMB, husbands and children. Possibly then, the application of charcoal by the novice's MM signals the termination of his previous relations with women as a child, and with his matriline in particular. Two things need to be

noted for future reference, though they are only remotely in evidence at this point: the opposition between fire and water, and the themes of sexuality and food in all its modalities (cooked, raw, rotten, etc). It is relevant that Yanyuwa prefix the word for penis in the same way as food.

The hair belt is, among other things, a metaphor of the novice's journey. I shall explain this further in due course. Sacred objects are bound in hair string before being taken and revealed to distant people. Sometimes only the hair string is taken. In these circumstances those to whom it is shown are, as it were, bound to participate in the ceremony associated with the object. Hair string also had this significance when it is worn by the novice. I have also heard the expression "going into the string" as a metaphor for marriage, but I know no more about this. At a more general level of symbolism hair string and belts exemplify a contrast between the straight (as a piece of string with a beginning and an end) and the circular (as a belt) which occurs elsewhere in the Marndiwar and its associated myths. I will add to this later.

By wearing the woman's pubic apron and "braces" (brassiere?) the novice is made feminine. His adornments are also those of the mararabana, "wild gin", associated with the Kunapipi except that they did not wear their pubic coverings around their necks. This mode of dress for the novice therefore

has a mythological sanction but it also contributes to the humiliation of the novice, to his shame. It is the Law, but it makes him ridiculous to other young men and subject to their teasing in the "journey" stage of the rites.

While the novice is made an androgynous figure the behaviour of the men and women is sharply contrasted. The men (the novice's agnates) chant kudjika verses dispassionately, the song, as it were, creeping along by its own "legs" (verses). The women, on the other hand, dance Awulayinba seemingly with a blind passion before which they are helpless. This passion is ambiguously the women's sexual drives or their feelings of loss of the novice. The dance seems to convey that these two are consequences of each other and that the women are helpless before this contradiction between desire and loss. The mother, bearing a hook boomerang and clutching her breast, is interesting here because she expresses both nurturance and aggression. The role of women is characteristically nurturant in so far as it is oriented to gathering food and feeding their children and other relatives. This is symbolised by the breast. Aggressive behaviour is the polar opposite of this. This becomes clear when women "wungayi".

Women wungayi first on the night of the novice's decoration. The novice's female banbayi, that is, his close female relatives, led in this behaviour by his father's sisters and

patrilateral cross-cousins, throw water, steal things, eat raw flour, jumble up their words, dance Awulayinba eccentrically, and attack people, especially men. In the words of a man: "They don't talk right way, they talk funny way. You kukudi will call you kuku, not wukuku, and they can mark (muck?) you any way ... You can't sleep, they frighten you, chuck water. Everybody happy. Your mother-in-law chases you got a boomerang.". It is said that the Kunapipi women used to wungayi "all the way" along their route inland from the sea so that this behaviour, like the dress of the novice, also has a mythological sanction. It is the correct thing to do. Nonetheless there is here also an element of humiliation and the behaviour is characteristically reactive. With raw flour and sugar pouring from their mouths, tilting at every ordinary convention, they are expected to rail impotently at the order which removes their children from them. The behaviour of the novice on the journey has a very similar paradoxical quality.

3. The novice, now under a ban of silence and decorated, begins his journey to pick up the bilibilayi men who will later dance for him. His guardians, with whom he is allowed only a minimum of speech, are his mother's father (alternatively, a mother's brother or matrilateral cross-cousin) and sister's husband.

Nowadays this "journey" usually takes him no further than a

tour over several days of the camps around Borroloola. There are no longer camps scattered throughout the district for him to visit and much of the region's population will have gathered at Borroloola after the cattle season to participate in the Marndiwar rites, among other reasons. In the past the novice's journey would have taken several months, and he would have gone as far as Anthony Lagoon to the south, and to places at similar distances in other directions. Journeys were sometimes made by canoe. What happens at Borroloola today is a compression of the past events. I will describe the journey as I understand it to have typically taken place in the past.

Before reaching each camp on the way the novice would be redecorated and shown to the local people. They would present him with gifts of, typically, boomerangs, pubic tassels, hair strings and other valuables which are destined for his family. His guardians would have discussions with the local people to decide who among them are bilibilayi, and who will dance for the novice. Bark boomerangs or toy spears would be cut for the novice, ideally by a young kuku ("MMB"). Directed by his guardians, the novice would then pursue and attack his potential dancers with these weapons. If a man were hit, and this should ideally draw blood, then he would be obliged to become part of the novice's travelling party and later to dance for him in the Marndiwar. The younger bilibilayi would play a game of cat

and mouse with the novice, teasing him, exposing themselves to his weapons and then evading his blows. Once the novice made a "kill" the "victim" would continue the teasing. This game is still played at Borroloola. It has often a sexual character and the young men sometimes make mock erotic advances to the novice. There is some slight evidence that in the past things went somewhat further than this.

One man told me: the dancers "used to fuck his arse, that wadangudji. That's the Law.". This may be little more than an imaginative interpolation of the style of the past, when, it is thought, the spirit of the Law was more clearly manifest in action. At least it indicates something of the spirit of the occasion since all of this does humiliate the novice, and one element of his shame is his dress which is both ridiculous and feminine. He is treated as a "wild gin".

The game would continue while the travelling party was on the trek between camps. Each day, I am told, a young kuku would cut new weapons for the novice. The weapon cutter would be the mandatory first target and the game would issue from there. On the march the dancers would lead the way with the novice following behind them, "like a drover", hunting them along. This was an arduous game which the novice was compelled to play, and one full of irony. The novice could not have failed to be aware that the men who he

is now compelled to hunt will soon make them his victim on the night before he is circumcised, when they dance for him. The requirement of the Law that he attack these men shows him that no matter how hard he tries he cannot physically resist his humiliation: violence as a means of resistance is neutralised by the compulsion on the novice to use it. He ought not resist because it is the Law, and he cannot resist because such is the Law. Under his ban of silence he must restrain his heartfelt complaints, but if he did complain he could only expect the teasing and torment to increase. Apart from this the novice was treated with kindness by his guardians, and when he became physically exhausted, as no doubt he must have done, he would be carried shoulder high by his brother-in-law "like a baby". This is the way he is eventually returned to his parents.

4. When the travelling party returns to the ring place they are said to "run mararabana". They assemble out of sight of the home camp and the ring place, nowadays in a gully to the south of the latter, where the novices are redecorated and the men daub themselves with white clay and arm themselves with spears.

The novice's banbayi gather on the ring place on the opposite side to that from which the travellers will come, facing in that direction. The men site in a group with the novice's father at the front with his agnates, and other

banbayi men closely behind. Female banbayi stand to the right (assuming that they face the south, which is the usual case) and dance Wulayinba while the men sing the novice's father's kujika song.

The novice's party set off for the ring place in single file with the novice, his brothers-in-law and a brother of a "mother-in-law" in the lead. Rattling their spears, sounding a sinister "Brrr!", they follow a sinuous path towards the ring place. As they approach, the line of men bunches around the novices and they progress for a while in a pack with the novices in the centre. Close to the ring place the novice, who now carries the gifts acquired on the journey on his head, is hoisted onto the shoulders of his brother-in-law and quickly carried across the ring place and deposited in front of his father. At this point the banbayi men stop their chanting and the women cease dancing Wulayinba.

The bilibilayi who have already been marked to dance for the novice, and who were part of the travelling party, then line up around the ring place on the side opposite to that on which the banbayi were sitting. Many of the women have returned to the camp by this time since they have relatives in avoidance relationships among the bilibilayi. The novice is taken around the remaining spectators and, guided by his guardians, he picks out more bilibilayi and leads them by

the hand to add them to the line of dancers. The novice is then led away from the ground and remains under the care of his guardians.

As this is happening those at the ring place will hear the camp in uproar as the banbayi women wungayi, as it were, with a vengeance. This continues throughout the afternoon and early night.

Many of the men remain at the ring place for an emu dance. The performance of this dance depends upon there being a man who is entitled to sing Yubulkara, the song which goes with the emu dance. There are supposed to be alternatives to the Yubulkara song and dance in the event that a singer is not available, but this did not happen while I was at Borroloola. The singer wears charcoal on his chest meaning, I was told, that he is a skink or kankulukulu. Later I give an account of a circumcision myth in which a frilled-necked lizard shows a skink how to dance Marndiwar. This is replicated in Yubulkara except that the lizard, who really does know how to dance Marndiwar, is replaced by the eccentric emu. The dance is a highly amusing one and each dancer performs his imitation of an emu alone. It seems likely that this is a parody of the women's wungayi in the camp. The male of the emu species is said to be peculiar in performing what is the mother's role in Aboriginal society, the care of the very young.

As each man dances a crazy imitation of an emu he wanders far afield, almost as if he is going to leave the ground altogether, and then returns picking up a handful of earth which he presses to a part of his body according to his relationship with the novice. He then throws the earth over his head and dances up to the singer. Another man takes a spray of feathers, which the dancer wears thrust upwards behind him in his belt, and has a turn. This is a dance for banbayi and for bilibilayi who do not stand in the avoidance relationship with the novice.

The novice's kuku ("MMB" etc) touch their foreheads. His actual "reared up" father touches himself on the shoulders, and the novice's father's brothers and his brother's sons touch their whiskers. His brothers (including parallel cousins) and murimuris ("FF" etc) touch their thighs. His ngabudjis ("FMB" etc) and his remote brothers-in-law touch their wrists and forearms or else their calves, that is, the extremities of their limbs. Mimis ("MF", "cross cousin"), munyumunyus (MBS) and his kadidis ("MB") touch their chests. Kadikadis ("ZS" etc) and marawaras ("FZS") touch their stomachs.

It is somewhat surprising that the forehead should represent the kuku relationship for this part of the body is normally associated with a man's own country. If I had to predict

the sign for kukus I would nominate the genitals. This would agree with the obscene joking which is expected between people in this relationship, and with other customs which give this relationship a marked genital character. Signifying the kuku relationship by the forehead may either be an allusion to the body as a symbolic phallus or indicate that, as a child, the novice was under his mother's and his matriline's Law. The other signs are more straightforward: the father who has reared the boy will have carried him on his shoulders; the other "fathers" and "sons" will have hair (hair=country) in common; brothers and murimuris have a common orientation in marriage or a common path in life and either of these meanings could be indicated by the thighs; ngabudjis and remote brothers-in-law are peripheral types of kin. The signs for mimis, kadidis and munyumunys make sense if one supposes that the dancer represents the novice's relationship to him: they are the novice's "milk" relatives, his matrilinear relatives. Those who rub their stomachs are milk relatives to the novice, they are from a woman identified with the novice's agnatic group of countrymen.

B. The novice at the limit.

1. The removal of the hair belt.
2. Wulayinba.
3. Men paint.
4. The novice passes to the men.
5. The arrival of the dancers.
6. The dog dancers.

7. The "mail man".
8. The purification of the novice.

1. Early in the night after the emu dance the novice is taken to a place about one hundred metres to the west of the ground by his guardians and the dancers. They begin a song called Yangarinjiri and start to move slowly towards the ring place where the novice's female banbayi are waiting. The men surround the novice and with each "leg" of the song one of the dancers unwinds a part of the hair belt, the party moves on, and another dancer unties his part of the belt. They progress in this way until all of the belt has been removed and they are close to the ceremonial ground. As they approach the ground the women, who have been dancing Wulayinba all the while, redouble their efforts and dance agitatedly. Then in a dramatic clash between the two groups the novice is transferred unadorned to the women and the men retire.

The removal of the hair belt in this fashion signals the novices entry to a dramatic stage of the rites. He is now quite naked, mute and the mere object of treatment by others. He is neither male nor female, but somewhere on the limits of either. It is said that the dingo has "brains" but is unable to talk because in the Dreaming it was under a ban of silence as a novice. The dingo remains the type of the novice and the boy in the process of initiation only plumbs the depths of his novitiate at this point. In that

sense the novice is like a dingo, and this is the point of his greatest impurity. This stage, which could be called the dingo stage, is only one of a series of liminal states, but it is the one which precedes his circumcision and entry to manhood.

The entire period during which the novice wears the hair belt is predominately circular in terms of the circular/linear imagery of the hair belt. The journey itself is "circular" in that the novice begins and ends at the same place. The wearing of the belt also belongs to circular imagery because it is wound on and then unwound. The unwinding however initiates an unfolding of the linear imagery, above all, of passage. Behaviour on the journey is essentially repetitive but, once the hair belt is removed, the novice commences a series of unique and irreversible changes. The dominance of linear imagery and the emphasis on process is accompanied by an increase in the force of alimentary imagery. Though the novice has dingo associations, he also becomes food. Among the Murinbata novices in the post-circumcision Punj ritual are referred to as "wild dog flesh" ("ku were" in Stanner, 1959: 113). In this case the novice might better be described as flesh for dogs, implicitly rotting flesh. This, however, anticipates events which I have not yet described.

2. With the novice now in their possession, the women

commence their night of dancing. This is called Wulayinba primarily because the series of dances which the women perform are accompanied by the Wulayinba song cycle. This song cycle runs parallel to the Kunapipi song cycle associated with the travels of the mararabana. Only the oldest men who are entitled to sing this song cycle are entitled to sing Wulayinba for the women. They may be either owners or managers of these songs. Their right to sing Wulayinba does not depend upon the identity of the novice.

Since I have not seen this performance I am unsure about what exactly occurs. My impression is that the women's dances on this night are strongly erotic and that for this reason, aside from the singers, men keep away.

Late in the night there is a dance called Buluruka in which the novice's kukudis ("MM"), kadikadis ("ZD") and older sisters-in-law dance in a circle around him. As they do so, they touch the novice's head with the brolga feathered tips of painted sticks called jaradji. Except for the sisters-in-law these dancers belong to the novice's matriline though his mothers are apparently absent from the group. There is another dance in which the novice's sisters dance around him. This is said to "give the rule for every sister" and it is the last time that the novice will be allowed to look directly at his sisters.

The women's dance continues until very late into the night, though it ends before daybreak. The novice is then taken to a hut in the camp where he remains out of sight until he is handed over to the men.

3. On the day after the Wulayinba the men prepare to dance later that afternoon and night. Each dancer wears a design (barawa) from his mother's country. This is painted on his body in ochres and down. Some of the men wear impressive conical hats with antennae-like projections which are tipped with feathers. All of the dances wear bunches of dried messmate bushes tied to the front of their knees. These are only worn at night and they must not be seen by women. The decoration of each dancer requires at least four people in addition to the dancer. These are as follows.

a. The dancer's mother's brother, or one of his mother's agnates, has to decide which design the dancer will wear since it comes from his ritual estate. He will rough out this design on the dancer's body.

b. Though the design can be painted on most of the body by almost anyone, the dancer's head may only be painted by a jungkayi, a descendant of a female of the dancer's patrilineal totemic group. He stands in the same relationship to the dancer's head as the dancer stands to

the design which he wears.

c. The dancer's older sister's husband, his napinapi, is the correct donor of blood to be used as an adhesive for the down. He also supplies the bunches of bushes to be worn on the dancer's legs.

d. The bushes should be tied to the dancer's legs by a mother's maternal uncle or one of his agnates.

The structure of the social relations among these men parallels that between participants in the Buluruka dance except that mother's are not included among the latter while mother's brothers are among the former. Among "decorators" the brother-in-law provides some of the essential means but he does not actually apply them to the dancer's body. Strictly speaking the mother's brother should provide the down and paint, and receive a gift in return. The application of the design is the concern of men who are linked through matrification. Typically this would amount to male members of four generations of a matriline (MMB, MB, Ego, ZS). The matriline is essential in either case. Men only wear their "mother's marks" in the Marndiwar. In sacred cult ceremonies men wear marks which belong to their own estate. Indeed the right to wear these marks in ceremonies is an index, as well as a privilege, of estate ownership. However these ceremonies are "dear" while the

Marndiwar is a "little bit cheap". Among other things this means that a man has to pay his managers when he exercises the privilege of wearing his "own" mark, but when a man wears his mother's mark to which he is jungkayi, he does not have to pay. He does have to pay his jungkayi for painting his head in the Marndiwar. This is not a large gift and the payment is made informally.

While the men are being painted the novice's mother's agnates sing a cycle from their estate. This song is called a mayidbi. It is a song which stays "in one place" in contrast with the kujika song, which is a "travelling" song. Mayidbi and kujika are not composed of different verses, it is a difference in singing them, though I am not sure exactly what this difference is except that mayidbi are sung while the dancers are being painted.

Meanwhile the women rage (wungayi) in the camp.

4. Late that afternoon the novice's agnates and other male banbayi gather at the ring place. His female banbayi lead the novice covered by blankets from the camp in a slow procession. As they approach the men on the ground turn their backs to the women and the novice is transferred to the men. This, compared to the dramatic passage of the novice to the women on the previous night, is a muted affair. One of the last women to leave, perhaps the

novice's mother's mother, may shout abuse at the men. The novice is immediately made to lie down on his back. He is still entirely covered by the blanket.

5. By this time the dancers have assembled behind the bough break on the eastern side of the ring place. A banbayi calls out the name of the novice's dog and the dancers, each carrying a stick across their shoulders to represent the ribs of a snake, are led in single file onto the ground by a man carrying a firestick. They circle the inside of the ring place, but not the novice, who is lying close to the bough break between some fires. The dancers, of whom there may be as many as sixty, then form an arc, several rows deep if need be, facing the banbayi who stand next to the novice. An old woman then wipes the back of each dancer's calves with a cloth in order, it is said, to make their legs strong for the night of dancing which lies before them. After this the dancers informally break their arc and move to the sides of the ring place.

6. Two dancers emerge from behind the bough break wearing conical hats and carrying feather-tipped strings. These are "dog dancers" and their dance represents dogs looking for food. They can smell the novice because he has eaten tabooed foods in the past. After appearing to search around they "find" the novice, a banbayi removes their hats, and the dance ends.

The dog dancer's hats are formed on a basis of reeds which are bound to their heads with string. An antenna-like structure is bound into the top of each hat so that it emerges from the point of the cone. Each hat has a different type of structure. On one hat the central column, which emerges from the cone, is divided into two and each half is bent back to form an arc. Each arc is tipped with a spray of emu feathers. On the other hat the central column supports two arcs which are lashed to it horizontally, one above the other. The ends of these arcs are also tipped with emu feathers.

No one was able to elucidate the significance of these hats other than by noting that they were worn at the ring place in the Dreaming attended by the skink, the blanket lizard, emu, goanna and others, where the novice was a dingo. I will discuss a myth relating to these events later. The hats are called "makudari" or "makajakaja" in Yanyuwa. The "ma" is the normal prefix for food items in the Yanyuwa language and other people call these hats "kudari".

"Kajakaja" is a man's term of address for his "child". It is possible then that the name of the hat might signify "son flesh". It seems very likely that the hats represent penes or prepuces in this context. Once these are removed the dancers cease to behave like dogs. The antennae could signify effusions of semen, and I strongly suspect that the emu-feather tufts have this significance. If so, then it is

probable that they have the same significance for the sticks used by the women in the Buluruka dance.

There is some ambiguity about the intended motives of the dogs. They can smell the novice: but are they smelling him because they are looking for food, or is there a sexual motive? The ambiguity cannot be resolved into a choice between these two as alternatives. The boy's penis is his mawari. It is classed as a food item in Yanyuwa (cf. Kirton, 1971, 69 n.13) just as are the dog dancer's hats. Erotic and gustatory elements coexist in this symbolism. The choice of a dog to represent these two elements may well reflect the fact that dogs are scavengers of food around the camp, eating anything regardless of its edibility for humans and regardless of its sacred status. Some food is tabooed to women, to young people or to people in certain kinship categories. Dogs eat regardless of these restrictions; and they mate with similar disregard for the human rules of sexual behaviour. This is in spite of their being included individually within the same social structure as human beings (cf. Maddock, 1972: 96). People say that the boy smells because he has eaten foods which are improper for him. They do not say that he has witnessed the eroticism of women who are improper for him, but he has certainly done this; in fact, he did so only last night.

The novice's impurity is illuminated by a myth which bears

on the dancer's snake formation in step 5. This is a black-nosed python. There is a very interesting and complex myth from the Binbingka and Kurdandji people about this figure. Very briefly, the python is a mother whose son is killed while hunting with her brothers, two chicken hawks. She wraps her son's body in a paperbark bundle and gathers all the fire which has been used in the hunting into her camp fire and finally into one firestick. Her brothers want to give her son's body a proper funeral but the old woman will give them neither his body or fire. She carries these with her lamenting as she goes. The body rots and she rubs the "stink" over herself leaving the black marks which one can see today. The black-nosed python is a "dirty bugger snake".

This is a myth about the overattachment of a mother for her son. The allusion to this myth by the dancer's snake formation, by the dancers being lead by a man with a firestick, by the novice remaining hidden beneath the blanket and, possibly, by the woman rubbing the legs of the dancers suggests that the novice is indeed rotting flesh, and that he is dead.

7. After the dog dance a banbayi, the novice's "MF" or "MBS", becomes the "mail man". Carrying boomerangs, he runs from the centre of the bough break, where the novice, his agnates, and other banbayi are positioned, to some of the

dancers who are standing on the periphery of the ring. He returns to announce the homelands of the dancers after each of these trips. Instead of the actual place names he frequently utters an obscenity. The mail man is a jester, spontaneous and inventive; the humour seems macabre considering that the novice is beyond it.

8. When the mail man has finished his rounds an old man, the "banajara", cries out dolefully: "Bwah, bwah, bwah, bwah", alternatively stopping and releasing the sound with his hand over his mouth, the sound diminishing in volume and pitch until there is no more breath. This is supposed to chase away the novice's smell.

Another old man, a potential father-in-law of the novice and ideally a "brother" of a banajara, then strikes the ground nearly in the middle of the ring place. The dancers who have by this time formed into their arcuate ranks converge on this point, stamping heavily with each step in time with the blows of the boomerang to form a dense pack. This is the end of the afternoon's proceedings. The dancers, most of the male banbayi, and the spectators leave the ground to have their evening meal. Food is brought to the ground for the novice's guardians who remain there with the novice who is still covered. The guardians light fires on either side of the novice.

These rites end the novice's period of impurity though he remains in a dormant condition.

C. The novice as a new man.

1. Waking up to the Law.
2. Marndiwar dancing.
3. Circumcision.
4. The period of recovery.
5. The steaming.
6. Promises.
7. Red ochre.

1. Early in the night after the evening meal the banbayi return to the ring place and the dancers make ready. Only at this point are the bushes tied to their legs for this is secret to initiated men. Women and children remain in the camp and they are not supposed to see what takes place. It is improbable that they remain ignorant of these matters since it is not hard to make out the figures of the men by the light of the fires on the ring place, even from the distance of the camp.

The novice's agnates gather together to one side of the novice in order that they be ready to commence their kujika song cycle. A guardian of the novice shakes bunches of dried leaves over his head, which is still covered by the blanket. The dancers quietly assemble on the ground and the songmen begin their cycle. At the end of a verse the dancers perform the Marndiwar dance in unison.

They dance with arms outstretched and knees bent outwards. After a few preliminary hops they begin to spring themselves on the balls of their feet so rapidly that they appear suspended above the ground. Verse and dance alternate several times. From behind the group of dancers a dancer wearing a hat similar to the ones worn by the dog dancers, but made on a base of paperbark (or beer carton), dances up to the novice. He draws back the novice's covering and blows spit into his ears to "wake him up for the Law", then moves back and dances Marndiwar before the novice. He does this several times until his hat is removed by a banbayi.

Two brothers-in-law of the novice wearing similar hats then dance "kudukudu" (sacred, dangerous). Each starting at opposite sides of the ground, they dance across it passing each other at mid-point, and dance to the novice. Their hats are removed.

2. The Marndiwar dancing which will occupy the rest of the night is initiated by groups of "skin" (subsection or semi-moiety) brothers dancing up to the novice, presenting him with a bundle of goods such as blankets and clothes, and then dancing before him again. After each group has made this initial contribution they continue to dance in turns but without the gifts. At the end of each "leg" of the kujika song one such group has a turn and then retires while the next verse is in progress.

The dancing continues in this way until daybreak. At first there is a great deal of fun and bravado on the part of the dancers. Some dance up to the novice, feign sleep and then come to life in a vigorous performance which is met with cheers and joking. As the night wears on towards the early hours of the morning a mood of determination settles in among the dancers. In each group there will be some who take on the mantle of responsibility by example and good cheer coax the less willing to overcome their fatigue and the pains in their feet. The dancing is extremely arduous and the more dancers who are obliged to drop out before the end of the night the greater the burden to perform on those who are left. The older men can be excused their fatigue, (though some among them will stand as an example to the hardness of men of old), but a lax young man is open to ridicule.

As the night progresses the stars passing overhead are scrutinised with increasing interest for signs that it will soon be daylight. When the first light of the sun illuminates the horizon those dancers who have been reposing in the darkness at the edge of the ring, fortified by the thought that the end is in sight, and a short sleep, rejoin the dancing for the final effort. At dawn the singers, who rely on the estimates of the time to adjust the pace of their song, move on to the final "legs", their voices hoarse from singing and their arms weary from rattling boomerangs

in time with the singing and dancing.

At this point one of the singers begins to call out to the camp after every few verses have been sung. Everyone listens for a reply. Several times there is no response then, finally, a low, barely audible murmur arises anonymously from the camp. The call is made again and this time the response is answered from the ground with an enthusiastic "Yi!". The song is brought to a close. The dancers divide loosely over the two sides of the ground facing the novice and dance sideways to the centre of the ring. Stamping the ground at each stride, they move forwards in one body to where the novice is sitting, and conclude the dance with a shout. They take the bushes from their legs and gather any others from the ground and burn them. Most of the men retire to their camps.

Throughout all of this the novice remains utterly impassive. I have often looked at their faces for an indication of what they might be feeling. Their expressions frequently suggest that they are in a trance: their eyes wide, their faces motionless, their mouths slightly opened. At other times they seem quite alienated from what is going on and they spend periods staring downwards at their blankets or at the ground in front of them. They are supposed to be watching the dancers and listening to the song so they seldom look behind them or to their left or right. This whole

performance is for them, yet no one pays them the least attention unless they indicate a need to urinate or to drink. The gregariousness of the men, serious and jocular, literally passes over their heads. They are at the centre of it, mute and alone.

3. At daybreak the novice is led away from the ground by a small group of men, his mother's father, the two brothers-in-law who first danced kudukudu on the previous night, some matrilineal cross-cousins, and his father. They go to a place to the east of the ring place, on the riverside edge of the belt of mango trees, where there is a fire and a rudimentary hut. When they arrive the boy's guardians warm green messmate bushes in the fire and press them to his ears, his forehead and stomach.

The two brothers-in-law lie down to form a "table". The boy is stripped, made to lie down over them on his back, and his shoulders are held gently but firmly by his cousins. All of this is supervised by the novice's mother's father. The circumcisor (the "butcher") arrives silently with a small parcel containing one or more pocket knives or ancient cut-throat razors. These have been sung to make them "cold" and they will have been sharpened for the occasion. He takes the boy's foreskin between the fingers of one hand, stretches it over the glans and cuts it. The boy is lifted from his table and placed so that the blood from his wound

collects in a piece of paperbark. His guardians tell him that he is now a man and he must not cry and they press more warmed bushes to his body. It is felt that the boy's cries would increase his father's feeling of pain. Throughout the operation his father stands in sight but with his back to the novice, covering his ears so as not to hear his son cry out.

The foreskin is kept in a roll of paperbark which is wedged into the fork of a nearby tree. It is the property of the banajara man who has "woken the boy up to the Law". I am told that he takes it away on a journey and receives presents upon showing it to the people on his way. He gets the foreskin, according to one man, because he "gave the novice Law" but if he loses it he will be killed. He is a "big man", a really high man, really "gentleman" and a "rich man" on account of the presents which he receives. When the foreskin is well and truly dry he returns it to the novice's banbayi, but it is held by the latter's mother's maternal uncle.

The banajara man can be, but it is not necessary, the circumcisor. The latter is preferably a potential father-in-law of the novice, but there is not necessarily a commitment made that the latter will actually be given one of the former's daughters. Similarly, there is no guarantee at this stage that the novice will marry close sisters of

the men who have taken leading roles in the rites as his brothers-in-law. Nonetheless, these men are the leaders, for the purposes of these rites, of the whole group of bilibilayi, just as the novice's mother's fathers of maternal uncles take a leading role among banbayi, and the relationship between circumcisor and circumcised is, in the strongest possible sense, symbolic of the relationship between a father-in-law and a son-in-law. This important point will be taken up later.

The fate of the paperbark which was used to collect the novice's blood is different. It is buried on the edges of a waterhole in the novice's mother's country. The surrounding area becomes kudukudu (sacred, taboo) for as long as four years during which time it is not hunted. At the end of this period the novice's uncle rubs red ochre on the nearby trees to make the country "free" (lamanda) and the paperbark is transferred permanently to a place on the novice's country, his father's country. In other words, whereas the foreskin passes among the bilibilayi and comes to rest in the hands of the senior representative of the novice's matriline, the blood goes to the country of the mother, who is arguably a central figure among banbayi, and remains in the possession of his patriline. The former remains above ground to dry, the latter is placed in the ground near water. Furthermore the foreskin attracts wealth in the hands of the banajara, but the blood requires restraint on

the part of those who normally hunt on the mother's country.

4. The novice's guardian now is a ngabudji ("FM"). Until the youth's wounds have dried he is supposedly not allowed food or water. I am not certain however that water is absolutely denied him in practice. It is more likely that he is allowed small amounts by his guardian. Whatever the case, these restrictions on the novice's diet and his separation from fire and water apply with most intensity at this point, tapering off with time and progress of the rites.

The novice's removal from water is said to be necessary because he is in danger of attack by "rainbow serpents" who can smell his fresh wound. Even small puddles of water are supposed to hold these dangers and where the novice cannot be lead around these he is carefully lifted over them. The novice's smell at this stage differs from the one he exuded prior to being circumcised. That was a rotten smell, the smell of death and decomposition; this is the smell of a "new" man, underripe and raw. This is signalled by, among other things, the transition from the use of dry bushes to green, of which we will see more later. The novice thus remains food, at least the kind of food which is attractive to "rainbow serpents".

Being raw, he is kept separate from fire and he cannot tend

one of his own. His guardian tends a namanda, a sacred fireplace, through which all of the uncooked food destined for the novice must pass. When the novice is able to eat he is sent cooked food by his mother's mother, and only this need not pass through the namanda.

Other banbayi may eat food from the novice's namanda, except for his father. I recorded the following explanation for this exception. "When a child is young his mother is responsible for his body, not his father. That is why the father can't eat namanda food. When [as I will shortly explain] his kukudi [mother's mother] rubs him with red ochre, the father is boss.". The exclusion of the father from the commensal circle of the namanda indicates that the father is differentiated from banbayi. Bilibilayi eat from a special namanda prior to their dancing. The food is supplied by banbayi.

The namanda, which is used in contexts other than this, is a fire built within an arcuate mound of earth. This is a uterine symbol, which also occurs in other contexts (cf. the bough break around one side of the ring place) including the Kunapipi, and it suggests that the food originates from the "fire", and its prior source is no longer significant. Whereas a group of people with different kinship relations to the human source of food would stand differently to that food according to these different relations, food from the

namanda has only one source, the fire itself, to which all stand equally. All who eat from a namanda are therefore unified by the feast. Notwithstanding, there seems to be a parallel between food from the namanda and food from the novice's mother's mother, in so far as it is destined for the novice, since he may only eat food from these sources.

5. At the end of this period of recovery, which might last ten days, the preparations are made for the novice to "go through the smoke". The earth oven designed to smoke the novice is built along it, to the south of the ring though still on the edge of the camp. A hole about a metre in diameter and about thirty centimetres deep is dug and a fire is built within it. It is then covered with damp grass so that it gives off steam.

The novice is met at sundown by a party of brothers-in-law and matrilinear agnates (an expanded group of the same kinds of kin who originally escorted the novice on his journey, in other words). Carrying green bushes, they form a pack around the novice and take him towards the earth oven. As they go they call out "Wu!", then answer "Yi!" alternately raising their bushes and waving them downwards. At the same time the novice's sisters, covered under blankets, are led, from the camp to the earth oven. The two parties face each other over the smoke with the sisters crouching beneath their covering. The men put their green

bushes on top of the fireplace and more water is added to it to encourage steam. Wearing only a loose calico around his waist the novice is made to kneel on the smoking oven and the smoke circulates around his wounds. After about five minutes the sisters are led away, the novice is removed from the fire and he is taken to a nearby camp where the banbayi men (excepting the father) have a communal meal from a namanda. The novice also eats.

The novice will now camp for, perhaps, a week or more at this camp which is located on the imaginary divide to which I referred above.

6. The novice is under a strict ban of silence before the men and women who danced for him on the two nights preceding his circumcision. Those of the men who wish to relieve him of this ban go to the novice, rub sweat from under their arms on his forehead and bite his thumb. Potential fathers-in-law and the brothers of mothers-in-law would not be among these and it is possible for other men to delay this rite.

The novice's mother and father's sister have to hold his head in order to make him speak. They are then under an obligation to find certain foods for him: wild honey, lily roots, black plums, green plums, wild potato, tortoise and goanna. Supervised by the novice's mother's mother, they pass these foods under their arms (to pick up the sweat,

ngalki) and give them to the novice. Thenceforth the novice may not eat goanna, though he may eat blue-tongued lizard. He may also not eat flying-fox, female kangaroo, stingray, emu, snakes of any description, shark and certain parts of other species. His diet is a lean one and it is devoid of "soft tucker".

7. Once these obligations have been discharged the novice is ready to be rubbed with red ochre by his mother's mother. This is the very opposite to "giving sweat" (ngalkingunda). Whereas the latter conveys an essence from one person to another, red ochre removes it. To give sweat is to place someone under an obligation of some kind, rubbing with red ochre removes that obligation. (It will be recalled that the novice's uncle rubs red ochre on the trees near where the novice's blood has been buried in order to "free" it of the ban on hunting. There are numerous occasions when red ochre is used in similar ways.) By this means the novice finally passes from his mother's Law to his father's Law.

With this the novice finishes his period of initiation and, as a young man, rejoins the life of the camp - more or less. He lives in his parent's camp and continues to eat food from his mother's fire, though he sleeps separately from his sisters and his parents. Nonetheless young men are no longer there on the same terms as they were when they were children only weeks or months before. Though they are

barely adolescents they are supposed to be men, and to behave accordingly. They tend to be distant, reserved, uneasy and even impatient with life in the camp. In short, they have acquired a new self-consciousness.

Nowadays it is common for boys to be initiated before being sent to high school in Darwin or elsewhere, or during the summer vacation, so they do not remain at home for long afterwards. Some, escaping the educational net, leave home to go to live with relatives on cattle stations where they are likely to find work as stockmen on junior wages, or even less. In any event a young man will lean towards a peripatetic life and it is common for them to travel widely throughout North Australia and the outback, passing from camp to camp on the basis of extended kinship, acquired friendships and work. In the Macassan past newly initiated men travelled with the trepangers and when the Macassans stopped coming their place was taken by the pearlers who travelled between Broome and the islands of the Torres Straits. Indeed, one young man returned from a journey which took him to Broome where he met old men who claimed to have known his father from the pearling days of the 1920's.

If the young man is in town for the Marndiwar in the year following his own he will, as long as he is a bilibilayi, be expected to dance and to wear a mark. He is expected to paint up at a distance from most of the men but his

relatives will take a special interest in the design to be painted on his body. In subsequent Marndiwar he joins in more closely with the other men.

6.2 Two myths.

The novice passes through several symbolic states during the sequence of rites associated with the Marndiwar. I will discuss two myths relevant to circumcision and to the symbolism of male initiation.

Skink and Blanket Lizard The first myth accounts for the origin of men's Marndiwar dancing and its connection with circumcision. The events to which the myth refers occurred just east of Borroloola at a ring place attended by goanna, emu, skink, and "blanket lizard", among other species associated with the Wuyaliya semimoiety, and where dingo, also Wuyaliya, was the novice. This version is very close to one I was given by a young man and the appearance of "style", "mocked", "ears", "hair" and "bald", among others is due to him. I recorded this on paper as he was telling me the story, so it is not exactly verbatim.

SKINK AND BLANKET LIZARD.

The blanket lizard had a young man on their ring place at the Fletcher River. The skink said "I'll show you how to dance for a young man". He danced in his style.

"You can't dance for a young man like that!" The blanket lizard mocked and laughed at the attempts of the skink. "I'll show you."

The lizard danced vigorously, sending up dust everywhere. "You want to cut your hair like mine." He said this with his ears (blanket) pressed close to his head.

He then cut off the skink's hair, making him as bald as the lizard appeared to be. "Ha! Look at you, you're bald." The blanket lizard laughed and danced flapping his ears.

The two fought until the skink won. "You go back to the dry country", he said, "I'll stay here on the river side."

The dancing style of the skink is supposed to have been like the languorous waving of its front foot which is characteristic of skinks today. The blanket lizard danced the Marndiwar style which resembles the way in which blanket lizards run upright on their hind legs. In the myth the skink is deceived into thinking that the potency of the lizard's style is due to his apparent baldness so he agrees to have his own hair removed. However the skink's actual baldness receives the same response as did his dancing from the blanket lizard. The blanket lizard's possessions of "hair" and "ears", in spite of appearances, is of a part with his vigour in dancing. There is no strain in asserting that the removal of the skink's "hair" in this myth is a metaphor for circumcision. Since Borroloola Aborigines view circumcision as a necessary condition for true manhood, the myth indicates a strange ambivalence about it.

At first it appears that not being circumcised, the skink's

having hair, leads to a kind of impotent, languorous dancing. The potency of the lizard is attributed to this supposed circumcision. But circumcision does not improve the skink's position. Whatever the connection between circumcision and potency, it is evidently not a simple one.

Two points need to be noted. Firstly, Marndiwar dancing evokes, among other things, the movements of vigorous copulation by its rapid springing from the balls of the feet, and by the spread of the dancer's legs. The sexual symbolism of this dance is an obvious and conscious feature of it. There is, moreover, a connection, to the minds of Aborigines, between sexual and reproductive power and vigour in general: childless married men are said to be lazy. Secondly, at Borroloola a man's head is sacred. It is the "same as" his country. His hair is especially sacred and it ought only be cut by a "manager". The penis is metaphorically an homunculus, the glans is its "head" or "hat". The foreskin is therefore equivalent to hair. Clearly then it is permissible to speak of hair-cutting and circumcision as symbolic castration.

In the light of this, the story might be reinterpreted as follows. The skink appeared uncastrated, but, as a dancer, was actually impotent. The blanket lizard only appeared castrated but was potent as a dancer. The skink was then actually castrated but remained impotent though his

castration was designed to make him potent. Is it the case then that the story denies any link between circumcision/castration and potency?

To illuminate this question it is first necessary to consider the theme of appearance and deception. This is at least as important to the sense of the story as the circumcision/castration theme to which it is closely tied. It was, after all, the appearance of the skink, the sight he presented to the blanket lizard, that lay at the basis of his moral subjection to the lizard. The skink showed his "style" but this was met with mockery by the lizard, who showed his style to be superior. This contest of appearances, which really was about intrinsic and moral superiority, led to the skink being deceived that his real difference from the lizard had to do with outward appearances. The removal of the skink's hair only superficially adjusted the skink's appearance, and his baldness, which the lizard had deceptively presented as his own mark of superiority, became the mark of the skink's original difference with the lizard, the mark of his inferiority. The superiority of the blanket lizard was his ability to laugh at and to deceive the skink, the superiority of looking and judging.

Borrooloola Aborigines are very conscious of the aggressiveness of looking. It is bad manners to stare at others,

and though adults seldom do this children are less controlled in this respect. It is common to hear a child angrily rebuke another for staring, and parents sometimes impose minor disciplines on children by saying "Whitefella looking at you!". Old people are supposed to have the power of dangumanthara which can bring "bad luck" to their juniors by staring. Similarly, it is bad to be too much exposed. To be minaji is to be seen, or to be open to the gaze and judgements of others, in a way which invites comment. Aspiring leaders are in danger of being minaji if they assume too prominent a role, and it is though wiser to exert an influence by more subtle means. The danger of being minaji is that one might fall under the unfriendly gaze of someone with access to sorcery. In ceremonial context this danger is removed when performers wear masks and body designs or when they act with the full justification of the Law. In both cases actors are not expressing their individual personality. Their public behaviour is thought to manifest the ultimate reality of the world as a kind of transcendental responsibility, not a personal motive.

In the myth of the blanket lizard and the skink the skink's moral subordination to the gaze and judgement of the lizard is ruptured when the lizard demonstrates the deception and reveals his naked aggression. The inferiority of the skink is no longer the issue and the two enter a physical combat from which the skink emerges the victor. Finally the skink

orders the lizard to the dry country and keeps the wet and cool river-side for himself.

After his circumcision/castration, in other words, the skink experiences a genuine revelation and a transformation from being an inferior, to being an equal and then also to being a superior of the lizard. The final superiority of the skink is perhaps expressed by his remaining "cool" by the river-side, while the lizard is a "hot head" in the dry country. However the final resolution is a separation of the antagonists between the wet and the dry, and this separation is also maintained for the novice after circumcision in the Marndiwar.

The whole movement of the story is from enclosure and concealment to separation. The skink was initially enclosed within the superior view and judgement of the lizard and within his own hair. But the real truth behind these enclosures was concealed, not by the visible hair of the skink, but the concealed hair of the lizard. The revelation of what had been concealed, that the lizard had something hidden, was the point of exit for the skink from the lizard's enclosing gaze and judgement. In the story this decisively marks the transition from enclosure to separation, but this was signalled earlier by the separation of the skink and his hair. The separation is then marked by the juxtaposition of skink and lizard in conflict, and then

final spatial separation. In brief, the connection between circumcision/castration and power which is made in this myth is that the skink's castration won him an immunity from aggressive social power and, at the same time, ablated his own aggressive urges. The uncastrated lizard remained "hot" (aggressive), the skink became "cool".

The story of the skink and the blanket lizard, brief as it is, encapsulates by analogy the whole process of initiation from the enclosure of the novice in hair string, its removal, the linear process leading to the ablation of his foreskin, the separation of wet and dry after circumcision, and possibly the steaming of the novice. This steaming brings the wet and dry and the hot and cool together and infuses the novice with their mixture. At the same time he emerges from his seclusion into public but he is separated from his sisters who are now enclosed beneath blankets, analogously to the enclosure of the blanket lizard.

The Two Young Men. The next story, about two young men, ("duwara wudjara"), rather than paralleling the whole initiatory process opens immediately after the young men's circumcision, when they depart on their epical journey and cross the boundary from ordinary existence to the realm of the supernatural.

Once when I was recording it, another man who was listening

was provoked by the episodes in which the two young men are swallowed and regurgitated alive by the serpent to ask if they were Dreaming. "No", answered the story teller, "they're really". The other persisted: "Well how come they're alive?". "I don't know", the teller pondered, "maybe Dreaming". There could be no ambivalence about the status of the myth of the skink and lizard: they are unambiguously Dreaming, but the story of the two young men belongs to human experience, albeit of a supernatural kind. There seemed to be no way in which the continued life of the two boys could be explained unless they had miraculous powers like the beings of the Dreaming. Even had these been attributed to the rainbow this would have jeopardised the distinction since it would then have become the central character. What is most interesting about this interchange is the opposition between Dreaming and "really".

This contrast is very close to those distinctions in the European tradition, at least since the Enlightenment, between fiction and non-fiction, between the imaginary and the real and between fantasy and the rational apprehension of reality. One difference between these parallel distinctions from the two traditions is that whereas the Aboriginal imaginary, in so far as it somehow condenses, informs or illuminates nomological knowledge is given an actual time and place conjoined with reality, the European imaginary is not.

However, as the interchange which I record above indicates, though the Dreaming and the "really" world each have facticity to Aborigines, different kinds of thought are supposed to be appropriate to each, and it is not easy to pass between them. Had this been a Dreaming story then there would have been no more point in asking questions than there would be to ask why the lizard tricked the skink. In the European tradition, though only poets and artists are granted full rights to pass between the real and the imaginary, it seems that this privilege is conditional on their separation from ordinary existence in a way which is similar to the removal of the Aboriginal novice. It may then be appropriate to introduce the story of the two young men with some thoughts of one European who through a "systematic derangement of the senses" conducted himself through his own tour of limbo.

"Not one of the sophisms of madness, - the madness which society locks up, - was forgotten by me: I could repeat them all, I understand the system. My health was threatened. Terror developed. I fell into sleep of several days duration, and, when up, I continued the saddest dreams. I was ripe for death, and by a road of dangers my weakness led me to the ends of the world and of Cimmeria, the home of darkness and whirlwinds. I had to travel, to divert the enchantments collected in my brain. Upon the sea, which I loved as if it could have cleansed me of a defilement, I saw the consoling cross arise. I had been damned by a rainbow." (Rimbaud, 1973: 89)

TWO YOUNG MEN.

At Ngarlbangarala (five miles downstream from Borroloola) people had a ring place where they circumcised two young men who were cross-cousins. Righthand was Rumburriya and Lefthand was Wuyaliya. They were waiting in seclusion for their "grannies" (kukudis, MMs) to bring them the lily root they were cooking. The two young men called out to them for food. Their grannies refused, saying that they were too "new" because they had been circumcised only that morning.

The two then left their seclusion camp in search of food. After finding some black plums they sat down to cook them. One sat on the eastern side, the other sat on the west. They twirled their fire drills and looked into the interstice for a spark of fire. The rainbow serpent came out from that point. The young men then ran away. The marks of this activity are visible on the rock at this place today: two depressions where they sat, some holes made by the fire drill and from which the rainbow emerged.

From there they moved westwards to Bumbalngani where they killed quails and began to cook them in an earth oven. They continued westwards and speared a black-nosed python in the head, creating a spring. Righthand's nose started bleeding. Behind them at Bumbalngani, their earth oven rose out of the ground and swelled into the hill which is visible today.

Continuing west, they speared a whip snake at Kuwarandila, making another spring. At Wununungku one went to defecate. They broke speargrass at Windawunyara and played with their spears. At Muluwiluma they killed a female mountain kangaroo and dragged it along the ground creating a creek at Wadangka and they cooked it at Akulungku. Next they killed a pheasant at Kandabulbulma. Further west they found tree gum at Manamanala and knocked it down with sticks and stones.

At Arawandji they killed some flying fox which were hanging up in the trees. The two had been following these flying fox which had been flying low overhead towards the west. At Adjara they killed some more and followed others to what is now the sinkhole Ngambingambi.

At Ngambingambi flying-fox hung in the tea trees in large numbers, but unknown to the young men, these trees were really the ribs of the snake which had

preceded them. The two began to knock more flying-fox from the trees. They made a fire to singe their wings. This was ineffective: the flying-fox fell into the fires but flew away. The two made an earth oven for the flying-fox, but when the oven was opened the flying-fox flew out unharmed. While Righthand tended the oven, Lefthand went "outside" to defecate. As he was squatting a boomerang (actually a rainbow rib) came out from the ground and poked him in the anus. He returned to the earth oven and the flying-fox were still "raw, alive and singing out".

"You and me go mate."¹

They killed flying-fox two each side; another Righthand side, another Lefthand side. Lefthand threw his boomerang and it went away altogether. He could not find it anywhere. It went right out to Muluwa (Vanderlin Island) and he had a look at that country. That boomerang came back again and sank down in the mud.

"Oh! I've found it here" said Lefthand. "We can pull it out."

"All right, but I'll have to feed first" said Righthand, and he ate some flying-fox.

Lefthand started to pull out the boomerang. It was loose in the mud, but it would not come out. He started to sink down into the mud. "Hey mate! What about you help me?" he called.

They both started to pull on that boomerang but it would not come out of the mud. They started to sink down more. Still they pulled. They were down to their knees. They sank down more, up to their necks. They could only see sky.

"Hullo, you and me are a long way mate". They sang this song:

¹. From this sentence onwards, apart from the sections in brackets, I follow virtually verbatim a telling of the story by the late Owen Hampton. The written words do not do justice to the warmth and to the drama of his oral narration. In this section before this point I have relied on several tellings to add details and to clarify some points and it is mainly set out in my own words. This applies to the sections within brackets except when the words and phrases are between quotation marks.

Warakulamba Ngambingambi
Ninikuramba Ngambingambi
Wirrambaramba Ngambingambi
Yarambaramba Ngambingambi

They heard from beneath them: "Bubi".

"Ah, that's the bugger that swallow you and me mate.
Big bugger snake here underneath."

Twofella been singim that snake (to make it "quiet")
- but no good. They sink down altogether, head and
all. They inside that snake stomach. They been
there a good while and all the birds from everywhere
came around, turtle, everything. They all cut
themselves to make water. No good.

Crow been talk: "You fellas wait here. Everybody go
no water here. Him too dry that poor bugger, that
snake. He can't go nowhere. You go to Luriyardi
and Mariyibul, get that Mambaliya mob. They got
water."

"All right!" They (in other versions the crow, who
is Mambaliya, goes) got Ayukuwal ("stinking turtle")
and Ayilindjar (pygmy goose).

"You allabout come up, we got two little boys in the
dry place. Snake can't take them somewhere. You
fellas help that snake take it away those young
man."

Ayukuwal and Ayilindjar come up to Ngambingambi:
"Where that twofella?"

"Look, here underneath, no water."

So Ayukuwal and Ayilindjar began to cut themselves
with stone knives singing:

Madjamiya wudjar
Nyiki wudjar
Duwara wudjar
Madjamiya wudjar
Kiripu! Kiripu! Kiripu!

They made water come out and go all over. They made
a sea there. The snake came out from underground.
He flattened and levelled the place with his tail.

(With the two young men in its belly the snake
retraced their original journey on its way to the
McArthur River. At Yarndindi, which is between the
original ringplace at Borroloola, the snake

regurgitated the two. They looked back to the west and saw the snake's eyes "shining bright like the sun" from a place called Abarala).

He been burnim twofella.

"That's the bugger been swallowim you and me mate". They been swearim that snake. "You get fucked. Fuck you, shit. Stinkin' prick." They been use a bad word.

(The snake swallowed them again. He tried to "save them, letting them out at a place further down the McArthur River, but they swore at him again. This was repeated at the following places along the course of the river: Walaluba, Wiyingu and Walayi, among others. They went out the mouth of the river to the sea and travelled to Centre Island in the Pellew Group. There the two were released at Mungkumungkanda where they tried again to cook some of the flying-fox which they had brought with them from Ngamingambi. When they opened the earth oven, the flying-fox flew away. Some were caught by a white-chested sea eagle which is Dreaming on North Island according to some versions.

At Mungkumungkanda the two were retaken by the snake, but from that point they road astride his back through the sea. The snake took them like this to two tiny islets in the seas to the northeast of the northernmost tip of North Island, Naninyira and Wuyidkunbu. The two young men then played Wambuyungu (Yabuduruwa) and Kunapipi and then "melted up rock" in the water, Lefthand at Naninyira, and Righthand at Wuyidkunbu. The rainbow remains somewhere in the vicinity. These remain sacred and dangerous places. If one should land there one is likely to have snakes and lizards crawling over one's body, or in one's path. These should not be killed or even brushed away lest the islands tip over. Even whitemen know about these islands, "they gotim long compass").

There is no mistaking the warning in this myth for young men who might have rebellious thoughts against their seniors and their initiatory regime. Ignorant and impulsive, driven by mere hunger, Righthand and Lefthand abandon their post-circumcision disciplines, leaving their seclusion camp to hunt and kill many of the species which are forbidden by their status. In strong contrast to their happy naivety, inexorable powers lurk beneath the surface in the figure of the rainbow serpent, and they fail to see the signs of their impending disaster; signs which are abundant but unread. Even after they are swallowed they misunderstand the snake's offer of redemption and they rail against him each time they are regurgitated, though this inevitably leads to their being reswallowed. For young men the message is clear: however heavy regime imposed upon them, it has a significance beyond appearances and beyond their capacity to fully comprehend and question; the alternatives to obedience can lead to incalculable disaster.

However pertinent it is to young men, it would not be correct to see this myth as a concoction designed for them by others who see things differently. For one thing, this myth is widely known - it probably has the widest currency of all myths known to Borroloola - and it is not primarily, or even always, told for the benefit of young men. Clearly virtually everyone at Borroloola believes these events took place. Deeper than the belief in the factuality of the

story, its tragic message that the order of the world ultimately eludes human understanding has a particular cogency within the world view of the Aboriginal people at Borroloola (and elsewhere). Perhaps this wisdom is grounded in experience: of the caprice of sorcerers and raiders, of the vulnerability of humans to the forces of nature, of the subjection of the individual to initiations to bodily mutilation, of the frequency of death. For the old, for whom the chance of death is the highest (though there may not be the same perceived correlation between the chance of death and age as Europeans are used to) and who are supposed to be the final reservoir of human wisdom, this tragic sense must have a special verisimilitude. After all, they must know better than their juniors just how insufficient is human knowledge and power in the world, for each generation can only look to the generations before it for the repository of wisdom, and the old have only the dead before them. If the old have a message for the young then it is probably, as Stanner observes for the Murinbata, that "there has been some kind of "immemorial misdirection" in human affairs, and that living men are committed to its consequences" (1960: 260).

Stanner draws this conclusion about Murinbata though in the context of his discussion about their myth of Mutjingga, the Old Woman. This myth at first seems very different from the myth of the two young men from Borroloola but a closer

examination reveals striking similarities in their themes. Like the story of the two young men, the myth of Mutjingga is a myth of the "swallowing and regurgitation" type (Hiatt, 1975: 143ff) and it also has two figures called Lefthand and Righthand but the similarities between the two myths lie at a deeper level than this. The ontological status of the events described in these two myths is similar. Stanner says that "Mutjingga was once "Kadu" i.e. a truly human person, not one of the self-subsistent spirits recognised within the theogony." (ibid.: 262). This accords with the "really" status of the Borroloola myth.

The Mutjingga myth and the Borroloola myth of the two boys show family resemblances and other members of this family of myths have been recorded from the peoples between Port Keats and Borroloola (see for example Elkin (1972: 85-87), Hiatt, (1975: 143-154), Maddock and Buchler (1978: 103-104) and various of the myth in Roheim (1969)). These probably stand in different relationships to the rites and ceremonies of people who tell them though many of these myths are associated with ceremonies of the Karwardi and Kunapipi cults. This is so for Murinbata myth but not so for the myth of the two young men which is not directly related to any particular ceremony, including the Marndiwar. These differences may well account for the differences between these myths though the converse may also be true: the differences between the myths may also amount to differences

in how they can be adapted to ritual. Though it would clearly be fruitful to study the whole or large numbers of this family in order to discover their common themes and structures this is not possible here. I will, however, use the Murinbata myth to illustrate some aspects of the Borroloola myth and as a guide to my interpretation of it.

It is necessary to say something first about the status of the snake in the myth of the two boys as a "rainbow" (pujimarla). Notions such as "rainbow" have been documented for many areas of Aboriginal Australia and the literature on them is too extensive to be documented here. Maddock (Maddock and Buchler, 1978) reviews some of this literature and shows the deep metaphysical significance of this kind of concept and its pervasiveness in Aboriginal thought. At Borroloola the concept of "rainbow" has many of the characteristics of the corresponding concepts from other places. "Rainbow" is applied in numerous circumstances to suggest the fecundating power of nature and the immense natural forces displayed by the wet season and by cyclones in tropical Australia. One might say as a gloss that the metaphysics of "rainbow" is a metaphysics of eternal cyclical becoming which is the grounding of life. Maddock (ibid.: 115) also notes the "stress on cyclicity embedded in the concept" and its connection with the role of cyclical thinking in Aboriginal thought. This is an important point for understanding some of the symbolism of the Marndiwar and

I will return to it later.

The metaphysics of "rainbow" can, to a large extent, stand on its own as a philosophical conception of the greatest generality and scope. Nonetheless, at Borroloola (and probably elsewhere it is set against another conception indicated by "ngabaya". Ngabaya are spirits of the human dead, whitemen, disembodied spirits, humanoid creatures with knife-like arms, others with powers to transform themselves from human form into dogs, little wild people like leprechauns, and buffaloes. In short, ngabayas are associated with death, disorder and deformity.

With only one exception for each concept, rainbows are associated with the Mambaliya and Rumburriya (and Wawukaria) semi-moieties and ngabayas belong to the Wudaliya and Wuyaliya semi-moieties. That is to say, rainbows are associated with one moiety and ngabayas with the other. Among these, rainbows are particularly associated with the Mambaliya semi-moiety and ngabayas belong to Wudaliya. When a rainbow belongs to Rumburriya or a ngabaya to Wuyaliya, then it is said to be "half-rainbow" or "half-ngabaya".

The exceptions to this classification are as follows. Some dugong, old bulls living outside the herd on their own, are said to be "rainbows". These (jiyamarama) are Wuyaliya, that is, they belong among "half-ngabaya". Secondly the

limping man Narakulandji who pursues the Kunapipi mararabana women, copulating with them "all the way", is described as a ngabaya. He belongs among half-rainbows, to Rumburriya. Both these enigmatic classifications concern individuals who are set apart from their group: the dugong because they live alone, Narakulandji because he is a lone man among women.

In this way "rainbow" is made part of a dualistic conception with "ngabaya" at the opposite pole. This partialisation is carried further by the association of each conception with a particular semi-moiety within the moiety with which it is associated. The other semi-moieties suggest intermediate classifications and refinements on this major organising opposition. The issues of semi-moiety classification are extremely complex and it would be difficult to account for the classification of all of the many species in terms of one single scheme. If one could do this then no doubt Aborigines would readily be able to volunteer this kind of information. Sometimes they do, but only tentatively. For example, when I asked for the semi-moiety of a small, ritually insignificant bird I was told that it was probably Wuyaliya because it appeared in the cold weather. Similarly a spider was probably Wudaliya because Wudaliya things "walk funny way".

With this reservation then, my impression is that Wuyaliya, apart from being associated with cold weather, is associated

with agents and subjects of transformation and with liminality. Fire, dingos, circumcision and novices are all Wuyaliya. Rumburriya seems to be associated with gregariousness: groups of women, groups of men, packs of sharks, herds of dugong, schools of porpoises are examples. It is associated with the hot weather, with the salt water and with tides. It is also strongly associated with women, motherhood and uterine functions and in this respect it contrasts with Mambaliya which is more phallic. My impression is also that Rumburriya is thought of as the semi-moiety of social order. It contrasts with Wuyaliya, which is more individualised and liminal in character, and with Wudaliya. Unlike Rumburriya animals, Wudaliya's social animals are organised amorphously. The prototype case is sea turtles. Their society is thought of as a highly unstructured community in which "they help each other for picanniny".

The general conceptions "rainbow" and "ngabaya" are in this way displaced into parts of a horizontally organised system of thought and this continues to more specific levels. There are not only ngabaya in general, as a pervasive force, there is the particular rainbow Dreaming. At Borroloola the rainbow is called Walalu and his original form is the water python or "quiet" snake. Water pythons are still said to be rainbows but there are also beings with similar titanic powers to Walalu living as rainbows in rivers, in waterholes

and wherever water is found. In Rumburriya country these supposedly take the form of king brown snakes and this is the species of the snake in the story above. This is a "cheeky" (poisonous) snake which can look similar to the water python. While the latter is oviparous the king brown snake bears its young alive. The two snakes have diametrically different temperaments: the cheeky snake is extremely aggressive, the quiet snake is extremely docile. In the same way as the blanket lizard and the skink, their temperaments correspond to their habitats: the aggressive snake belongs to dry country, the quiet snake to the lagoon.

The "cheeky" snake is used in the Kunapipi as an emblem for the "wild women" (mararabana) and it seems that they both are aggressive. There are places I am told, where a man can find these "wild women" and even capture one for a wife. This takes exceptional courage because these creatures are very aggressive, but it can apparently be done. The technique is to lasso a wild woman, tie her tightly and cook her over a fire to make her quiet. (People are supposed to have done this in the past though I could find no evidence of it in genealogies. Perhaps these woman-tamers have not emerged unscathed!) The snake who swallowed the two young men is said to be male but this evidence would suggest that it is also female. Rainbow serpents are frequently ambisexual and this snake alternates in other ways as well. First it hunts the two young men by a process of deception

and then it tries to "save" them by regurgitation. It is both an eater and a giver of life. In the Murinbata myth, Mutjingga takes the children by deception and at no time tries to save them from herself. They are eventually saved by the two men Righthand and Lefthand so that in this myth aggression and benevolence are the functions of female and male respectively. This lends support to the characterisation of the snake in a Borroloola myth as an ambisexual being.

The duality of the single figure of the rainbow in the Borroloola myth has a counterpart in the duality of the two young men. As Lefthand and Righthand they represent two sides of a single body, and since they are cross-cousins they are descendants of a male and female siblings. They also represent the two moieties since one is Rumburriya and the other is Wuyaliya. In these senses they are two aspects of a unity which can be conceived as the unity of the body, the unity of siblings (from a single body?), and the unity of the group formed by the coalition of two moieties (in marriages between two sets of siblings?). This suggests an unfolding of one to many.

There is some other evidence that the two young men represent many from the Murinbata myth. Mutjingga swallows ten children in all, precisely two hands full, and this is the counterpart in the Murinbata myth to the swallowing of

two young men in the Borroloola myth. The number ten is usually signified by the digits of the hands. It may also be relevant that the two young men nearly eat, eat a small portion of, kill or playfully use ten species: lily roots, black plums, quail, black-nosed python, whip snake, speargrass, kangaroo, pheasant, tree gum and flying-fox. The ambivalence of the two young men towards these species as food conforms to the spirit of the story in that they too are ambivalent food. They therefore stand in the same relationship to the species which they hunt and use as the rainbow serpent stands to them, as ambivalent eaters and ambiguous food respectively. They mediate in this way between the snake and the animals but this relationship also suggests that the two young men may be interpreted as a single entity or as a plurality, though there are dominantly a duality. Thematic play between unity, duality and plurality are prominent in this myth.

In the Borroloola myth there are three pairs of actors: Lefthand and Righthand, their "grannies" and Ayilindjar and Ayukuwal. The snake is the major single actor though other animals appear singly: the black-nosed python, whip snake, pheasant and mountain kangaroo. Though they appear singly the two snakes could be counted a contrasting pair analogous to Ayukuwal and Ayilindjar. The black-nosed python is thought to be a "dirty bugger snake", Ayukuwal is a "stinking turtle", the whip snake is associated with water

like the Ayilindjar. Like the two liberating animals these snakes produce water, though only after being speared. The black-nosed python appears to be associated by proximity with a bleeding nose and the whip snake with defecation. If this were accurate then the pairing of Ayukuwal with the black-nosed python and the whip snake with Ayilindjar, which is what one would expect, is reversed on this point.

There are two main pluralities apart from the species hunted by the two young men. Though they do not emerge as actors in the narrative there is a group of people who attended the young men's circumcision. Secondly there is the assembly of helpful birds and turtles. In addition to these, the quails and flying-fox which are enclosed in the earth ovens are pluralities, and the lily roots (which contain numerous seeds) and the plums can be counted as plural.

Dualities tend strongly though not invariably to mediate between pluralities and unities. The exception to this is that the grannies mediate between the plurality of people and the two young men. They do, however, transform lily root seeds into dampers, and this may be taken as a mediation between plurals and singles. The pair, Ayukuwal and Ayilindjar, mediate between plurals and singles by helping the assembled birds liberate the snake. The two young men, as I have pointed out, mediate between the animals they hunt and the rainbow snake which hunts them,

that is, in an aggressive eating series quite in contrast to the benevolent series mediated by Ayukuwal and Ayilindjar.

Variants of bounding and process associated with approximately circular and linear forms, respectively, are important to the structure of the myth. There are two varieties of the former and also two of the latter. The two types of circular form depend on the distinction between inside and outside. The belly of the snake and the earth ovens enclose their contents: these are inside the boundary. When the bird's converge on Ngamingambi they are on the outside of the boundary, the snake's belly.

The two kinds of linear forms are "straight" and "crooked". Righthand is associated with straight (or gently curving) lines and Lefthand with crooked lines. They named the parts of the McArthur River which correspond to these shapes and this is said to be the reason why the upper parts of the river are mainly Rumburriya and the lower parts, where the river winds through the mangrove swamps, the Wuyaliya. This distinction also appears in relation to the river which is Mutjingga's course in the Murinbata myth: "The river now went crookedly" (Stanner, 1960: 261). It is also the same as between "straights" and "bends" in the zig-zag designs of north-western Australia (von Brandenstein, 1972: 223). These designs are supposed to represent rivers. The association between these two types of lines and rivers

suggest that lines, like rivers, have a single direction. Straight lines would suggest a continuity of direction or process and crooked ones, "bends", a change in direction or process. The association of these with rivers also suggests a "downwards" direction to these lines since the direction of rivers is said to be, absolutely, from the "top end" to the "bottom end", and, relatively, from "up" (angka) to "down" (wayika). This vertical orientation is relevant to the vocal, alimentary and female reproductive metaphors which are so prominent in the myth. These are linear processes but they also involve enclosure and movements from the inside to the outside of the body. I will discuss vocal metaphors first.

The sound made by the snake in response to the song of the two young men is a deep visceral "bubi". This is appropriate to the snake's subterranean position. By contrast Ayilindjar and Ayukuwal who act for the birds end their song with a high "kiripu, kiripu, kiripu" which emerges from the upper vocal tract. The two songs are chanted in monotone. The song of the two young men is sung by men today to "quieten" the rainbows at Ngamingambi and at Walala (Lake Eames, on Vanderlin Island). The meaning of the second song is not clear. However, the language of song would seem to contrast with the other major vocalisation, swearing. Each time the young men are regurgitated they swear at their persecutor and and reswallowed. The songs

are placatory, swearing is incited by aggression. Swearing, foul language, stands to the vocal tract as faeces does to the alimentary tract.

The alimentary tract is a more obvious source of metaphor in this myth than the vocal tract or even the female reproductive tract. Alimentary processes such as swallowing and regurgitation and defecation, pre-alimentary processes and states such as rawness and cooking, and post-alimentary results such as stench and faeces (with mud as an associated metaphor) occupy the centre stage in the drama. The vocal tract, as I have shown, is also directly exploited for metaphorical purposes. The myth does not, however, refer directly to the female reproductive tract but the inference that it is present as a metaphor or as the referent of other metaphors seems inescapable, especially in the light of other similar myths (cf. Hiatt 1975). The voice takes its exit from the body through the mouth, which is the point of entry for the alimentary tract, and originates from the lungs. The female reproductive tract originates in the uterus (or perhaps in the two ovaries) and exits at the vagina which is next to the point of exit from the alimentary tract. The upper alimentary tract also has an associated opening at the nose and it may be that the significance of the nose-bleed in the myth is that it draws attention to the symmetry between the upper alimentary tract and the vocal tract and the lower alimentary tract and the

female reproductive tract. The nose under this interpretation bleeds because it stands to the mouth as the vagina does to the anus.

This symmetry indicates that the body is divided into two along the alimentary tract. The stomach is the vessel of transition between the upper and lower halves: the place where food begins to be faeces. This transformation does not happen in the Borroloola myth since the two young men are regurgitated. In the Murinbata myth the children lived only because they "had not gone where the excrement was" (Stanner, 1960: 262).

This vertical division of the body suggests an explanation for the events surrounding the liberation of the snake from the mud. The two liberators, pygmy goose (Ayilindjar) and stinking turtle (Ayukuwal) are creatures of the surface of the water and the immediate subsurface, and the muddy depths of the water hole and beneath the ground, respectively. When there is plenty of water these two creatures occupy adjacent regions within the waterhole: pygmy goose belongs to the top part, stinking turtle to the bottom half. In the latter part of the dry season when the waterholes have dried pygmy geese seek out the remaining water while stinking turtle buries himself underground in the dry mud or in sand. Water thus brings them together, an absence of water separates them into wet and dry regions. In the myth the

water issues from both of them and this suggests that though they are different creatures they are one in relation to water. The stench of the stinking turtle suggests that it is associated with faeces and, because of its habitat, it is also associated with the mud in which the snake is stuck, which is also a faecal metaphor. I have no direct evidence which would point to complementary associations between pygmy geese and alimentary processes but their green colouring and their aqueous habitat might suggest rawness or freshness. Without water these two liberators are separated as are food and faeces but in the presence of water they are connected by process analogous to the alimentary process which transforms food into faeces except that it moves in the opposite direction. Water is able to reverse the direction of alimentation in that it halts the movement towards mud/faeces and initiates the snake's journey to the east where it regurgitates the young men alive. It is associated with the upper alimentary tract, with the region upwards from the surface of the earth, which is the domain of the birds, with benevolence and life, and also, evidently, with the wet season.

Fire, the natural opposition to water, is mainly used in earth ovens, that is, beneath the ground. It belongs to the Wuyaliya semimoiety and on this ground belongs with the dry season. Though it is used at Centre Island towards the end of the journey, the use of fire is otherwise confined to the

young men's journey to Ngamingambi, and it is entirely in human hands. The use of fire is paradoxical: it either fails to cook or it is wasted. The fires consistently fail to cook flying-fox, and the quails are left too long in the oven, and they are wasted. The swelling of this oven may allude to the possibility that overcooking can turn food directly into faeces. The pear-shaped bodies of the quails which could suggest an over-fullness of the bowels contributes to this impression.

The first of the young men's attempts to use fire stands to the trip to Ngamingambi as the liberation of the snake by water stands to the return trip to the McArthur River. They try to make fire in order to cook plums, though these do not need cooking since they are normally eaten raw, but this is frustrated by the emergence of the rainbow snake from the first sparks. In this incident the young men surround the point of the snakes emergence from fire. In the later incident the two liberators make water emerge from themselves on behalf of the animals who converge on Ngamingambi. The mood of the first incident is aggressive while the second incident is in a benevolent mood. Finally, water is given on behalf of creatures from the upper regions and fire is associated with the emergence of the rainbow from the depths.

One incident in particular indicates the connections between

these alimentary themes and the circular and linear imagery which I discussed earlier. When Lefthand left Righthand by the earth over to go "outside" to defecate, as he squatted a boomerang emerged from the ground and poked him in the anus. He returned to the oven to find the flying-fox still alive and singing out. In this incident Righthand is "inside" in the sense that the fire is among the trees which were really the rainbow's ribs, that is Righthand is metaphorically inside the snake's stomach, just as the flying-fox are inside the earth oven, unharmed among the fire. The "outside" is associated with defecation, which is a kind of separation, a linear and downwards process. This appears to have been frustrated by the upwards movement of the boomerang. This failure to defecate is paralleled by the paradoxical failure of the fire to cook the flying-fox. Cooling and defecation are the original terminal points of human alimentation and here they are aligned over the discrete distinction between inside and outside and allocated as special functions of the two young men.

The symbolism of the boomerang which is a rainbow rib and later the rainbow's eyes might be explained as follows. Firstly boomerangs and ribs are crooked or bent and this linear form is associated with Lefthand, who named the crooked parts of the river which are mainly "low down", and with defecation, which is the expulsion of faeces from "low down" after passing through serpentine intestines analogous

to meandering parts of the river. Righthand, who is associated with straight lines, was left with the flying-fox which were originally hanging up in the trees, which were also ribs, and these are in the pre-alimentary and pre-digestive process of cooking. The passage from straight to crooked is thus aligned with the passage between the relatively straight upper alimentary tract, the pre-digestive part, and the lower, crooked, post-digestive intestinal tract.

Secondly, a rib, though one rib follows another as appendages of the linear spine, is complemented by another rib. Boomerangs usually come in pairs too since one of their important functions is to keep time while men chant song cycles. Ribs, and boomerangs used as rhythmical instruments, form an enclosure, and indeed the two young men are thought of as being so enclosed after they are swallowed. The function of the boomerang as eyes on its circular route to survey the route which is eventually taken by the snake and the young men suggests enclosure by the circular imagery and hierarchy, for the same reasons that enclosure and hierarchy are linked in the myth of the skink and the blanket lizard, because it looks. The rainbow is able to enclose within its hierarchy, by means of this farsightedness, two naive young men. Later, after the snake has swallowed the two young men and regurgitated them on the banks of the McArthur River, they see his eyes "shining like

the sun" and they are burnt by his glare. They respond to this with foul language, meeting his authority, which is ambivalently aggressive and benevolent, with naive and rebellious aggression, and they are immediately retaken. After this the snake is said to be trying to "save" the two young men, evidently from his own aggressive impulses, each time he regurgitates them but he is met, in all but the last of these occasions, by the same abuse. These incidents dramatise the tension between enclosure and separation, between hierarchy and independence, between food and swallowing and faeces and expulsion and between benevolence and aggression.

The entire route of the two young men is divisible, as I have said, into three parts: the journey to Ngambingambi, the journey back in the belly of the snake, and the journey down the river and out to sea. On the first leg the two young men are in search of food, they hunt animals and use fire though without any clear results. Their ambivalent use of fire suggests the fact that though they would be eaters and they are hunting, they are in a pre-alimentary state themselves, "new", fresh and raw after circumcision, and about to be eaten. They are evidently already being swallowed. Their path is largely straight. After they are swallowed they are protected from the mud/faeces by their enclosure within the snake and the liberation of the snake by helpful animals. The second leg ends with the snake

regurgitating the two young men by a process as long as their original swallowing over the first leg. The first leg takes the young men from east to west. The second movement is in the opposite direction. Whereas the second movement begins and continues with a benevolent act, the release of the snake by water from the birds and the regurgitation of the young men, the first movement begins with an act of rebellion and continues with a series of aggressive acts. The associations in this myth between fire and rebellious, aggressive and anti-social impulses and water and gregarious, benevolent impulses are most clear in these incidents. They parallel the associations between hot, dry land and aggression and cool, wet riverine land and placidity in the myth of the skink and the blanket lizard. The alternation between these impulses is, as I argue above, encapsulated in the episodes of swallowing and regurgitation. These occur with greater frequency and shorter duration on the third leg.

The third leg takes a radical detour from the axis of the first two. The snake takes the young men down the river from the "top end" to the "bottom end". This is a linear process moving from the straight to the crooked, at least until they arrive at Centre Island. The suggestion that they are moving downwards and through the snake is supported by the downwards direction of the river and by the incident in which the boomerang encircles the whole area. This

encirclement represents a cross-section through the snake. The ambivalence between the rainbow and the two young men seems to give way to a benevolent relationship when the two ride astride his back. This signals a complete and happy separation between the two boys themselves, who subsequently co-operate to perform Kunapipi and Wambuyungu, and the snake since he no longer encloses them. Finally they end up, as far from land and people as they could be, as rocks under the water. These rocks are supposed to look something like human beings, but they could equally suggest faeces. The snake remains in the water but at no particular location. This area is known as a place to which one does not normally go and even whitemen avoid it since "they gotim long compass". The islets are precarious places and they are prone to inversion.

It seems peculiar that the story should end with the implication that the two young men and, possibly, also rainbow snake are defecated when in the earlier sections so much trouble is taken to avoid this happening. Throughout most of the myth digestion leading to a passage through "bends" and finally to defecation seems to suggest destruction or death and most of the drama centres around avoiding this. Even the metaphorically parallel process of cooking fails to destroy or kill the flying-fox and the quails, which are probably overcooked, are left behind. Though the liberation of the snake from the mud/faeces

suggests a more hopeful resolution, the repetition of swallowing and regurgitation suggests an inability to resolve the conflicts it entails; between antisocial and gregarious impulses and between hierarchical enclosure and independent separation. These incidents are, until the last one, insolubly cyclical since the initial aggression of the snake, the swallowing, only provokes the young men to foul language and this in turn incites the snake to swallow them again. There seems no way out of this cycle of antagonism.

It may be that the myth tries to solve this problem by diminishing the distance between swallowing and regurgitation, increasing its frequency and orienting it in another direction. The axis of the first two legs runs east west and there is some evidence that this orientation connotes the cycle of life and death. In terms of the myth the first leg of the journey heads towards disaster in the west while the second leg moves in a easterly direction where the two young men are first regurgitated, where they have the first chance of salvation. The third leg is oriented differently to the first two, downwards and northeasterly, and in following the river it begins with broad long curves. As the river approaches the delta the amplitude of the curves is smaller and the frequency is greater. The snake's path out to sea from the river mouth is nearly straight.

Whether the myth succeeds in resolving this problem by these

means is nevertheless unclear. The Murinbata myth solves the problem by having the children removed by a different route, by a cut through the stomach perpendicular to the alimentary canal. Whereas in the Borrooloola myth the final movement is downwards, the children are raised out of Mutjingga's stomach towards, in terms of the Borrooloola myth, the happy realm of the birds. There is no happy ending in the Borrooloola myth, and it is altogether more ambivalent and pessimistic than the Murinbata myth.

Whereas Mutjingga does not regurgitate the children, and she is entirely female, the swallowing and regurgitation is repeated in the Borrooloola myth, by the sexually ambivalent snake. The Old Woman in the Murinbata myth is only treacherous whereas the snake is alternatively aggressive and benevolent. The whole chain of events in the Borrooloola myth was instigated when the grannies of the young men denied them food, but this was a benevolent denial since the young men were "too new" and the old women were preparing to give them food. Perhaps this is the clue to the problem.

The young men were, after all, wrong, to have not waited for their grannies to bring them food. The young men were excessively impulsive and aggressive and when they discovered the snake's deceptiveness and aggression they were excessively resentful and aggressive in return. They could not understand that the snake was trying to save them

from his own aggression just as they could not understand that their grannies denied them food on account of their own precarious condition. Though the extremes of aggressiveness were diminished as the story progresses the young men's final separation from human society which is conveyed by geographical and defecatory metaphors was probably inevitable once they left their sacred enclosure as "new" or raw young men. Theirs' is the story of transgression in which fire fails to make the correct transformation between the raw and the proper pre-alimentary state for human consumption and where they do not go back from their own raw state to human society but pass from the raw state to faeces.

In the normal process of circumcision initiation the novice is removed for a period from both fire and water, from excessive aggression and gregariousness. When he is steamed fire and water coalesce and he is thereafter brought slowly back into the group. At the same time he is required to protect himself from the shame inspiring gaze of his mothers-in-law and he must avoid looking at and speaking directly to his sisters who are, it will be recalled, covered under blankets while he is steamed. The association between fire and marriage, or more specifically sexual intercourse, suggests in this context that the mother-in-law is also aligned with fire and with excessive aggression and voracity. Perhaps sisters are associated with the danger of

hyper-gregariousness which has also to be avoided. At the same time, since food and eating are common sexual metaphors, aggressiveness, which is signified by eating, is also opposed by it since once the snake has eaten its mood changes to benevolence, and hyper-gregariousness, which is signified by the rejection of food, is also opposed by it since once the snake regurgitates the two young men, they swear and the snake becomes aggressive once more. The repetition of swallowing and regurgitation also suggest the alternation of sexual intercourse (eating and aggression) and birth (regurgitation and benevolence, or nurturance) and this is reinforced by the association of eating with fire and regurgitation with water. Whereas fire represents marriage, water could represent the continuity implied by reproduction and parentation. These metaphorical associations apply to the femininity of the serpent which is a sub-textual interpretation of the gender of the snake who is nominally male. There does not seem to be a way of establishing a hierarchy of meanings among these different associations. One would expect this to emerge from the consideration of the snake as male.

The snake is an eater of the young men on his own behalf but their benefactor after a chain of benevolence beginning with the mass of birds, executed by the two liberators and regurgitated by himself. In the Marndiwar care is taken that the father does not eat food from the sacred fire since

this would amount to his eating his son. The mass of men act aggressively towards the novice by bringing about his circumcision and they are lead by two brothers-in-law, the dog dancers. The father takes no part in this aggression except that he represents himself to his son as extremely sensitive to the pain of the boy's circumcision. The father's role in the circumcision is therefore the opposite to that of the snake in the myth. This suggests that the snake represents the father in relation to the transgressions of the sons, and the inverse of the father's relationship to his sons mediated by their adherence to the Law. The sub-textual interpretations of the snake as female, which evokes the obvious but unstated metaphors of the female reproductive tract and the essentially antagonistic cycle in which the boys become trapped, would appear to be a threat implied by the dominant interpretation of the snake as male. The place of the unstated female reproductive tract which runs in the same direction as the destructive lower portion of the alimentary tract appears to be taken by the vocal tract which moves its products in the same direction as benevolent regurgitation. Foul language, analogous to faeces, and the low voice of the snake signal the demise of the young men but the good words of the mass of birds and the high notes of the liberators initiate a process leading to salvation. This points to the superiority of the good word, the Law, over the rebellious word and over female reproduction and the proper dominance

of the father's Law over the functions of women.

To appreciate the symbolism of myths it is necessary to go beyond their expression in language to an understanding of the processes of thought which they manifest. Myths form a bridge between language and thought in a way which differs from everyday language. The latter typically expresses an individuals needs, issues commands or formulates plans for the solution of problems. Myths sometimes are expressive, they often do have the force of commands, and they sometimes suggest solutions to problems. Nonetheless, the essential quality of mythical thought is the breadth and hierarchical organisation of symbolic associations. This is the sense in which myths are timeless. The expression of this thought in the form of a narrative requires that this thought be transformed into a serial order. To achieve this end so that the hierarchy of thought is maintained over the distance of the serial narrative there is a necessary resort to integrative metaphors.

The circular imagery of enclosure is essentially hierarchical and static whereas linear images represent series and processes. This is the case in the myths which I have discussed and the same kind of metaphorical associations occur elsewhere in the world. In her study of circular and straight imagery in Greek philosophy Ballew arrives at similar conclusions. Speaking about early Greek literature

she says:

"The tension between mutability and permanence, between straight and circular, is perhaps most marked in Euripides, who seems particularly aware of the futility of straight acting and thinking, and whose characters so often express a desire to escape into the realm of the eternal. But conscious attempts to resolve the straight-circular tension are not yet to be found." (Ballew, 1979: 16)

In the myth of the two young men this tension is displaced onto the single being of the snake who is at once a powerful symbol of enclosure and circularity and a manifestation of the two linear forms, the straight and the crooked. The two young men, in so far as they sometimes are associated with the end points of the snake as an alimentary tract, Righthand with food and Lefthand with faeces, encompass the snake as two halves of a single body and at other times they are encompassed by him, within his stomach. The vertical axis such that what is above is superior and encompasses what is below is also used to contain the tension between circularity and hierarchy and linearity and seriality; but as the liberation incident indicates this too is divided into two regions corresponding to discrete states: the upper region is associated with water and freshness, the lower, subterranean, region with dryness and faeces. The liberation takes place by creating a continuity between these two states, by overlapping the interface between the two by the common action of the pygmy goose, who belongs to the region just above the surface, and the stinking turtle, who belongs to the immediate subsurface. The tension between the

straight and the circular, between continuous processes and discontinuous states, and between seriality and hierarchy is not lost in these displacements. Rather it appears to be brought to the service of a dynamic relationship between the force of the Law and the word and its transgressive, antagonistic and feminine underside which are so subtly interwoven into the dual figure of the snake.

When the women wungayi in the Marndiwar they manifest this aggressive, transgressive and chaotic behaviour by theft, by disordered speech, by attacking men, by voraciously eating raw food, and by breaking the rules of behaviour to different kin. While they do this men's public behaviour is serious and dignified. When the women dance Awulayinba in public they emulate the "wild women" who were Dreaming powers and who can still be found as supernatural beings at certain places. While they do this men sing the song cycles which they regard as the tests of the Law which have passed to them from the Dreaming powers and through generations of Law men who have maintained the fidelity of the songs throughout. Whereas the men hold the essence of the Dreaming powers through these songs, and through them they have these powers under some control, the essence of women is therefore sanctioned by the Dreaming and made an objective feature of the world with the belief that there really are such women to be found in the wilds. There is no equivalent representation of men for the world of men is a

truly human world in which, through the Law, it is necessary to bring these other forces under control. This, then, is the constant message which is dramatised in the Marndiwar. It is made all the more opaque to criticism in that the men and women do behave to type in this context. The men behave thus because the message is theirs, but the women behave as they do for a different reason. Since they are excluded from control, theirs is a reactive catharsis and they find genuine enjoyment in the inversionary behaviour which characterises wungayi.

In the process of initiation in which a boy moves from being under the control of his mother to his father's Law he also moves from one to the other of these poles of behaviour. First he is wound with the hair belt and decorated in an absurd way with feminine articles and subsequently, on the journey, he is given an aggressive role as an attacker. The novice's attack is impotent and reactive since it is aggravated by the teasing to which the older youths and men subject him. Throughout this period his behaviour corresponds to the behaviour of women as "wild women" who wungayi.

The removal of the belt precipitates the novice into the hands of women who also subject him to aggressive/erotic dancing, but, no longer as a woman; he is naked, between his previous feminised state and manhood. By the afternoon of the next day he has become rotten and smelly and

the two dog dancers seek him out as food, again aggressively/erotically. His ascent to the ranks of men begins with his purification by the banadjara man, who chases away the smell of foods illegally eaten in the past and who wakes him up to the Law.

Though the men's dance is aggressive and erotic itself it contains a trick which is symbolised by the secret of the Marndiwar, the bushes worn hanging downwards from the knees. In most other ceremonies, mortuary ceremonies and cult ceremonies, bushes are worn upwards from the shoulders. This is an inversion of the normal practice and it suggests other inversions peculiar to the Marndiwar. Most obviously, though this is unknown to the novice, the dancers wear their "mother's marks", not as is more usual, designs from their own Dreamings. These marks are merely shown to the novice and, apart from an initially disconcerting or frightening impression, they have no other significance as they are presented. This, again, differs from the use of body designs in other ceremonial contexts. There may also be a symbolic connection between the leaves worn at the knees and the novice's current uncircumcised condition, though this is not very obvious. In any case once the novice is circumcised, and this is symbolically reinforced by the thumb-biting, the novice will not again suffer the collective aggression of the men.

As I have suggested earlier, the separation of the novice from both fire and water following his circumcision indicates that he is still food, but food of a fresh and clean kind, and that he is still removed from women. This precarious poise is resolved when he is steamed and his taboos on the company of women are displaced and concentrated on sister avoidance and mother-in-law avoidance. Finally he is given food of certain kinds by his mother and other female relatives and his period of initiation ends when he is rubbed with red ochre by his mother's mother.

Chapter 7

SELF, OTHER AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

The novice is an ego under reconstruction. As part of the same process his whole social world is transformed and his relations between self and other which hitherto had been encompassed largely within the protective ambit of his relations with his parents are considerably enlarged. This new enlarged social world is still inhabited mostly by various kinds of kin but there is a new significant group, that of his affines. Whereas in childhood the young man was subjects to few constraints, as a man he is obliged to observe a range of customary behaviour towards particular kinds of relatives and affines. The change from one self, one world and one kind of behaviour occurs dramatically through the Marndiwar ritual sequence.

In this chapter I first examine the possible linkages between the symbolic processes of the Marndiwar and the psychological transition of the novice to manhood. Following this I discuss the ritual division between **banbayi** and **bilibilayi** and the kinship system in the structure of

the social world.

7.1 Circumcision and male identity

Aboriginal men at Borroloola claim to achieve certain ends by means of the symbolic processes of the Marndiwar. They claim that by subjecting boys to this process they "make a man", they move the boy from the mother's control to that of the father, and they make boys "quiet". It is reasonable to enquire further about these claims: what exactly is being claimed as the efficacy of the ceremony, and what are the relations between the symbolism of the rites and the psychological transformation of the novice to manhood?

Obviously, if all that is meant by making a man is subjecting him to the formal processes of the Marndiwar or the literal act of circumcision, then the claim that men make men by the Marndiwar is completely justified but without much substance. And if a change in control is merely brought about by the men seizing the boy and forcefully removing him from his mother, then this is certainly done in the course of the ceremony. It is less clear that boys become "quiet" after the Marndiwar, though the Marndiwar is a man's first step in his career as a Law man and this requires him to obey the commands and meet his obligations according to the Law. The Marndiwar also

substantially succeeds in removing a potentially troublesome youth from too close an association with his father's camp.

Something more, however, is implied by these claims, namely that the Marndiwar brings about a psychological reorientation in young men. It is probable that boys on the verge of puberty are ripe for psychological changes and possibly the psychological changes which Aboriginal men attribute to the Marndiwar would occur in much the same way without subjecting the boys to initiation. In this case the effects of the Marndiwar would be redundant or non-existent. On the contrary, there is some evidence that the Marndiwar does have some effect in bringing about the results claimed for it. Here I will suggest some of the mechanisms which might result from the symbolic ritual processes.

Circumcision is the pivotal and indispensable event in the Marndiwar and for Aboriginal men it is a necessary condition of manhood. Subincision, prior to the cessation in the region during the 1950's, was a mark of the highest prestige among men and it was necessary for a man to be subincised if he was to participate in ceremonial life at the highest level. Subincision conferred a political distinction in ritual life. A subincised man (nguyibi) is "boss of his own business". Circumcised men are not. This difference turns about the different relationship of subincised and circumcised men to their ritual jungkayi: for circumcised

men jungkayi are more "policemen" than "workers", for subincised men it is the other way around. Under this system subincised men are able to use their jungkayi executives in ritual who have among their functions the control of circumcised non-managers. Possibly, subincised men had some interest in maintaining the exclusivity of their high status by delaying the subincision of other men, their juniors especially. What ever the reason might have been, it seems that subincision had not become regarded as necessary for manhood. There are no men who have been locally subincised at Borroloola younger than about fifty years, but even among the oldest men there are some who are "only duwara", i.e. circumcised, though the majority are subincised. Subincision was necessary for painting log-coffins, a service some sister's sons performed for their mother's brothers, and both practices seem to have lapsed at about the same time. Circumcision seemingly is more firmly entrenched.

Though the disciplinary aims of the ceremony are frequently approved by Europeans, Marndiwar circumcisions have drawn strong criticisms from missionaries and health authorities over the last thirty-five years at least. During my fieldwork at Borroloola health authorities have tried to persuade senior Aboriginal men to allow the circumcision to be done at the local health clinic. The most that has been achieved is that circumcisers have been persuaded to use

sterile blades. However men will not use them unless they are "sung" and this is not always convenient. In general men are very conservative about Marndiwar circumcision and they resist the intrusion of European authorities into what they see as an intimately Aboriginal domain. For Aboriginal men at Borroloola circumcision is not only the indispensable mark of manhood, it is, when accompanied by the appropriate ritual, the outward sign of a man who thereafter belongs to the Law. Uncircumcised Aboriginal men, and whitemen whether they are circumcised or not do not belong to the Aboriginal Law.

An uncircumcised adult Aboriginal man is known at Borroloola as a "makulumbu". There are some men in the district, the sons of whitemen and Aboriginal women, who are not circumcised since this was prevented by their white fathers. A "makulumbu" without European antecedents is extremely rare. I was introduced to one at a stock camp at Lawn Creek on Alexandria Downs Station. Before the introduction I was coached in this man's peculiarities as a "makulumbu". These included a very Irish name and the polite manners of a gentleman; he was a "real whiteman". The anxiety of my friends that we should meet stemmed from the anticipation of the delight of a double contradiction, for I, they said, was a white blackfellow. I was introduced to the man as John "Hapry" Bulanyi (a subsection name). After he was introduced by his name, one of my friends whispered in my

ear wickedly: "makulumbu". The poor man's "Pleased to meet you" was replayed time and again as I drove my friends back to Borroloola.

Makulumbu are said to have "whiteman's brains". This is not a completely unenviable faculty since whitemen are thought to be clever. It is not unusual for men at Borroloola to underline a victory in verbal argument by declaring themselves to be makulumbu (or ardu, "child"), and therefore clever, even though they are subincised or circumcised. The cleverness of whitemen is thought nonetheless to be a superficial capacity for innovation made possible by the fact that they have no "country" and no "skin" (semi-moiety or sub-section). Whitemen are able to act in ignorance of that transcendent metaphysical order which is the true grounding of all permanent things, the criterion of authentic human action in the world, and which is accessible only through that body of knowledge and action which is the Law that binds Aboriginal men. Men say that participation in the ceremonial life "turns the brains" in an opposite direction to that in which the brains of children and whitemen are turned. Marndiwar circumcision is the decisive point from which men embark upon the ceremonial life in pursuit of a transcendent order, leaving behind their playful but naive childhood, cleverness and spontaneity.

This transcendent order is not identical with any particular ceremony or any particular sacred site, though these have an important relationship to it. Such places, and the ceremonies associated with them, evoke either awe or deeply felt regret. Regret is, in my experience, the most common of these emotions and men feel it for both the Dreaming power itself or for the generations of known and unknown people who were associated with the site or the ceremony. Awe and regret are, in these circumstances, two emotional attitudes to the tension between the tremendous creative power which Dreamings have exerted on the world from "the Beginning" and which has encompassed the lives of humans since then and the individual mortality of human beings; between, in other words the unity of life and the chaotic dissociation of death. The orientation of Aboriginal men towards a transcendent and elusive metaphysical order represents one pole of a cultural ambivalence with the fear of dissolution and attack on one hand and the desire for ultimate unity and invulnerability.

Evidence of such ambivalence in Aboriginal culture is pervasive. I have already noted this in the myth of the two young men and in the opposed notations of "rainbow" and "ngabaya", the former associated with life and becoming, the latter with death, formlessness and anomaly. Each individual is constituted along similar lines: there is a spirit which originally derives from the Dreaming powers and which

somehow returns to the Dreaming place of the individual which it inhabits, and there is a spirit which departs the body at death, is "chased" away as a danger to the living, and which remains as a ngabaya or ghost.

The most deeply felt dangers are the threat of attack from sorcerers and from ghosts (ngabaya). One man expressed to me what he felt as the irrationality of his anxiety about these invisible threats, saying that though these beliefs were probably "primitive superstitions" as he had been told by missionaries and others and, though he had no direct experience of them himself, he could not stop himself from believing in them. An encounter with a ghost holds the prospect of shock and terror, but these feelings can be overcome and ghosts can be conjured for practical purposes. One man did this by lying in the bush at night with his head surrounded by owl feathers in order to be taught a dance performance (walaba) by the spirits. The danger of sorcery is more concrete and the results of sorcery are evident to Aborigines in every chronic illness, fatal accident or death.

The fear of sorcery at Borroloola takes the form of a concern over the integrity of the body and its boundaries. Aborigines apparently consider the body to be an ordered assemblage of parts; organs, bones, blood and other fluids, and non-material parts such as spirit, shadow and name. It

functions because the "blood keeps going around" but also because all necessary parts are conjoined and properly aligned. Sorcery upsets this arrangement by an invasion of the body by foreign elements or by dissociating its essential parts.

The invasive techniques include the projection of bones or magical bullets and the use of magical poisons. The former are techniques of the specialist but magical poisons are believed to be available to almost everyone. They are said to originate in the Queensland Gulf country and to be traded by the bagful through Mount Isa and Camooweal. The poison "namarrwurryu" is the most common. Made from a mixture of golden syrup, white dry dingo faeces, "California Poppy" hair oil, and the poisonous green bark of the new tips of the ironwood tree, which is boiled until it forms a white crystalline powder, this poison can be thrown onto the sleeping victim, rubbed on his or her clothing, or secreted in food, beer or tobacco. It is also called "sugar" and it is held to be the cause of diabetes, among other illnesses. To Aborigines at Borroloola the salient point in the diagnosis of diabetes by health workers is the excess of sugars in the blood. This quickly becomes understood, dismayingly, as the body being "full of sugar". The sudden fearful realisation that their body has been invaded by a foreign object or substance which "blocks" normal functioning or replaces essential items characterises

invasive techniques of sorcery. It would seem to correspond to the fear that among their close kin and co-residents, that is, from within the everyday group, there is someone who is venting a grudge with poison.

Other techniques of sorcery attempt to remove something of the person to attract other essential parts to what is removed. A variety of techniques like this are known as "wilgin", which could be the general name for this variety of sorcery. Items which are ambiguously extensions of the body, viz. faeces, hair, sputum, clothing and other personal items, are taken by the sorcerer and treated in various ways. One technique is to take the item, preferably clothes, "sing" the victim's name into them, wrap them with hot stones and place these in the hollow of an ironwood tree, which is then sealed to prevent the contents from escaping. In 1976 a young man at Borroloola was charged for shooting at three men who he thought had taken some of his clothes for this purpose. He was working on a cattle station at the time among people with whom he was not closely related. This case adds some support to what the structure of this technique suggests: that anxieties about this kind of sorcery are focused on people with whom there is a distant relationship but with whom there is sometimes close contact.

Another variety of this type of sorcery is performed by the

sorcerer drawing an image of the victim on rock and singing the victim's name into it. This is another means of capturing the shadow or soul which is normally part of the body. It does not require any contact between the sorcerer and his victim since the sorcerer need only possess the victim's name. Fear of this kind of sorcery amount to fear of an individual acting secretively either on his own initiative or as the agent of others.

In addition to these kinds of sorcery which are thought to be inspired by the victim's past misdeeds, at least as these might be imagined to be perceived by a specified or unspecified enemy, there are other kinds of sorcery for which the motive is indefinite. People at Borroloola are frequently worried by the thought of a "mulunguwa", a "hunter" who travels magically among distant and ill-defined people, a "red ochre man" from the "Kilkaja" people who travel though the inland with their mystical business perhaps, or, as was speculated in one case, a magical assassin from southern Arnhem Land. There were persistent rumours that such people were on their way to Borroloola and there were several supposed sightings of them while I was there. These frequently took place late at night as people returned in the dark to their camps from the drinking places by the river. Everyone feels threatened by these individuals, who are likely to strike at anyone in the course of their travels.

Though anxiety about sorcery is general, my strong impression is that men are more worried about it than women. If a sorcerer attacks a woman or a child this is more likely to be construed as the result of the sorcerer's enmity for a male relative of the victim, a husband or father typically, than an attack directly on the victim. The sorcerer is always thought to be a male, though there are some techniques which require the collaboration of women, and it seems that it is usually enmities between men which inspire sorcery.

Individual deaths or chronic illnesses are nearly always ascribed to sorcery. Even cases where someone has died in a fight, particularly where the combatants are closely related, are suspected to be the result of sorcery, a type called "wurawura", by someone who magically arranges for the person to be so killed in the (vain) hope that sorcery will not be suspected. Car accidents can also be arranged by sorcery and cyclones can be generated to intercede in sorcery feuds. Thus, the Darwin cyclone of 1974 was said to be "sung up" by a Borroloola man who went to Darwin to avenge the murder of a relative in a car accident. Unfortunately, cyclones do not lend themselves to precise work and the magician fell victim to his own craft, though not fatally.

Particular cases of sorcery are usually explained in terms of what the victim or others see as the past misdeeds of the victim or the enmities in which the victim is involved through the misdeeds of people allied with him. I have never heard anyone lamenting over the injustice of an alleged sorcery killing or protesting the innocence of the victim. It seems assumed that the sorcerer, in concrete cases of sorcery, had a reason to attack the victim even if it is only as a means of indirectly attacking someone else or a payment for past attacks by the victim's family. Sorcery in this context offers an explanation for particular deaths in terms of an arena of meaningful conflict which is imagined to exist behind the normal face of daily life. The root causes of this underlying conflict can, in the overwhelming majority of cases, be traced to disputes over women or to the ceremonial life. Ultimately disputes over women or other matters can open to interpretation in terms of ceremonial rights, and the explicit reason for sorcery is normally cast in terms of ceremonial infractions.

The connection between sorcery and the ceremonial sphere is frequently made with two implications. Firstly, the value of the cause enhances the significance of the death, and ceremonial motives represent the highest values. Secondly, the value of the ceremony is reflected by the extent to which people have fought for it, and been killed as a result. I have been told by different people, for example,

that the decimation of the Kurdanji population, which I attribute to the setting up of McArthur River Station, was due to their having a particularly dangerous ceremony, the Burukuwala. Similarly, the Balgin or Kididjingara (cf. Bern, 1974) ceremony owned by Alawa people among others is supposed to have caused their decline, and it is reputed to have been responsible for at least fifteen deaths in recent times. Likewise the deaths which followed a Kunapipi ceremony at Borroloola in 1976 were attributed to conflicts which arose from it.

It is interesting that these ceremonies which offer men the prospect of the **somewhere else**, the transcendent unitary order, should also be perceived as the most potent sources of danger and sorcery. This precarious balance between harmony and conflict adds to the emotional charge of cult ceremonies and, in the Kunapipi, it is formalised in certain aspects of the rites. For example, formal gifts of food are made between the two groups of men associated with the two Kunapipi bough shades. The main host group gives food to the other. Rattling spears and singing the most sacred (and "dangerous") of all Kunapipi songs they proceed slowly over the few yards to the other group, who sit in silence with their eyes averted. When they arrive they place a large damper among the recipient group and retire. The recipients are then expected to eat, but this could be dangerous: as one man confided to me, the damper "might be poisoned".

Ultimately though, the ideal of the Kunapipi is to unite all of the men participating under the principal Kunapipi symbols and to create harmony. This unity and harmony is quite opposite to the structure of sorcery anxieties.

In these rites men perform dances commemorating the creative events of the Dreaming period by assuming the identity of Dreaming powers to whom they believe themselves to be in some way genetically related and with whom, at a level which is normally hidden from view, they identify themselves. To do this the dancer's body is masked by a design which, like those used in the Marndiwar, is painted on the body with ochres and down; and in some performances hats are also worn. Thus decorated, the dancers, usually singly and seldom more than two at a time, perform various short dances. These are stereotyped performances which somehow capture the essence of the Dreaming events which they portray, but they always involve a tremulous shaking of the shoulders. To achieve this motion it is necessary to be very relaxed and, indeed, a relaxed and confident mien is the hallmark of the successful dancer who is able to translate his inner poise into a demonstration of the transcendent order. An exceptional performance inspires genuine admiration and wonder in the spectators as if they had experienced a direct demonstration of that elusive order to which men are oriented. At the conclusion to one such performance one of my fellow spectators turned to me and

said "That was really!". It was magnificent.

The situation is particularly interesting because normally Aboriginal people do not like to be looked at by others. Being *minaji*, at the centre of attention, is dangerous because it could cause others to feel resentful and inspire them to sorcery. The ceremonial dancer places himself in an analogous position. He does so, however, wearing a complex ceremonial design which hides his ordinary appearance and provides a kind of defence. But this design is supposed to represent his inner and ultimate identity with his Dreamings and to manifest this in a direct, unmediated way. Such behaviour would otherwise be construed as socially aggressive. Thus the dancers in these sacred rites are permitted to express a kind of invulnerability to threat and a momentary catharsis of his relations between self and others.

The symbolism of the commemorative rites recasts a Dreaming event, part of a larger narrative, in a static, idealised form. In as much as this represents the transcendent order as a static and timeless ideal it is the opposite to the imagined world of sorcery as an arena of multifarious temporal and personal acts leading to death. Whereas the latter is manifest in the dissociation of the body or by its invasion by foreign elements, the transcendent order is attained by projecting an inner essence outwards onto the

surface of the body and in sublime actions.

The point here is not that these two realms are related as complementary oppositions in an intellectual sense but, rather, that there is a relationship between them at the affective level and there is a psychological tension between them. Sorcery beliefs correspond at least approximately, as I have indicated, to sociological features of Aboriginal life but they are thereby not less understandable as projections of some kind of anxiety. It is true that a belief that there are sorcerers is itself likely to cause anxiety in addition to any original anxiety which may have led to the projection of sorcery beliefs in the first place, but a purely cognitive appreciation of sorcery would be insufficient to account for the generality of the intensity of sorcery anxiety at Borroloola. However, even at the cognitive level sorcery is linked to suffering; to death, illness and accident, so that the cognitive appreciation of sorcery is, among other things, a rationalisation for suffering. Possibly the incidence of these misfortunes is the source of the original anxiety which forms the basis of sorcery, and the historical elaboration of sorcery beliefs as a rationalisation for these sufferings has taken place at the expense of increasing the intensity of anxiety related to sorcery. Certainly it would be difficult to argue that sorcery beliefs function to diminish anxiety. Moreover, there seems to be a close correspondence between the

experience of anxiety and the nature of the fear of sorcery.

For Freud (1963: 70) the feature which distinguishes anxiety from other unpleasant states is the subject's perception of efferent phenomena, such as increased heartbeat or sweating. That is, the subject becomes aware of an increase in activity which is beyond his or her control. This experience corresponds to the notion of an invasion of the body from without or the dissociation of its parts by an external agent which lies at the heart of sorcery beliefs. Aboriginal sorcery beliefs therefore appear to be explicable as the projection of the structure of anxiety onto the external social world as a rationalisation of suffering. By comparison, the orientation to the transcendent order, in so far as it leads men to the rites which I have described above, leads to a feeling of enhanced control of the body and an extension of the ego's domain. This is sublimated as the expression of a timeless inner essence linked to an impersonal and transcendent realm, the "true", final and unchanging self. In psychoanalytic imagery sorcery is characterised by castration anxiety and the transcendental orientation by countervailing desire for omnipotence. This tension has an inner dimension as the ego's control of the body, a projected imaginary dimension in the opposition between the sphere of sorcery and the transcendent order, and a social dimension in the tension of dependencies between self and other.

If I have succeeded in drawing the outlines of a bipolar psychosocial complex in Aboriginal thought, particularly that of Aboriginal men, its aetiology is less clear. For Roheim totemism, under which he includes myths and rites of the kind which I have been discussing, is an organised defence against the anxiety of separation from the mother under which the libido is deflected from the mother to the father (Roheim, 1969: 77-79, 249, cf. Hiatt, 1975: 1-10, 155). Roheim's analysis of the unconscious symbolism of myths and rites is very plausible and much of my own material could offer support to his views. However, I have some reservations about the adequacy of this form of psychoanalytic interpretation as an explanation for specific ethnographic cases, for actual social historical phenomena, as I will shortly explain. When Roheim notes that the "laws that govern the use of symbols for the purpose of allegory are one of the future tasks of psychoanalytic anthropology" (ibid.: 248) one is reminded that this kind of symbolism inheres also in psychoanalytic discourse itself. The danger with Roheim's approach is that it reduces the variety of human thought and action to the elemental psychoanalytic motifs. The point on which I disagree with Roheim is his reductionist interpretation of "totemism" as a defence against maternal separation anxiety. My material suggests that such anxiety is intensified in the rites where it is resublimated into other forms, and it is essentially left

behind with childhood.

Marndiwar initiation stimulates the novice's anxieties, magnifies them and identifies their origin as the novice's dependence, and, specifically, dependence on his mother and other close female kin. Prior to his initiation a boy is still a child and he need only have expressed a frustration or pressed a demand to his mother and, in all probability, his need would be met. His voice and gesture were a means of his obtaining his needs from the environment through his mother. In the other direction, his mother's voice extended her control over him. In this relationship the boy experiences his mother as an extension of his own body and himself as a part of a self-contained unitary system. In the course of development, according to Luria (1981) unity with the mother is weakened, and this is accompanied by the separation anxiety familiar to psychoanalysis. This anxiety may well be sharpened in childhood by particular features of socialisation in Aboriginal society. In particular, mothers, partly because of their own fears and partly as a means of disciplining the child, keep their children close to them by adverting to dangerous external forces, principally ghosts and frequently crocodiles. On several occasions I have seen variants of a game along these lines: a child decides to elude its mother and runs towards the periphery of the unmarked areas within which it falls under the control and supervision of its mother. As it approaches

this limit the mother calls out "Ngabaya! Ngabaya!". The child may keep running a few more yards until it shows a crisis of confidence, turns and runs back to its mother, sometimes laughing, sometimes really distressed and crying. Adults are amused by the transition in the child's thoughts as it contemplates leaving its circle of maternal protection.

This game indicates the spatial dimension in the relationship between mothers and their children and the transition between unity within the mother and separation anxiety as the child approaches the limits of its knowable world. The extent of this domain in which a child remains in its relationship with its mother increases as the child develops, but when a boy is taken as a novice on a journey through the region he is taken across its boundary into the larger world beyond his mother's protection. The anxiety of separation, which was prefigured in experiences such as the boundary games, among others, is by no means reduced on the journey. Rather, the novice's anxiety is increased. The tension is maintained, if not magnified, up to the novice's circumcision and it continues until the steaming rite when it is displaced onto the relationship between the novice and his sisters and, also, mothers-in-law. On this point it is relevant that inappropriate behaviour with sisters and mothers-in-law arouses shame, and this emotion is attended by the awareness of efferent phenomena characteristic of

anxiety: increased respiration, heartbeat and so on.

Though maternal separation anxiety, which even prior to initiation is manifest at the level of culture, undoubtedly is important in the aetiology of the psychosocial tension within Aboriginal society at Borroloola, it does not follow that later phenomena can be reduced to it in the manner suggested by Roheim. This would only be justified if this germinal anxiety were somehow recoverable in the later phenomena and there is no indication that this is the case. Marndiwar initiation, in short, only begins with this anxiety, which is already conditioned by culture, and it then proceeds to amplify and transform it into other tensions which are only superficially analogous to it.

The crucial question is, as Roheim says, the relationship between symbolism and constellations of psychological forces. It is implicit in what I have so far said that psychological phenomena are always sublimated symbolic structures and that they are not recoverable outside these structures. This can be put in another way: symbolic structures always entail a mode of experience which has both cognitive and affective aspects. For example: rather than interpreting circumcision as an allegory expressing separation with the mother, it seems that circumcision casts the novice's removal from his mother in terms of the separation of the foreskin from the penis. The elaboration

of this metaphor of separation in the act of circumcision reinterprets maternal separation and in doing so adds a meaning to it which it did not previously have. Moreover, again, if separation anxiety is the original anxiety in initiation processes, in the course of its reinterpretation during the rites other sources of anxiety are brought to bear in the interests of "rewriting" the experiences of the past in new sublimated forms. I take up this point shortly.

The metaphor of separation reinterprets the novice's removal from his mother's sphere as a separation of a part (boy, foreskin) from a whole (relationship with mother, penis). The reorientation of the novice in the course of his initiation can also be understood in terms of relationships between a part and a whole, that is to say, hierarchical relationships (see Dumont 1972: 24). Thus the relationship of men to the transcendent order is articulated as follows.

The foreskin is the impure and feminine part of the penis. The penis, a lesser body, is part of the body. The superior and sacred part of the body is the head and the hair. These are loci of a person's Dreaming country on his body. An individual is associated with a part of a Dreaming site, a particular rock or tree for example, and the Dreaming site is explicitly or implicitly conceived as the body of the Dreaming, or part of it. This site in turn is part of a larger order, ultimately the transcendent order. Prior to

circumcision the novice is a part of a unitary relationship with his mother and the head of his penis is enclosed by the foreskin. Initiation seeks to overturn this hierarchy, which it interprets as a hierarchy under the feminine, and to invert the relationship so that femininity lies on the impure side of the male body and masculinity on the superior and sacred side. In this way initiation establishes a cognitive link between individual psychology and the cultural symbolism of male superiority. This is related to the issue which I raised in the paragraph before last, to the additional anxiety which is supplied in the course of initiation.

I am interested here in the links between individual psychology, social processes and the historical formations of a particular society. The Soviet psychologists, who are most eminently represented by Vygotsky and Luria, have made very important contributions relevant to this issue, and ones which would appear to be very useful to anthropology in general. Vygotsky's enduring contribution is his work on the relations between language and thought in psychological development, and this has been continued by Luria who, very much in the spirit of Freud's work taken as a whole, integrates researches into language and thought with both the physiology of the brain and extra-cortical, historical phenomena (Vygotsky, 1962, Luria, 1973, 1981). Their approach is applicable to the understanding of psychological

transformation in Australian Aboriginal initiation ceremonies and it suggests new aspects to the problem.

I have, in summary, described a psychological tension in Aboriginal culture in terms of the experience of anxiety as an uncontrolled efferent phenomenon and its opposite, the participation in certain rites, as an extension of ego's control over his motor activity. This kind of phenomenon can be illuminated by Luria's psychology of volitional acts. Luria bases this on the power of verbal commands over motor functions, which he demonstrates in a series of experiments. He argues that the capacity for independent volition develops in the following way.

"... initially the voluntary act is shared by two people. It begins with the verbal command of the mother and ends with the child's act. It is only at the next stage that the child learns to speak and can begin to give spoken commands to himself/herself. This occurs first externally, in the form of overt speech, and later internally through inner speech." (1981: 89).

Subsequently the child increases the scope of his or her motor control directed by his or her own volition with the aid of an increasingly differentiated language and cognitive structure. For Luria, who follows Vygotsky (1962) in this, inner speech provides the bridge between language and thought, *inter alia*, in volitional acts. Inner speech differs from overt speech in that it is more fragmentary and predicative. The nominative character of overt speech is not manifest in inner speech since the orientation of the

child to a problem takes the place of the referential function in overt speech. Inner speech nonetheless retains meaningfulness, as opposed to the referential function, which is organised according to the orientation of the subject.

It is possible, using this approach, to see a relationship between language, symbolism and the control of motor functions in the Marndiwar and other similar rites in Australia. This would be an improvement on Roheim's account of these rites in that he concentrates on symbolism at the expense of the obvious feature of these rites: they bring about the psychological and social reorientation of young males by means which, in addition to being symbolic, are markedly physical and physiological. He is, of course, not the only one to overlook this aspect of the rites.

Piddington, speaking of circumcision among Karadjeri, for example, opposes the "social aspects" of circumcision to the pain it involves, arguing that the novice's susceptibility to pain has been lessened by lack of sleep and physical exhaustion. He says that "the fear exhibited by the novice appears to be due to the atmosphere of mystery which surrounds the entire ritual of initiation" rather than the novice's anticipation of the pain (1932: 72 n.22). Though this may very well be the case, the novice's exhaustion, deprivation and fear are themselves varieties of pain, and

they are very much part of the rites. The possibility that the novice's fear engendered by the "atmosphere" of the ritual, presumably a social aspect, could be mistaken for his fear of circumcision itself suggests that the two could be equivalent and that the physiological element cannot be separated from the social aspects of the rites. Strehlow is one anthropologist who does not attempt to make such a separation. His records of Aranda men who have had their thumb and forefinger nails torn off show that physical pain is sometimes central to initiation. For example:

"The old men seized my hand. They all struck up the chant-verse:

With fierce eyes, with glowing eyes, they
seize the thumb.
With fierce eyes, with glowing eyes, they
rip off the nail.

... It was slippery with blood. I almost shrieked with pain; the torment was unbearable. I have not forgotten it: the pain was not slight; it was exceedingly great. When the nail had been loosened, he took a sharp opossum tooth, forced it into the living flesh through the base of the thumb-nail, and tore it off from behind ..." (Strehlow, 1947: 113).

This intensity of physical trauma induced by this operation is probably not matched by the Marndiwar, even by the circumcision. On the other hand, the Aranda rite, which allowed a man to engrave the sacred stone tjurunga, was of shorter duration than the trauma to which novices are subjected in the Marndiwar. Another difference between these rites is that whereas the Aranda rite is confined to a single traumatic event, circumcision novices are subjected

to trauma, to rigours and restraints, over a wide range of actions. The essential requirement of these traumatic rites appears to be that the initiate submit to them in spite of the fact that they run counter to instinctual tendencies which manifest themselves in motor responses: not to express one's needs in speech or to speak when one wishes, not to eat when and what one wants, not to look where one's desires direct, not to recoil from horror or pain, to persist where exhaustion tells one to rest.

The effect of the initiators' commands for the novice to observe these disciplines in actually bringing about restraint is necessarily mediated by the novice's command over himself. While the novice is on his journey prior to his circumcision the behaviour required of him, his retaliatory attacks upon the dancers who tease him, is about as close as it might be to the kinds of behaviour he might resort to if he were to attempt to resist his initiation. During this time his self control is not far removed from the control of his behaviour by others. He not only finds that to resist this self control is unpleasant, since it will only increase the teasing to which he is subjected by the other men, he will also associate these feelings with his feminine aspect, with his feelings of loss of dependence on and protection from his mother, and the ridiculous and feminine way in which he is decorated. These experiences form the basis of the novice's association of shame (which amounts to a

recognition of loss of control over certain efferent phenomena in increased heartbeat, blushing or trembling) with femininity and his dependence on his mother. This experience is confirmed on the night when the women dance for the novice when he sees his female relatives in a new, shameful, light and by the stereotypical behaviour of the women throughout the initiation rites. Increasingly the danger to self control is cast as feminine and the weight of responsibility for self control falls on the novice. This is perhaps most acute at his circumcision when he is expected to submit passively to the ordeal without a murmur.

In this way, by what Freud calls 'introjection' the novice is bound to form his will as an analogue of the will which commands him, the will of men. He becomes an agent of the men in command over him since his commands over himself become identical to their own demands of his behaviour. But their commands are not exclusively their own since the initiators see themselves as following the commands of the Law which is an expression of the transcendent order. This order is the final justification and end of the whole ritual process and it is the direction of orientation for which the novice commands himself to an extraordinary degree of motor control. Thus he finds that the Law, which hitherto lay only in an order external to himself, and which he experienced as a constraint, also lies within himself.

The role of the symbolism of the rites in this reorientation parallels the function of inner speech, which it closely resembles. The tension within this symbolism, which is also expressed in some of the myths which are relevant to the rites, points the way to the transcendent order, towards safety and omnipotence, and away from the realm of danger which it identifies with women and femininity. Like inner speech this symbolism is directed to a problem and it provides the cognitive means of identifying the nature of this problem and guiding action in the right direction for its solution. The problem, in its broadest aspect, is for the novice to avoid unpleasure, but since it is impossible for him to avoid this entirely, he must reduce its psychological intensity by taking it on as a reflection of his own will, to incorporate it cognitively and affectively as his own desire.

When the boy is said to pass in the Marndiwar from the mother's Law to the father's Law this amounts to more than a change in the identity of authority. Under his mother's Law the boy is a dependent under the care and protection of his mother who is like an alter ego. Under his father's Law the new man acquires the superego of an adult male and this leads him towards acquiring similar powers and a similar status as his father in relation to his local estate and the ceremonial life.

7.2 The structure of the social world

Every Aboriginal person at Borroloola stands in a relationship of kinship to every other Aboriginal person in the community and, indeed, to many outsiders as well. Relatives at Borroloola are likely to be related by several genealogical connections as a result of intermarriage among relatives. Knowledge of such genealogical detail can be very important in particular situations and relatives will have various amounts of this kind of information about others. However, as against the relative richness of this kind of knowledge, people apply a relatively small set of terms to all others, classifying diverse types of kin by the categories of the terminology.

Like other areas of language, the small number of kin terms permit a great number of expressions, and a knowledge of the terminology is not sufficient to understand the range of uses to which it is put. That is, the conceptual content of the kinship terminology is not identical to the array of kinship words available; and it makes little difference whether these words are in Yanyuwa, Mara or English. What is of interest is the conception of kinship implicit in the terminology and how people categorise their social world through the idiom of kinship.

The fact that we are dealing with kinship terminology is not

diminished if it should turn out that the concept or theory of kinship is particular to Aboriginal people or specifically to Borroloola people. Indeed, I have already referred to the practice of interpreting conception events in dreams, that is, to spiritual conception; to the notion of common kinship through 'one country' and one Dreaming; and to manner in which men's man-making rites articulate with women's productivity and reproductivity in the structure of residence in the Rocky Creek camp. In categorising their kin Borroloola people consider facts of an ordinary genealogical type but they also use criteria of relatedness of these seemingly exotic kinds which in their view are continuous with what is physically obvious.

I will first describe and make some formal analysis of the kin classification implicit in the terminology. The formal approach to some extent depends on the idea that people use the terms by following the rules which seem implicit in the structure of the system. These rules can indicate some of the meaning of the words and kin categories but, in practice, when people categorise others as kin a range of non-formal factors is usually involved.

For one thing, there are many ambiguities as to which terms might apply to particular individuals, and considerable leeway in how people structure their social world in terms of the kin categories. Of course, children have the world

of kin already marked out for them by their parents and other adult relatives; and older people generally have advantages in making their definitions of the social world stick. The extent to which people manufacture their world using the kin terminology, as opposed to merely applying culturally given rules of categorisation, perhaps is more appreciable as non-genealogical criteria become relevant considerations. As I have already said, such things are very important in the views of Borroloola people on what constitutes kinship.

Moreover, the classification of kin according to the categories implicit in the kin terminology and the customary behaviour expected among various categories of kin are quite distinct issues. The former is a matter of classification, the latter a matter of the articulation of relations. This distinction is quite important to the understanding of the role of the Marndiwar in the structuring of the social world because, while people are assigned roles on the basis of kin category, the series of rites reconfigures the structure of relations among the various categories of the novice's social world.

Accordingly, I will begin by describing the formal aspects of the kin classification and then discuss the manner in which the Marndiwar structures the novice's relations to others.

Kin classification The kin terminology at Borroloola is actually quite complex, but except for some rules governing usage, it is can be represented as an Aranda (cf. Elkin, 1964) kin terminology. In fact, it was not until quite late in my fieldwork that I discovered the so-called Omaha skewing (Lounsbury, 1964) in the use of these terms. Diagram 3 shows the Yanyuwa terms arrayed on the Aranda plan, with four grandparental sibling categories (FF/FFZ, FM/FMB, MF/MFZ and MM/MMB), a pattern of alternating generations and bilateral marriage with a kind of MMBDD.

Looking at this diagram it can be seen that the terms map onto the genealogical grid, classifying relatives according to matrifilial and patrifilial links and generational status. There is no question that (excepting the affinal terms) these are kin terms; and even though the terms are extended to other relatives than the primary ones, words like 'kujaka' (mother) and 'kajaja' (father) are correctly translated by English kin terms.

According to the plan of Diagram 3, the terminology is harmonious with the subsection system, with its matri- and patri-cycles of four and two generations respectively. Some men and women at Borroloola are quite aware of this serendipitous arrangement among the subsections and of its harmony with kin classification. Naturally, there is a similar concordance between the kinship system, viewed from

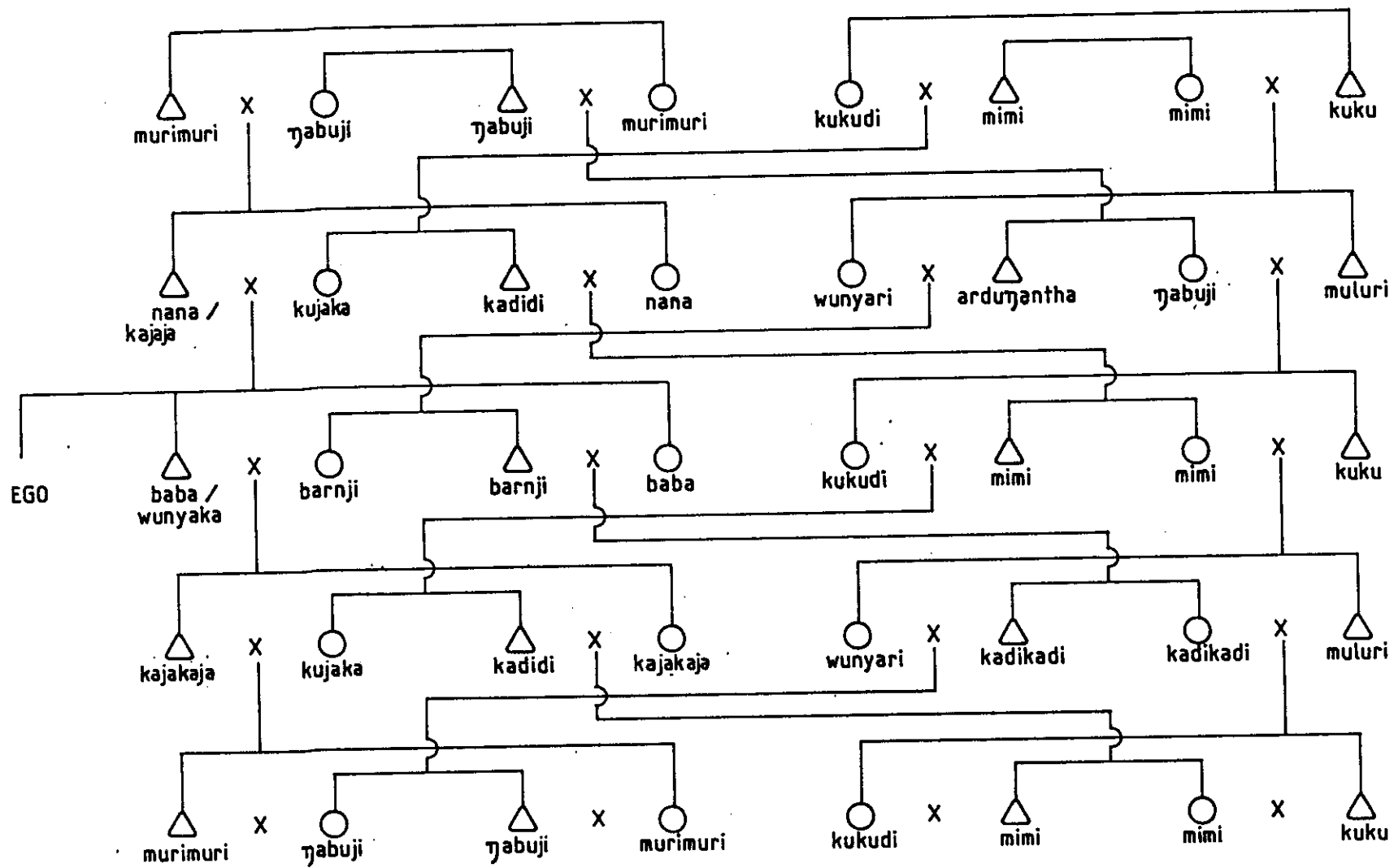


Diagram 3 Yanyuwa kin terms on an 'Aranda' plan

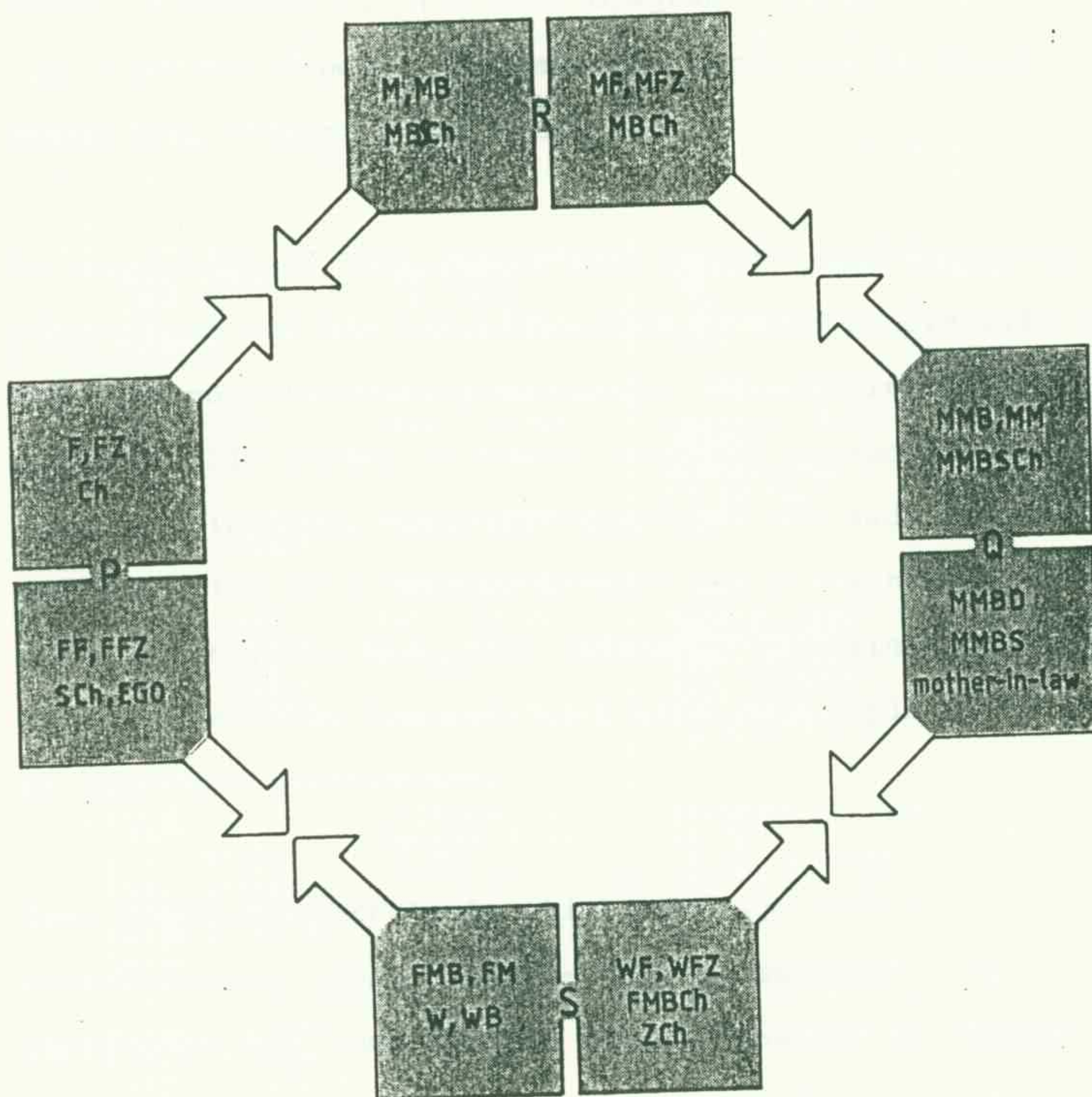


Diagram 4 Concordances between semi-moieties (P, Q, R, and S), main kin categories and ideal marriage

the point of view of any ego, and the semi-moiety system, as shown in Diagram 4. (In that Diagram I refer to some of the important kin types. The relevant terms can be found by consulting Diagram 3 and Table 2.)

An assumption of this concordance between semi-moieties or subsections and kin classification is that people will marry into the correct kinship category. Then their children will automatically belong to their 'correct' category. In precise principle, "correct" marriages are made between ego and the child of a "mother-in-law" and a "father-in-law", that is, they are made with reference to affines rather than with reference to kin and, as I will soon explain, this is an important distinction.

Many people at Borroloola think marriage with a classificatory cross-cousin - "barnka married" - is legitimate, but some Yanyuwa people consider it "wrong". Reay (1962) apparently found this attitude among all groups and attributed the reluctance to recognise the "alternate" marriage to a hardening of the rules resulting from a decline in the traditional way of life and to a dislike of marriages resulting in children with ambiguous or multiple subsection identity. Only a core of senior Yanyuwa men at Borroloola - whose marriages were 'straight' - were vehemently opposed to cross-cousin marriage. Other Yanyuwa thought it 'couldn't be helped' and Karrawa people generally

Table 2 Categorisation of kin and affine types by generation, semi-moiety and Yanyuwa kin terms.

GEN.	PATRIMOIETY A		PATRIMOIETY B	
	P	Q	R	S
+2	kuku/kukudi (MMB/MM), kajaja/nana (FMFZC)	murimuri (FF/FFZ)	ngabuji (FMB/FM), kayikayi (H/W) etc.	mimi (MFB/MFZ)
+1	kuku/kukudi (MMBC), baba (MFZC), muluri/wunyari (MB/M-in-law)	nana (FZ/FOB) kajaja (F/FYB)	ngabuji (FMBC/FFZC), ardungantha (F-in-law)	kadidi (MB), kujaka (M)
0	kuku/kukudi (MMBSC), kajaja/kadtha-kadtha (MFZSC) wukuku (YMBSC)	baba (Osib) EGO wunyaka (Ysib)	ngabuji (MMBDD/FMBSC/FFZSC), napinapi/murumuru (m.O/YB-in-law) kayikayi (m.W/WZ/f.H/HB)	munyumunyu (FZC), mimi (MBC) marawara (MBC/FZC) barnka (MBC/FZC)
-1	wukuku (FZDC), murimuri (MFZSS) baba/wunyarka (MBDC), muluri/wunyari (MB/M-in-law)	kajakaja (m.C) kadthakadtha (f.BC)	kadikadi/adiyadi (m.ZC), kulukulu (f.C), ardungantha (F-in-law)	kadidi (m.DH), kujaka (m.SW), ngabuji (FZSC/MBSC)
-2	wukuku (m.ZDC/f.DC), kadtha-kadtha/kajakaja (MBDSC)	murimuri (m.SC/f.BSC)	ngabuji (m.ZSC/f.SC)	mimi (m.DC/f.DC)

accepted (remote) cross-cousin marriage and the resulting "mob of skins" which could be sorted out later. One Yanyuwa senior explained this as a Karrawa propensity resulting from a mythical brother-sister incest which occurred in Karrawa country.

In fact, the phasing of descent lines and generations with the regularities of the sociocentric class systems is largely formal and, particularly at Borroloola, it is not particularly significant. In actual usage there are numerous deviations which result from quite legitimate kin classification. The main conflict is with the 'principle' of alternating generations. With the "skewing" of the terminology, certain relatives in adjacent generations are classed together. As well as this, certain relatives normally found in one semi-moiety are found in the other semi-moiety of the same exogamous (unnamed) moiety. An examination of Table 2 will indicate how some of the skewed terms conflict with the seeming generational and lineal patterns of the semimoiety system.

With this so-called skewing, ego's mother's brother's children are categorised, depending on their sex, as ego's mother or mother's brother. This little known practice is found throughout a very large area of northern and northeastern Australia. It is found among the Barkly Tableland people as well as the coastal people at

Borrooloola. Sharp notes (1935: fn. 3) that mother's brother's daughters are identified with mothers among the Aborigines of the Cape York Tableland. Sharp (1935) also reports similar skewing among the coastal people in the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria among whom mother's brother's daughters may "follow her father's sister". Thomson (1972) indicates this to be the practice throughout a large part of Cape York among people without sociocentric classes with non-Aranda type kin terminologies having fewer descent lines. Scheffler (1978) analyses the same kind of skewing among Ngarinyin in north Western Australia where, again, it occurs with a terminology of a different type (cf. Elkin, 1964: 106) to either the central northern Australian or the Cape York ones.

Thus, this skewing is a feature of Aboriginal kinship throughout a very large and otherwise culturally diverse region. As such it is a practice of general significance to understanding Aboriginal kinship.

The English terms for these relatives are quite useful for the current exposition. Thus matrilateral cross-cousins are 'cousin-mother's' or 'cousin-uncles', patrilateral cross-cousins being 'cousin-nieces' or 'cousin-nephews'. It follows on from this that one's cousin-mother's children are 'cousin-brothers' and 'cousin-sisters' and, consequently, that the normal sibling terms of address apply to them (even

though they are in a different generation and semi-moiety.)

Sharp's explanation for this practice is that it prevents both first cousin marriage and marriages between the children of close second cousins of otherwise appropriate kin class. Thus an individual cannot arrange bestowal between his ZCh and his matrilateral cross-cousins since these are classified as his mothers and mother's brother's. However, ego's cousin-siblings may, according to Sharp, marry ego's spouse's siblings, i.e. bilaterally. Accordingly, he says, the Laierdila allow marriage with the father's father's sister's daughter and with the mother's brother's son's daughter; marriages which are not allowed at Borroloola. At Borroloola the skewing rules, rather than allowing new forms of marriage, make finding legitimate parents-in-law more difficult than it otherwise would be.

Yanyuwa do not call mother's brother's daughters 'mother' and mother's brother's sons 'mother's brother' although they make the equation for reckoning the appropriate terms for more distant relatives linked by cross-cousins. They do, however, distinguish matrilateral cross-cousins from patrilateral cross-cousins. Patrilateral cross-cousins are called munyumunyu for which the reciprocal term is mimi (which is used reciprocally between ego and his MF/Z). These terms are not used between close cross-cousins in all contexts and symmetrical cousin terms, marawara or barnka,

can be used instead. The asymmetrical terms, however, highlight a seniority difference between cross-cousins such that "[the one who says] "munyumunyu" is boss". This is justified by the notion that a full patrilateral cross-cousin is "from my own binji (i.e. stomach or uterus), from my own aunty (FZ)".

The seniority of matrilateral cross-cousins is consistent with their being placed in the generation of their parents; and this flows through to other relatives. Thus ego's mother's matrilateral cross-cousins are addressed by ego as if they belonged to the same generation as ego's mother's mother and her brother: ego calls his or her mother's mother's brother's children 'kuku' (male) or 'kukudi' (female). The children of these kukus are also 'kuku' or 'kukudi', just as they would be if ego had addressed their father as 'muluri' (i.e. 'MMBS' or 'WMB'). By the same logic kukudi's daughter (i.e. one's MMBDD) can be classed as 'mother', although she could also be called 'father's mother' (i.e. ngabuji) which is also used to address other "mothers" such as a man's classificatory son's wife.

Ego may not legitimately marry his MMBDD whether she be 'mother' or 'father's mother' (ngabuji). Marriage with a 'mother' is evidently incongruous to people at Borroloola; and as one man put it, 'ngabuji gives a warning: too close to marry'. Marriage with daughters of mother's female

patrilateral cross-cousins is opposed by the same rule.

Ego's mother's patrilateral cross-cousins, though they belong to the mother's generation, are classed as siblings 'through one milk'. Similarly ego's mother's brothers' daughters' children are cousin-siblings. This cousin-siblingship is based on sharing one mother's country (yakura), overlooking the difference in generation of the mothers. (I will deal later with the obviously important question of what constitutes 'one milk'.)

Children will address their parents' cousin-siblings as kinds of 'parents', just as if they were their parents' parallel cousins. Following this another generation, their children are likely to address their parents' cousin-siblings' children as siblings. Once again, since both ego's mother and ego's mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter are from "one milk", i.e. ego's MMF agnatic country, then this woman is ego's mother's sister and therefore ego's 'mother' or else ngabuji.

Under these rules, the similarity of the Borroloola terminology to the Aranda system appears much more superficial. The neat plan mapping kin terms with alternating generations and four lines of descent gives way to something seemingly more chaotic and arbitrary. Yet there is an underlying formal order in the application of

kin categories to kin types.

The outstanding formal feature of this terminology is that the extended uses of kin terms can be reduced to their primary categories by Lounsbury's (1964; 359-60) "Omaha Type 1" rules. These are the merging rule such that a person's same sex sibling is regarded as their equivalent when the sibling is a linking relative between ego and alter; the half-sibling rule such that a person's parents' children are their siblings; and the skewing rule which specifies that when the kin type 'father's sister' is a linking relative between ego and alter it is to be regarded as equivalent to the kin type 'sister'. These rules are sufficient to account, not only for the 'skewing', but for the apparent lineality and generational alternation in the organisation of the terminology. That is, there is no need to invoke a principle of alternating generations or lineal principles to account for the pattern of the kin terminology. In the light of this, the 'skewing' of the terminology is unexceptional. I will demonstrate this below.

The skewing rule, which is the one of specific importance here may be written in the following form with two corollaries which are relevant to the present discussion.

SKEWING RULE: ..FZ.. => ..Z..
corollaries: MBD => M
 MBS => MB

This indicates that the terms on the left, when they appear in the description of kin types, can be reduced to terms on the right. Using Table 2 the following equations between kin types and four main kin categories 'mother', 'father's mother' (i.e. ngabuji), 'father' and 'mother's mother' can be made. That is, the kin types on the right hand side are all classified by the terms indicated on the left. I will leave out parallel cousin kin types, which would come under the merging rule.

1. 'M' = M/MB/MBS/MBD/MF/MFZ
2. 'FM' = MMBDS/MMBDD/FM/FMB/FMBS/FMBD/FFZS/FFZD/-
FFZSS/FFZS/FMBSS/FMBSD
3. 'F' = F/FZ/FMBDS/FMBDD/FMFZS/FMFZD/
4. 'MM' = MM/MMB/MMBS/MMBD/MMBSS/MMBSD

Applying Lounsbury's Omaha Type 1 rules the kin types can be reduced as follows:

1. 'M' = M/MB/M/MB/MF/MZ
2. 'FM' = MB/M/FM/FMB/FMB/FM/ZS/ZD/ZSS/ZSD/FMB/FM
3. 'F' = F/FZ/F/FZ/F/FZ
4. 'MM' = MM/MMB/MMB/MM/MMB/MM

Assuming siblings are classified similarly:

1. 'M' = M
2. 'FM' = M/FM/Ch(fem)/ZCh/SCh(fem)/ZSCh
3. 'F' = F
4. 'MM' = MM

The assumption in making these reductions is that the genealogically closer kin types are primary and the more distant ones are extensions of these kin types to other relationships. The reasonableness of this assumption is

shown by the success of the reductions which would not be guaranteed if the assumption were not correct. These reductions show that, indeed, the alternation of terms in the M's, FM's, and MM's 'patriline' are explained by the skewing rules, and there is no need to adduce principles of alternating generations or, indeed, descent lines for the explanation. Indeed, the 'MM' class kin types all reduce to a single type, namely 'MM/MMB', even though they occur in three consecutive generations in a what is superficially a patrilineal line.

Rather than patriline, the terminology relies on a concept of the sameness of people with 'one country'. This sameness imbues the generations associated with the country by filiation, extending to the offspring of women who have the same 'eternal father'. Children of such women are, in effect, from 'one uterus' and 'one milk'. The same kind of link, this spiritual sameness, thus links people to both their mother's and their father's country. Thus while distinguishing the categories 'father' and 'mother' the kin terminology puts them on the same basis. Accordingly, the important 'mother's mother' category marks the matrifilial link as an association through the mother's (father's) country rather than as an extension of the nurturant chain through the mother's mother.

In terms of its reducibility by the substitution rules, the

category 'FM' is the most complex of the four. All I would want to say about this is that, given the primacy of the patri-category implicit in the skewing rules, the 'father's mother' is less significant to the construction of the primary linkages of the kin terminology than the 'mother's mother' category. The latter, as I have pointed out, has a role in marking the mother's category as one conceptually defined in relation to the father's side (abstractly by 'country'). The ngabuji category does not contribute to this, and for this reason it may be more readily adaptable to categorise remoter kin of various kinds; hence its 'warning' about being 'too close to marry'.

There are two seemingly fundamental questions concerning the use of this terminology which do not admit formal answers. Firstly, if marriage is bilateral, then how are matrilateral cross-cousins distinguished from patrilateral cross-cousins? Secondly, what counts as 'one country', 'one binji', or 'one milk' for purposes of kin classification?

Part of an answer to the first question is that the patrilateral cross-cousin is "younger" than the matrilateral. This does not help very much because the relationship between (potentially) intermarrying sets of siblings determine these usages, not relationships between individuals. Sets of siblings will not usually be distinguishable by relative age. In theory the same kind of difficulty is

faced if the seniority of sets of siblings is referred to seniority differences among the parents of these siblings. Mothers and fathers are ranked in seniority among their own siblings and in relation to their cousins, but a junior father might be married to a senior mother or vice versa, and it is far from clear how these issues could be resolved by formal rules.

Similar formal indeterminacy is evident in the meaning of 'one country'. This can include genealogical agnates, others who share responsibility for the same Dreaming sites or others of the same Dreaming in adjacent parts of the Dreaming tracks. Moreover, people who are wayarungu ('one water') by spiritual conception or by having the same Aboriginal name could be regarded as siblings through 'one country'. Such determinations are inherently flexible.

Buchler and Selby (1968: 249) assert that Omaha classifying kinship systems generally have the propensity to sharply distinguish kin from affinal categories and to be effective in transforming affinal groups into groups of kin. This is very much the case at Borroloola. The terminology can be used to extend the range of one's kin very far indeed, so narrowing the section of the population who can be affines. Thus, with the 'Omaha' extensions of ordinary kin terms potential mothers-in-law are turned into 'sisters' or 'mother's mothers' and potential fathers-in-law are turned

into father's mothers and relatives 'too close to marry'. The effect of this is that there will be very few mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, and these will stand out sharply from all of one's kin. In terms of the kin classification as a whole, fathers-in-law are kinds of sister's sons (one of the elementary types of the ngabuji category) while mothers-in-law are kinds of mother's mothers (more specifically as MMBDs) in that they grade in with these kinds of relatives who are their classificatory siblings. However, affines are sharply distinguished from kin, their status being marked by a radical break in the otherwise highly graded world of kin.

Constructing the social world The social world of children is bound initially in their relationship to their mothers, and later to the circle of close familial kin. The world beyond these confines is largely unknown and somewhat ominous, particularly as children are warned of the supernatural threat posed by spirits, sorcerers and other malevolent entities in addition to natural hazards. For boys on the verge of puberty, these fears are dramatically realised as they are taken on a journey far from their parents, subjected to hazing, passed through a series of night-long dances and finally circumcised by a stranger. At that point they are removed from ordinary society and remain under a ban of silence until the taboos are gradually

relaxed and they resume life in the camp. The whole process consists of erasing the novice's initial social identity and his childhood relations between self and others, placing him in the role of extreme otherness to the group, and then from that position being reinstated in a newly structured social world. Over this course, the self-other relations of his social world are polarised in various ways and, at the end, this polarity remains with respect to the novice's relations with his father-in-law, his mother-in-law and to a lesser extent his sisters. His older brothers-in-law, who formed the table for his circumcision, have to exercise restraint with him.

A primary polarisation is that between men and women, this being a constant theme of the rites and the associated mythology. However, this polarity grades into the principal ritual division between banbayi and bilibilayi. The former are the novice's close male and female kin and classificatory siblings and includes all of those relatives who have 'one milk', 'one binji' and 'one country' relationships with the novice. As a group, banbayi are sometimes described as 'one guts'. This does not seem to relate directly to the 'one binji' metaphor but it suggests that they are unified as the novice's close kin.

Male banbayi usually exclude themselves from Marndiwar dancing whereas female banbayi are expected to participate

on the night of women's dancing. That is, in their roles as dancers, banbayi and bilibilayi are contrastingly female and male. The contrast is also between close and distant kin for the bilibilayi are more distant male classificatory kin. However, they are represented above all by the brothers-in-law who dance kurdukurdu and perform the dog dance and by the circumcisor. These men, coming from the limits of the novice's world of kin, are the man-makers, and their initial masked appearance in this role would seem to emphasise their remoteness.

Once the novice is made a man he is in an avoidance relationship to the bilibilayi who danced for him, he remains out of sight from women and is generally off limits to all but his guardians. With the thumb-biting rites prior to his being smoked, the avoidance of certain bilibilayi is undone and they become incorporated into his new social world. He is then passed through the smoke in front of his relatives, but his sisters are brought under blankets to the edge of the fire pit, an act which signals the avoidance to be observed between adult brothers and sisters.

During his seclusion the novice is insulated from commensality with his female kin through his use of the namanda fireplace, from which his father is also excluded. Commensality is re-established prior to the final red-ochring rites when certain female relatives provide the

novice with particular sorts of food. Interestingly, some new men make promises to these women to reserve certain animals or certain parts of certain animals for them. Thus, one man would not harpoon a dugong of a certain kind because of his initiatory promise to his father's sister who recently had died. This custom suggests that the commensality with women re-established at the end of the rites is more contractual or symbolic in character than food given to nurture children.

The effects of initiation are that men leave behind their childhood attachments to their mothers and sisters, that they follow their father's Law and that they avoid their sisters and potential wives' parents. What remains is a social world divided into categories of kin and affines according to the kin terminology and structured by contrasting behaviours of extreme avoidance, familiarity and obscene joking.

This structuring of relations pervades men's social interaction even in seemingly informal settings. Men who freely call each other by personal names rather than by a kinship or affinal term are likely to belong to the same generation and to be brothers, parallel cousins or cross-cousins. Actual and classificatory brothers-in-law are likely to be respectful towards each other. Older sister's husbands will not speak to their younger brothers-in-law at

all and classificatory "brothers-in-law" will address each other as barnji. The other category of male kin in the same generation are kukus (MMB or MMBSS), with whom obscene joking is expected.

Men in appropriate kin categories often joke with each other. The joking might, for example, focus on two men in the matrilateral second cousin joking relationship. With the joking there are customary exclamations for kin in particular categories who are present. Thus brothers customarily shout "wari-wari" (translatable as, perhaps, "What pricks (our brother and our "MMBSS"!)" whenever their matrilateral second cousin is consulted. The joker's cross-cousins either leave if he is joking with their actual brother-in-law, or else they avert their eyes, make spitting sounds and exclaim "ngalamu" whenever a classificatory brother-in-law is delivered abuse. When a cross-cousin is jokingly insulted the response, quite opposite to "ngalamu", is "kabarani", "Balls!". This pattern of joking and exclamation extends to relatives in adjacent generations of patri-categories: for example, mother's brothers hear kabarani, classificatory sisters' sons and ngabuji hear ngalamu, mother's cross-cousins hear wari-wari. In this way these customary responses correspond to the semi-moiety distinctions among men.

The manner in which they do so contrasts with the pattern of

marital relationships which can be expressed in terms of semi-moieties. Thus, whereas the MMB's patri-group is subject to obscene joking this is directly opposite to extreme avoidance of mothers-in-law, who also come from this category. Similarly, whereas relations between spouses are sexual, sexuality is eliminated from talk among brothers-in-law. And there is also a contrast between a degree of restraint between mother and son (which is manifested in a taboo on the mother's name practiced by some Karrawa people) and the joking response to one's male matrilinear kin. In short these customary joking expressions appear to ease relationships among men by a denial of the mediations of females in the actual constitution of male society. This, of course, is a general theme of Aboriginal men's ritual; and it is not surprising that women's relationships with each other are not accented to the same degree.

The avoidance behaviours which remain after the rites - the avoidance of parents-in-law and sisters mainly - are the residue of a general avoidance or solitude which is steadily lifted. With the lifting of taboos the new man's social world expands until its limits are pushed back to the remaining avoidance relatives. The extreme avoidance of parents-in-law marks a radical discontinuity and the role of the father-in-law as circumcisor/castrator seems to realise the malevolent forces which lay on the periphery of the child's world. The forces which threatened the link between

young child and mother thus seem to return in the figure of the father-in-law.

Of course, it is classical psychoanalytic theory that the son must give up his attachment to his mother so as to reconcile his relations with his father and find his own spouse outside of the family circle. Indeed, the father-in-law's eventual gift of a daughter (not necessarily his own, but possibly one of a 'brother') can be seen as compensation for his attack on the novice; an attack conceived to sever or at least diminish the maternal tie and bring the new man under his father's Law. The maintenance of father-in-law avoidance in later life would seem to act as a reminder of this state of affairs. However, this does not account for mother-in-law avoidance which is at least as extreme as the avoidance of the father-in-law.

Hiatt's analysis of mother-in-law avoidance is illuminating here:

"We can now pose a central question: given the patent interest of a man in the reproductivity of his mother-in-law, how do we account for the elaborate precautions imposed by the institution of mother-in-law avoidance against any expression of interest in her sexuality? The answer, I believe, may be found by focusing on the situation of the father-in-law. A youth who has been given a mother-in-law still has a long time to wait for a wife. In the meantime he behaves in one important respect like a husband towards his mother-in-law: he gives her meat. A flow of sexual impulses in the same direction would clearly threaten the uxorial interests of the father-in-law. Hence the imposition of an avoidance barrier. From this perspective,

it is no accident that in many tribes men circumcise their future sons-in-law at puberty. With a potential transfer of libido from mother to mother-in-law, the role of potential castrator shifts from father to father-in-law." (1984: 192).

In this account the father-in-law is again the central figure, mother-in-law avoidance being maintained for the sake of his uxorial interests. The transference of the threatening aspects of the father's role to the father-in-law appears to be supported also by the father's passive role while his son is circumcised. However, one problem with Hiatt's interpretation for the Borroloola material is that father-in-law avoidance would have to be explained in a different way to mother-in-law avoidance.

Furthermore, the 'patent' interest of men in the reproductivity of their mothers-in-law is not so obvious. Clearly men at Borroloola find female reproductivity in general a key problem and it represents the focus of much of their ceremonial life. The Marndiwar is intended to make men by means of ritual which supervenes in the processes of reproduction; by discerning spiritual conception in dreams men assert a positive role from the start; and the categories of the kin classification are constructed in terms of an abstract 'eternal father' rather than in ways which reflect the relationships of female reproductive nurturance. This points to a denial of men's dependence on female reproductivity though, admittedly, the focus of this is largely on the reproduction of men.

The explanation for this extreme avoidance undoubtedly has something to do with sexual denial but the denial of ordinary reproductivity, both male and female, also seems important. The son-in-law only sees his father-in-law in the role of castrator. After that his wife's parents remain out of his view and in a sense beyond his understanding. As another moment in the long chain of ritualised transactions she enters the scene mysteriously, from the margins of the social world as it is comprehended through the categories of the kin classification. Men similarly turn a blind eye to the origins of the women who enter the world of their affines in the same mysterious way - their sisters, "rubbish". Accordingly, it is permitted for a younger brother-in-law to joke with the "older" man who has married his sister, but this man cannot speak to his "junior" brother-in-law seemingly so as not to recognise the origins of his wife.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

The main lines of argument in the previous chapters can now be drawn together and a number of generalisations about the nature of Aboriginal society at Borroloola can now be made.

Several times in this thesis I have referred to Hamilton's (1980) view of Aboriginal societies as dual (male and female) social systems. Hamilton conceived the idea to account for aspects of Western Desert Aboriginal society. There, as I have already noted, there is considerable territorial flux, local organisation is weakly developed and, according to Hamilton, "structural and ideological dominance of men over women has not become a reality" (1980: 18). The situation in the McArthur River area, both before and since European contact, is very different. Here language groups seems to have had stable associations with territories corresponding to geographical and ecological divisions, local organisation instanced by the semi-moieties organisation and local totemism is highly developed, and male structural dominance is a reality. Nonetheless, the

articulation of social relations between men and women has such a central role in culture that the dual social system model is still very relevant to Aboriginal society at Borroloola.

The notion of dual social systems immediately raises the question of how they are related. The Yanyuwa material lends support to Hamilton's generalisation that males have benefited directly from increases in productivity due to technological innovations. Thus, while Yanyuwa women have about the same technology as their Western Desert counterparts, Yanyuwa men used the complex canoe and harpoon technology, among others, which gave them access to rich marine resources. Compared to Western Desert Aboriginal men, men in the McArthur River area were much less dependant on women's productive labour; however, they remained dependant on women's reproductivity as a means of social reproduction.

Indeed, the analyses I have made of the Rocky Creek camp, the semi-moiety system and the Marndiwar circumcision ceremony reveal the structural centrality of the articulation of male and female reproductive power. At the cultural level there seems to be a powerful denial of the reality of female fecundity, indeed of the sufficiency of ordinary reproductivity, and a stress on metaphysical and ritual sources of reproductive power. In spiritual

conception, interpreted by men in dreams, fertility is attributed to spiritual powers intrinsic to sites on the land and the identity of an individual's conception site represents a significant strand of his social identity. Ritual circumcision at the onset of puberty is the moment of men's 'making men' from the raw materials appropriated from women. The process reconstructs male personal identity and social status, the whole processes dramatising the radical discontinuity between men and women and children.

In the course of the Marndiwar the novice's social world undergoes a dramatic realignment. His ties with his parents are severed and his previous identity is erased. After circumcision he is plunged further into solitude - threatened by rainbow serpents - and his silence continues. This quite general state of social avoidance is lifted by degrees. He is brought back into relation to the social world and restored to his parents. However, extreme affinal avoidance and less strict sister avoidance represent the residue of this process and they are thereafter linked to the experience of circumcision.

It seems to me that the paradigm of the social world is the early relationship of dependence of the child upon his or her parents, especially the mother, and close kin. This family circle circumscribes the child's cognised world, the limits of which are approached with apprehension. Kinship

classification at Borroloola involves a somewhat elusive notion of sameness through 'one country', this being constituted as a patri-category, an abstract or mysterious 'eternal father', a concept consistent with the structural dominance of male ritual and the devaluation of natural reproductivity. Relations with kin are constituted in terms of chains of this 'sameness' transmitted either by males or females: the children of men share their father's totemic and semi-moiety identity, however the children of women of all generations from 'one country' are classified as siblings. In this sense, the world of one's kin is an extension of oneself.

This particular classification extends the circle of kin far indeed, linking people through genealogical and totemic links. However, parents-in-law are sharply distinguished from kin by extreme avoidance, and appear to be constituted as figures at the margins of the graded, egocentric world of kin. Indeed, the father-in-law as castrator exemplifies this extreme otherness and manifests the malevolence felt to lurk at the margins. Moreover, affinal avoidance in general (which is essentially a male practice) also seems to imply the mysterious origins of the wife, representing another instance of the denial of mundane reproductivity.

This, however, does not amount to a denial of dependence of men on women. Aboriginal men demonstrate their dominance by

removing sons from their 'mother's law' and placing them under their father's, but the relationship with the mother is reinstated at the end of the rites. The Marndiwar requires close cooperation between men and women and dramatises the interdependence of the sexes. In fact women participate in ritualised man-making on a night of women's dancing of equivalent importance to men's. However, their role in this ritual lends further weight to the significance of cultural fecundity over natural fecundity.

The semi-moiety system is also directly involved in this articulation of mainly male ritual relations with female reproductive nurturance. To treat it as a formal equivalent of the subsection system can be misleading because semi-moiety are constituted as the articulation of men's ritual fecundity with women's reproductivity in marriage. Semi-moieties are ritual groupings and they are marriage classes, not in the sense that they provide the terms for expressing norms of marriageability, but only in the sense that they articulate the social character of marriage.

Thus, in spite of a century of often traumatic association with Europeans the Borroloola Aborigines remain firmly anchored to their traditions. Their marginal position in the economically and politically dominant structure of Australian society has probably contributed to this situation though it has left them dependant on government

for their livelihood. A succession of government policies have sought to eliminate this dependence by assimilation, integration or 'self-determination'. However, it is far from clear that Borroloola Aborigines share the assumption behind these policies, that individuals and social groups could be and ought to be self-supporting, autonomous units. Indeed, their culture places the highest value on individuals and groups being in relation to others and regards social independence as a somewhat pathological state. Thus, while well-intentioned Europeans see Aboriginal dependence as the root of the problem, Aborigines put the same problem in terms of the relation between two laws. Of course, it is implicit that the two laws have about equal status.

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