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OF ACTS AND AXES

An ethnography of socio-cultural change
in an Aboriginal community, Cape York Peninsula

Thesis submitted by
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in October 1984

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Department of Behavioural Sciences
at James Cook University of North Queensland.

VOLUME I

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the processes of socio-cultural change set in motion when the Aboriginal people of the Edward River reserve gave up their hunter-gatherer life-style and joined with Anglican missionaries to form the Edward River settlement in 1938. In opting for a sedentary life, the Aborigines of the reserve were consciously adopting the role of culture recipients who were dependent on change agents (missionaries, and later government officials) from the mainstream Australian society to provide the sources for socio-cultural change as well as the direction in which it should proceed.

The cultural patterns characterising reserve life prior to the establishment of the settlement are reconstructed from informants' memories and the observations of anthropologists who conducted studies among the reserve's peoples between 1925 and 1935. The pre-settlement patterns are then compared with those which characterised settlement life in the period 1968-75 when the author undertook his fieldwork. Two independently formulated hypotheses concerning the degree, direction and sources of socio-cultural change are tested against the actual course of events. The first hypothesis was developed by an anthropologist, Lauriston Sharp, who on the basis of his investigations into the totemic ideology of the Yir Yoront, came to the conclusion that sustained contact between the people of the reserve and European Australians would lead to the collapse of the indigenous cultural system. The second hypothesis was implicit in Queensland State Government policy and legislation. It stated that the Aboriginal people of the Edward River settlement could be transformed over time from a welfare-dependent, managed community to one that was just like a normal country town in Queensland by providing physical amenities similar to those of country towns, and by imposing routines and social structures similar to those found in the economic systems and formal processes of social control in the dominant society.

Neither hypothesis has accurately anticipated the real outcome. Aboriginal belief systems have not collapsed

nor have the people of Edward River achieved that level of cultural competence that would permit them to manage their community without help. It is argued in this thesis that the first hypothesis failed because of an anthropological interpretation that over-emphasized the comprehensiveness of the indigenous totemic ideology and thus understated the resilience of Edward River belief systems. It is argued that the second hypothesis concerning the appropriate techniques for inducing change is also failing despite the commitment of the Edward River people to the development of their community. Edward River people have adapted to their institutional environment in such a way as to preserve some fundamental Aboriginal values, and to create a permanent niche for outside managers. There seems little prospect for change in this situation unless certain prerequisites to fruitful socio-cultural change are incorporated in basic planning strategies.

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CONVENTIONS

In rendering Aboriginal words I have employed the practical orthography developed by Dr A.H. Hall for the Edward River bilingual programme. Kinship notation follows the standard practice for representing kintypes. Classificatory relationships are represented by enclosing kintypes within quotes. The symbols ♀ and ♂ preceding a kintype mean "from the viewpoint of a female..." and "from the viewpoint of a male..." respectively.

In those places where I have had to rely heavily on the case material of other anthropologists, I have taken care to distinguish the material that I recorded from the material recorded by others by noting the appropriate source. In case examples where there is no source attributed the reader may assume that they represent my original data.

In the analysis and discussion of disputing behaviour I have followed the convention of numbering cases in order to make it easier to refer to them in the text.

CHAPTER 1INTRODUCTION1.1 The research population -- an historical overview

This thesis is concerned with an Aboriginal population living on a reserve on the western side of Cape York Peninsula known as the Edward River Aboriginal Reserve. The reserve is a large one. It stretches from the Mitchell River in the south to the Holroyd River in the north and encompasses approximately 2,800 km². To the south lies the Mitchell River Aboriginal Reserve and to the north is the Aurukun Shire which until 1978 was known as the Aurukun Aboriginal Reserve.

The present Aboriginal inhabitants of the Edward River reserve live, for the most part, in a small township which is called Edward River. The township and the reserve are administered by the Department of Aboriginal and Islanders' Advancement (hereafter referred to as the DAIA), which is an instrumentality of the Queensland State Government. Before European contact, the Aboriginal people who lived in the area bounded by the reserve pursued a semi-nomadic way of life based on hunting and gathering. Their current sedentary life-style is a product of their interaction with Europeans who came to live in their part of the world at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this section I present a brief overview of the history of that contact and the formation of the reserves and settlements. I also give some account of the early anthropological research among the peoples of the Edward River reserve.

In recorded history, the Dutch were the first Europeans to make contact with the Aborigines of western Cape York Peninsula. Between 1606 and 1756 they made four voyages that took them into the Gulf of Carpentaria. They were seeking to extend their Asian commercial interests by finding further opportunities for commerce. Their contacts with the Aborigines often ended in conflict and the Dutch did not follow up their exploratory trips partly because they saw no avenues for trade or exploitation and partly because of the hostility of the natives they encountered

(Loos 1974:3).

In 1845, the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt undertook an overland journey of exploration from Moreton Bay to Port Essington. His route took him some distance along the course of the Mitchell River before he turned south to traverse the bottom end of the Gulf of Carpentaria. During his sojourn in Mitchell River country his party was attacked by Aborigines and one of its members killed. The first Europeans to travel through the country that was to become the Edward River reserve were a party of ten stockmen under the direction of the Jardine brothers, Frank and Alick. They were overlanding a herd of 250 cattle from Carpentaria Downs station on the upper Einasleigh River to the just-formed settlement of Somerset at the tip of Cape York. As the party made its way up the western side of the Peninsula they encountered increasing hostility from the Aborigines between the Staaten and Holroyd Rivers. Several clashes occurred, including the now infamous "Battle of the Mitchell River" in which it was reckoned that at least 30 natives fell to the rifles of the drovers as they opposed the passage of the Jardine party. Although the event was intended to teach the Aborigines a lesson they would long remember, an anthropologist who subsequently worked in the area found that his informants had no recollection of the episode 70 years later (Sharp 1952:70). J.T. Embley, a government surveyor gave the Edward River its name in 1884 during an exploratory trip in which he plotted the westward course of the Coleman River before turning north to survey the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers. Embley reported no trouble at all with the natives whom he appeared to have observed at close quarters (Jack 1922:632).

Permanent European settlement commenced during the 1880's when large areas of land around the lower reaches of the Mitchell River were taken up for cattle raising. Dunbar station was formed in 1885 followed by Koolatah in 1886. The Rutland Plains pastoral holding was first occupied in 1903. Pastoral expansion along the western coast of Cape York Peninsula was inhibited to a large extent when Queensland's colonial legislature passed a bill known

as "The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897". The Act enabled a vast area of the coastal lands to be set aside for the purpose of forming Aboriginal reserves. The land set aside stretched from below the Mitchell River to the tip of Cape York Peninsula. At that time one Aboriginal mission, that of Mapoon (founded in 1891), was already in existence and was being conducted under the aegis of the Presbyterian Church. In 1898, the Presbyterian Church formed a second mission at Weipa and in 1904 a third at Aurukun. The Mitchell River mission was established in 1904 also. The first site of the mission, Trubanaman, proved unsuitable and it was moved in 1915 to a site on the banks of the Magnificent River which became known eventually by its native name of Kowanyama. The Mitchell River mission was administered by the Church of England as part of the Diocese of Carpentaria. In 1932 an attempt was made to set up an outstation of the Mitchell River mission near the Coleman River in order to provide the natives of that part of the reserve with a mission settlement of their own. The fledgling mission failed (see Daniels 1975), and it was not until 1938 that the present Edward River settlement was successfully established by J.W. Chapman. The detailed story of the setting up and development of the Edward River mission is taken up in Chapter 6.

The first serious anthropological studies of the peoples of the Edward River reserve began in 1927 with Ursula McConnel's fieldwork among various groups living on the coast between the Archer and Edward Rivers. She left the field in 1928 and returned again in 1934 to conduct further research at the Aurukun mission (McConnel 1957:xiii-xv). In 1928 Donald Thomson made a journey to the Mitchell River mission and for a period of several months camped on the Coleman River in company with a large party of Aborigines he referred to as the Koko Taiyor or Koko Daiyuri (Thomson 1935:9 1936:71). He then left the area to carry out more intensive work during 1929 on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. He returned to the west coast in 1932 to spend the wet season at the Archer River. He left the area in August the following year. The anthropological studies that are

of the most significance for this thesis are those resulting from the work of R.L. Sharp. Between 1933 and 1935 Sharp spent some 29 months in the field in North Queensland, and much of that time was devoted to an intensive study of Aboriginal groups still pursuing a hunter-gatherer way of life in the country between the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers (Sharp 1937:xii). The groups Sharp studied were the Yir Yoront, the Yir Mel, the Taior and the Ngentjin. The names identified speech or dialect groups. They were not the names of discrete "tribes", if the term "tribe" is taken to mean a group whose territorial affiliations and major social alignments were confined within the speech group. Indeed Sharp (1958:2) has stressed that the concept of "tribe" as an autonomous and politically bounded land-owning entity has no place in the description of the flexible social structures of Aboriginal North Queensland (or even in Australia as a whole for that matter). From a territory holding perspective, the unit of importance in Cape York Peninsula was the named patrilineal clan. Thus when Sharp (1937:301) gave locations for the above speech groups he was merely identifying where it was the speakers of those languages had the bulk of their primary entitlements to land through their clan memberships.

It should be noted, however, that in much of Sharp's published work he referred only to the Yir Yoront (e.g. see Sharp 1934a, 1934b, 1952, 1958). As Sutton (1978:30) has pointed out, fieldworkers in Aboriginal Australia who write ethnographies of culturally similar but linguistically diverse communities often choose one of the names of the speech groups making up the research population to stand as the exemplar for the whole community. The procedure is justifiable in terms of descriptive simplicity but it runs the risk of creating a false impression of linguistic, cultural and territorial homogeneity when the technique is not made explicit. Suffice it to say here that what Sharp asserted of the culture of the Yir Yoront in his published works he intended to apply equally, with due regard for linguistic differences, to the other named groups of his research population. This is clear from his 1958 paper, "People without politics: the

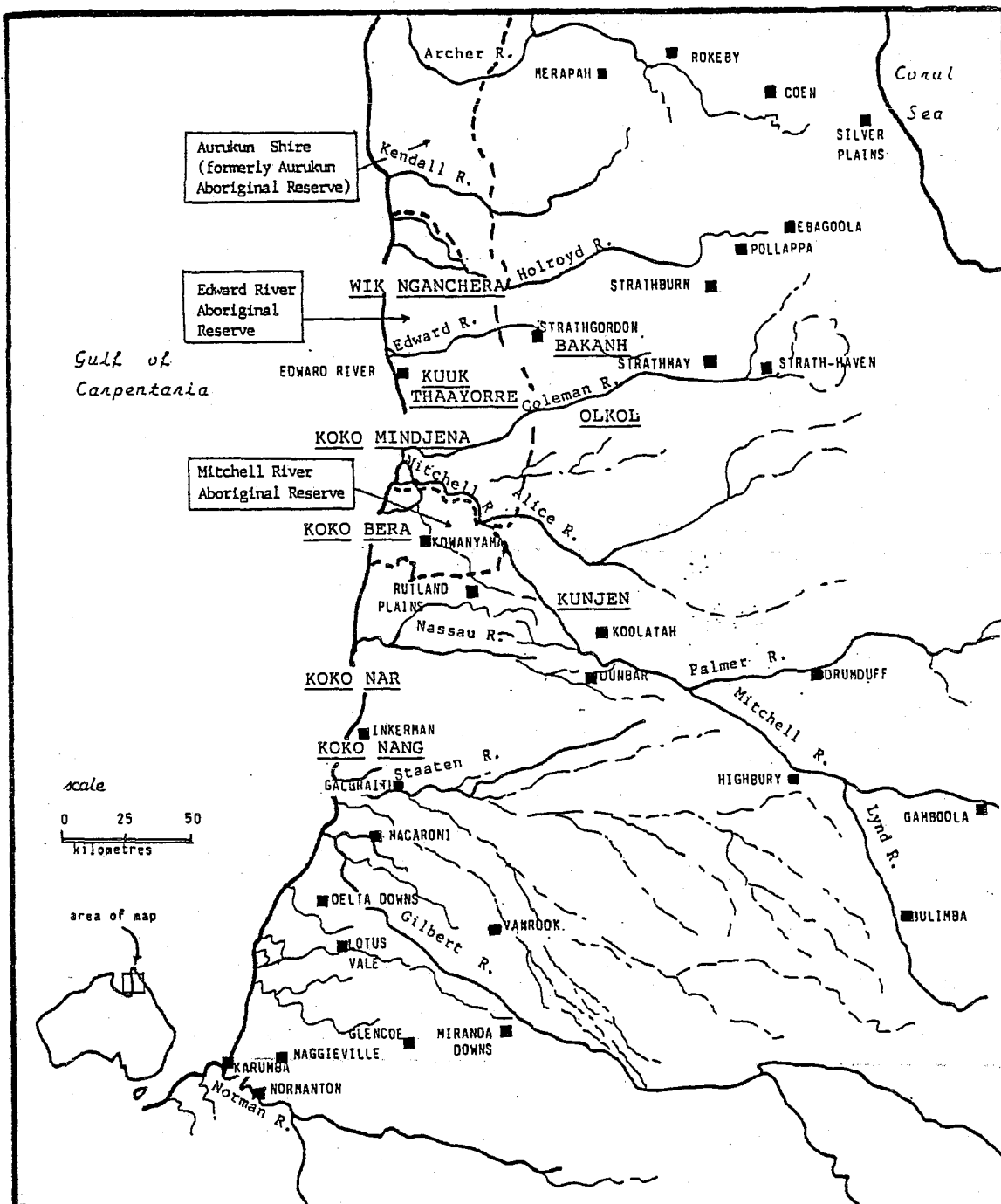
Australian Yir Yoront". This is an important point to be borne in mind when considering the aims of this study.

Between them, the studies of Sharp and Thomson focused on the populations living in the southern half of the Edward River reserve. The rest of the peoples of the Edward River reserve were equally diverse linguistically, but in other respects were culturally similar to their southern neighbours in most major points of comparison including land tenure systems, material culture, subsistence technology, kinship structures, marriage systems, ritual activity, beliefs and social control. Charting linguistic diversity on Cape York Peninsula has always been problematic. There are many so-called "tribal maps" which attempt to associate names for speech groups with particular areas of land. The maps range from crude small-scale diagrams drawn by the early missionaries (e.g. see White 1906) to relatively large-scale and detailed distributions of the "tribes" of Cape York Peninsula based on the anthropological research of the 1930's (e.g. see McConnel 1957, Sharp 1939, Thomson 1972). Tindale (1974) as part of a general survey of all the "tribes" of Aboriginal Australia has presented a seemingly definitive distribution of "tribes" or language groups for Cape York Peninsula. Sutton (1978) has found reason to criticise his distributions for the Wik speaking peoples, and my own mapping activities (Taylor 1976, Sinnamon & Taylor 1978) on the Edward River and Mitchell River reserves indicate that Tindale's maps could be further refined.

With Map 1.1, I have provided yet another distribution of speech communities within or near the Edward River reserve. The map is not an attempt to reconcile or correct various existing maps. As Alpher (1973:4) correctly notes, much detailed mapping of territorial and linguistic affiliations is required before a definitive distribution can be produced for Cape York Peninsula. Instead the map employs a series of terms that have come to acquire a general currency among the present-day residents of Edward River and Kowanyama. Each term on the map is, in a sense, a cover-all that stands for a variety of related and, in pre-settlement times, neighbouring dialects. Several of the terms (e.g. Wik Nganchera

and Koko Mindjena) appear to have had this cover-all function in pre-contact times. The other terms emerged out of the need to provide rough guides to linguistic affiliation when linguistically heterogeneous populations of Aborigines began to come together into single communities on mission settlements. Of the related dialects covered by the terms some are now extinct and some are nearly so. Others, however, have become the major vehicles for vernacular communication within the Kowanyama and Edward River settlements, a process that has obviously involved major changes in linguistic identities.

Each term on the map then does nothing more than designate the approximate pre-contact location of sets of related languages and dialects. Beginning in the north, Wik Nganchera refers to speakers of the following languages or dialects: Wik Mu'inh, Wik Iiyanh, Wik Yianh, Wik Uwanh and Wik Muminh. All of these languages or dialects are spoken at Edward River. Kuuk Thaayorre (the Taior of Sharp and the Koko Taiyor or Koko Daiyuri of Thomson) appears to have been a dialect that has become a major communicative vehicle at Edward River in recent times. Other members of this set are Kuuk Thanon, Kuuk Thaayunhth, Kuuk Thayem and Kuuk Yak (Sharp's Ngentjin). Only Kuuk Yak appears to have any residual speakers. Traditionally Koko Mindjena was a cover-all name applied by Koko Bera speakers to those whose languages were Yir Yoront, Yir Thujim, Yir Thangedl (apparently Sharp's Yir Mel) and Kin Kopol. Yir Yoront has become one of the dominant vernaculars at Kowanyama. Only a few people have any competence in any of the other dialects (see Alpher 1973:5). The origin of the term Koko Bera is similar to that of Kuuk Thaayorre. It is one of the three major languages spoken at Kowanyama but appears to have been one of a set of dialects that included Koko Wap, Koko Beberam and, perhaps doubtfully, Koko Babangk. The term Kunjen is a pidginised version of Okunjan and is applied to speakers of Oykangand, Okunjan, Kawarrang and Uw El (Sommer 1969). At Kowanyama the term is also extended to cover speakers of Olkol, but since Edward River people see Olkol as a separate language group I have decided to keep them so on the map.



Map 1.1 Locations of Aboriginal language groups (underlined), Aboriginal settlements and reserves together with principal pastoral properties and townships, western Cape York Peninsula.

Oykangand is the third major dialect spoken at Kowanyama.

My information of the remaining language clusters, Bakanh, Olkol, Koko Nar and Koko Nang is much less secure. Some Bakanh speakers are referred to by Edward River people as Kuuk Mathn, but I do not know whether this is a dialect or an alternative name for Bakanh. I am similarly uncertain as to whether Olkol was composed of a single dialect or several. Bruce Sommer (pers. com.) informs me that Koko Nar was said to include Koko Daw and Uw Inal while Koko Nang included Og Indar and Kuandar. Further clarifying work on the language clusters has been carried out by the linguists Bruce Sommer and Paul Black, but I have yet to see their results.

The main groups of languages spoken by the research population of this thesis were (and are) Wik Nganchera, Kuuk Thaayorre, Yir Yoront and Bakanh.

1.2 Research aims

The primary aim of this thesis is to present an ethnography of the socio-cultural changes induced in an Australian Aboriginal society by virtue of its contact with European Australians. The argument draws its inspiration from a paper written by R.L. Sharp and published in Human Organization in 1952. The paper was called "Steel axes for stone-age Australians". It has been widely reprinted since then, attaining the stature of an anthropological classic in the study of the social and cultural dynamics involved in technological change (Smith 1974:8). Sharp's studies among the Yir Yoront (and the other members of the linguistic conglomerate represented by the Yir Yoront) inclined him to the view that the pre-contact Aboriginal cosmology was so tightly integrated around a relatively unchanging human and physical environment that any widespread introduction of novelty would have serious implications for the survival of that world view. Sharp asserted that the basic Yir Yoront cognitive orientation towards the world was conditioned by a set of totemic beliefs which provided the primary screen through which events and

behaviour in the real world were interpreted. The same world view fashioned Yir Yoront responses to events and behaviours. When Sharp arrived in the field, the artefacts of European culture were becoming available to the bush-dwelling Yir Yoront in appreciable quantities. The material artefacts alone were sufficient, so Sharp thought, to cause revolutionary changes in Yir Yoront ideology.

For the purposes of his paper Sharp chose to examine the consequences that followed upon the replacement of the indigenous stone hatchet by its European steel counterpart. Sharp concluded that the steel hatchet, like other items of European technology, was setting in motion so many intellectual contradictions that the cultural disintegration of the Yir Yoront seemed imminent. The propositions leading to this conclusion I shall explore in greater detail in Chapter 6. I shall simply note here that the argument of the paper was so persuasive and the writing so vivid, that many readers have assumed that the Yir Yoront culture that Sharp described in earlier papers did actually disappear. In fact, Sharp was forecasting an outcome on the basis of an hypothesis about the "tight" structure of Aboriginal world views. That hypothesis was general enough to apply to all of the Aboriginal inhabitants of western Cape York Peninsula whose pre-contact environments and cultures were similar to the Yir Yoront.

Sharp predicted that the totemic ideology, the fundamental underpinning of Yir Yoront beliefs, would disappear and that the bush-dwelling natives would undergo a period of anxiety and personal deprivation whose outward manifestations might be symbolic aggression or withdrawal and apathy. In the last paragraph of his paper he argued that the Yir Yoront would probably turn to the missionaries whose presence had brought Western goods within their reach. The missionaries, Sharp felt, with appropriate understanding and empathy, could help reconstitute a new cultural universe to replace the one they had unwittingly destroyed with their material artefacts. It is worth noting that by 1940, five years after Sharp had left the field, the group we are calling the Yir Yoront had, for all practical purposes, exchanged

their hunter-gatherer life-style for a sedentary one on the mission settlements of Kowanyama and Edward River. This could be interpreted as a confirmation, in part, of his hypothesis.

Sharp's analysis focused on the processes of social change unintentionally set in motion by the missionaries. But the missionaries themselves, and the DAIA officers who succeeded them at Kowanyama and Edward River, were not simply passive caretakers and administrators. They were conscious agents of social change deliberately attempting to transform Aboriginal communities in accordance with a particular vision. Both missionary and DAIA official envisioned the end products of the transformation process, firstly, as independent Aboriginal communities capable of sustaining themselves without the paternal oversight of others, and secondly, at the individual level, as Aboriginal citizens who could competently participate in the economic, political and social institutions of the dominant white society. If it was anything, the vision was assimilationist and saw the eventual absorption of Aborigines and Aboriginal communities into the majority culture. It is fair to say that at the founding of Edward River the Aborigines themselves had little, if any, conception of what it was they and their descendants were required to become. Thus it is important to acknowledge from the outset that Edward River has always been a community committed to effecting socio-cultural changes among Aborigines. It is equally important to recognise that when the bush-dwelling people of the reserve invited the missionaries to form a settlement, they were choosing to exchange their former life-style for something else -- even if they had no clear conception of what that something else portended. Whether they were motivated to do so because they were seeking a reconstitution of their own tottering cosmology is a matter for empirical investigation. What cannot be ignored is that the Aborigines in coming to live at Edward River, were also choosing to live permanently alongside Europeans and were placing themselves in a position of tutelage and dependence upon them. Thus, as a functional entity, Edward River society has been (and is)

intentionally bi-cultural with two special roles for its European members. One role was to provide models that Aborigines should aspire to or imitate. The other role was for them to be active change agents of the dominant donor culture with the purpose of instilling ideas, routines and rules that would progressively serve the aims of the developmental plan.

To adopt a phrase of Goffman's (1968:22), Edward River may be seen as a forcing house for changing people. Indeed a number of observers (e.g. Long 1970, Stephens 1970, Stanner 1974) have noted that Goffman's characterisation of the total institution is particularly apt in the case of mission and government controlled Aboriginal settlements in Australia. In choosing to write an ethnography of a total institution devoted to changing a community's entire way of life, it is a small step to move from the actualities of the change processes to a comparison of the actualities with the outcomes anticipated by the vision. Therefore, if the first aim of this thesis is to test Sharp's hypothesis against the subsequent course of events, the second aim is to evaluate, at a purely descriptive level, the extent to which the course of actual socio-cultural change has coincided with the directions intended by those who had the responsibility of planning for the community and marshalling and organising its human and physical resources.

1.3 Methodology and the description of socio-cultural change

It is necessary at this point to make clear to the reader what is meant in this thesis by the terms "culture" and "socio-cultural change".

I take culture to be a phenomenon of the mind and share Goodenough's (1966:167) view that a community's culture consists of whatever it is that one has to know or believe in order to operate as a member of that culture. In the words of Goodenough (pp.258-9) culture consists of:

1. The ways in which people have organised their experience

of the real world so as to give it structure as a phenomenal world of forms, that is, their percepts and concepts.

2. The ways in which people have organised their experience of their phenomenal world so as to give it structure as a system of cause and effect relationships, that is, the propositions and beliefs by which they explain events and design tactics for accomplishing their purposes.
3. The ways in which people have organized their experience of their phenomenal world so as to structure its various arrangements in hierarchies of preferences, that is, their value or sentiment systems. These provide the principles for selecting and establishing purposes and for keeping oneself purposefully oriented in a changing phenomenal world.
4. The ways in which people have organized their experience of their past efforts to accomplish recurring purposes into operational procedures for accomplishing these purposes in the future, that is, a set of "grammatical" principles of action and a series of recipes for accomplishing particular ends. They include operational procedures for dealing with people as well as for dealing with material things.

Culture, then, consists of standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it.

Goodenough finds it useful to distinguish three kinds of culture. There is each individual's conception of how other members of his society have organised their experience. Goodenough calls this private culture. Private culture is the individual's theory by means of which he predicts his fellows' reactions to events and especially

the ways in which he believes his fellows will receive, judge and react to his behaviour. An individual's private culture may be composed of as many theories of behaviour as there are different kinds of groups in which he participates. Therefore, depending on the complexity of group arrangements in a society, individuals may have a repertoire of culture theories upon which to draw and in terms of which they can operate at any given time. The private culture theory selected for the purposes of the moment by an individual, Goodenough designates the operating culture. The third kind of culture Goodenough distinguishes is public culture, the generalised culture a person attributes to the aggregate membership of any social group. Among the individuals of a given community there may be a high degree of consensus about the content of a community's public culture. Elsewhere Goodenough (1971:42) has suggested that all the ideas, beliefs, values, recipes and traditions that are known to one or more members of a community form a culture pool. Much of the content of this culture pool is not shared by other members of the community. Several writers (Keesing 1974, Pelto and Pelto 1976) have expressly drawn attention to the importance of non-shared informational heterogeneity within groups as a potential source of adaptive variability. Such privately owned portions of the culture pool are not social imperfections. Rather, they may be, as Keesing (p. 88) observes, an adaptive necessity and a "...crucial resource that can be drawn on and selected from in culture change..."

Goodenough (1966:263) observes that strictly speaking no one true description of a community's culture is possible. All that anthropologists can do is to construct others of their own. In order to achieve culturally valid analyses of knowledge systems in action and to guard against ethnographies becoming merely sets of idiosyncratic, non-replicable descriptions, Goodenough and his followers have urged the adoption of what has come to be called the "culture scene" approach. Central to such analyses is the notion that particular sets of rules are valid and useful only within culturally defined domains.

Such domains are bounded and refer to those recurring situations that provide the settings within which the members of a particular community organise their social interactions in order to satisfy their wants and needs. Thus Frake (1969:471) argues that a descriptively adequate ethnographic statement would have to include:

- (a) Discovering the major categories of events or scenes of the culture;
- (b) Defining scenes so that observed interactions, acts, objects and places can be assigned to their proper scenes as roles, routines, paraphernalia and settings;
- (c) Stating the distribution of scenes with respect to one another, that is, providing instructions for anticipating or planning for scenes.

The goal of such analyses is to describe what participants have to know, that is, the rules or "grammars" they have to abide by, in order to take part in such scenes. Culture scenes are then described from an insider's point of view and essentially are definitions of the situation held by the participants of a scene (Spradley and McCurdy 1972:23-24).

This approach to the description of culture has not been without its difficulties. The degree to which participants cognitively share the same definition of the situation is always problematical in any culture scene, and Wallace (1970:35) has suggested that cognitive non-sharing may be a necessary prerequisite for the maintenance of complex patterns of social interaction. Black (1973) refers to similar issues in her discussion of the dynamic cognitive map that participants require in order to chart their way through the multiple levels of context that determine meaning and action. It may well be impossible, she says, (p. 555) to describe cultural scenes in their totality, given the infinite regression of contexts and metacontexts that could conceivably be operating. Finally Keesing (1970:447) notes the lack of any adequate theory of contexts.

Despite these problems, I have attempted in this thesis to remain faithful to the mode of cultural description advocated by Goodenough.

Goodenough's conception of culture sees cultural systems as sets of shared decision-making structures in human minds. In cybernetic terms, these decision-making structures process inputs from the physical and social environments and generate appropriate responses or outputs. The responses or outputs manifest themselves as sets of patterned behaviours commonly referred to as social structures. There may be changes in social structures over time. Such social structural changes may be the result of changes in environmental inputs with which the decision-making structures have to deal, they may be the result of changes in the decision-making structures themselves or some mix of the two. A change in the decision-making structures constitutes, for the purposes of this thesis, cultural change. Cultural change is defined here as the process by which members of a community revise their cultural knowledge and use it to generate and interpret new forms of behaviour (cf. Spradley and McCurdy 1975:569).

It is usual for anthropologists to assume that the percepts, concepts, propositions, values and recipes for action that constitute a particular set of culture grammars for a given society, or, as I argued above, a particular set of decision-making structures, form an invariant set for a certain time period known in anthropology as the "ethnographic present". The assumption of cultural invariance over a particular time period (usually the period of the anthropologist's sojourn among the subjects of the study) is generally seen as necessary for the sake of a tidy, integrated description (Vansina 1970:165). At any particular moment it can be argued that this assumption reasonably reconstructs the real world (Goodenough 1966:252-3, Cortes, Przeworski and Sprague 1974:6). The ethnographic present enables the investigator to ignore, temporarily, the complexities of cultural change in order to concentrate on the adaptive processes of a given culture coping with a natural world that is continuously changing and infinitely variable.

The ethnographic present then is an expedient that is adopted for the sake of description. Within its time scale the anthropologist may observe some social structural changes due to shifts, movements and variations within the modal clusterings of the social and non-social environments interacting with a static cultural framework. Such changes in social structures are not due to cultural change.

There are several impulses that encourage a community to revise its existing cultural codes. Changes in the modal clusterings of events, artefacts and behaviours, particularly sudden changes (such as conquest, sudden contact with aliens, decimation by disease or natural disaster, rapid population growth, urbanisation etc.), may bring about rapid changes in the knowledge people use to generate and interpret new forms of behaviour. This is not to assert that cultural systems react spontaneously to every environmental change. Changes may occur in the real world long before they enter the phenomenal world of a particular community. Cultural change may also occur in the absence of environmental change, as when a cultural system achieves a more faithful mapping of an existing environment. Thus, during the time when the germ theory of disease replaced the humoral theory of disease in Western societies, the pathogenic environment was essentially static. Indeed, if the work of Berlyne (1966) and others on the nature of curiosity in higher animals is any guide, we might expect humankind to pursue novelty for its own sake and engage in exploratory behaviour that has no obvious linkage with the prerequisites of immediate survival and thereby come to fresh insights that can be incorporated into the knowledge that people use to perceive and respond to the behaviour of others and the environment.

I use the term "socio-cultural change" to refer indifferently to changes in social structures that come about either through change in environmental inputs acting on invariant decision-making structures, to changes that come about through revisions of the decision-making structures themselves or to some mix of the two. This may perhaps be confusing initially, but such a usage recognises

that, in terms of the conceptual model of culture and cultural processes I am applying, there are two sources of change. Figure 1.1 presents a simple classification of them. It is a matter for empirical examination to determine from what source changes in social structures originate. To put the matter in the context of the present research, one may ask: are the patterns of behaviour of Aborigines living in the Edward River settlement the result of revisions and reconstitutions of their traditional ideational order (as Sharp hypothesised), or is their changed style of living the result of an Aboriginal adaptation to an imposed regime? I hasten to assure the reader that an answer to these questions is by no means as clear-cut as the questions themselves.

	<u>Environmental</u>		<u>Decision-making</u>	
	<u>Inputs</u>		<u>Structures</u>	
			same	revised
same			stasis	change
changed			change	change

Figure 1.1 A simple classification of kinds of socio-cultural change.

Culture change begins with the individual. It comes about, says Goodenough (1966:273), as people attempt both to organise new experiences and to relate themselves purposefully to conditions for which customary routines do not provide adequate solutions. For cultural systems the central question is: by what processes do particular alterations in private culture come to be selected and stabilised as relatively enduring solutions to recurring needs and wants? How, in other words, do some of the variations in

the existing culture pool become transmuted into the grammars of the operating and public cultures of the group? With respect to social change, Barth (1967:661) has remarked that "...if we want to understand social change, we need concepts that allow us to observe and describe the events of change" (his italics). This statement is no less true if one substitutes "cultural change" for "social change".

Two theorists, George K. Zollschan in sociology and Homer Barnett in anthropology, have presented analytic paradigms that focus on the events of institutional and cultural change.

Zollschan and his co-workers have presented a very general theory of institutionalisation in a series of working papers (Zollschan and Perrucci 1964, Zollschan and Overington 1976, Zollschan 1976). The Zollschan model envisages three stages linking individual action and the emergence of new socio-cultural forms. These three stages are identified as Exigency, Articulation and Activation.

The process begins when an individual encounters an exigency. As Zollschan (1976:319) describes it, an exigency is present when something "...is not as it should be, or has to be or can be". The extent of the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be is measured by salience. At any point in time an individual may be seen as being exposed to a multiplicity of exigencies which induce tensions. The salience of an exigency is the importance of it in relation to all other tensions at that time and its strength provides the motive force for the next stage of the process, articulation. Articulation transforms exigencies into ideas or images or needs with associated goals and activates individuals in the direction of those goals. Articulation requires both instrumental specification, that is, how objectively to deal with the exigency in terms of the situation and experience of the individual, and justification, which might be described as the normative evaluation of the goal in terms of its goodness or badness. Once goals are crystallised for the individual in terms of their salience, specificity and justifiability, they enter into the realm of social behaviour because goal attainment

requires the action of more than one person. Activation refers to the process of enlisting the assistance of others. Before collective action can take place there must be certain consonances between the goal originator and the others s/he seeks to involve. There must first be valence consonance. The goal must be sufficiently valent for others before they will be motivated to act. This means that the needs they share or reciprocate with the goal originator have to be sufficiently salient for them as well and that alternative needs of greater salience do not deflect them into different activities. There must also be cognitive consonance. There must be some similarity of conception regarding the specific activity or technique that is seen to be appropriate for movement towards the goal. Finally, there must be normative consonance. The goal and the specified activity involved in reaching it must be justifiable for the persons involved and considered legitimate by them. When such consonances are lacking we can say that valence dissonance, cognitive dissonance and normative dissonance exist. Such dissonances constitute what Zollschan describes as second order exigencies for the goal originator. They direct the originator to engage in additional pattern mobilising activity with the goal of establishing consonance. Finally, the notions of additional consequences or unanticipated repercussions link the newly perceived goal and its mobilisation patterns with other patterns of collective action. Such consequences may be either supportive or inimical to that goal.

Zollschan's view is that the operation of socio-cultural systems involves the unending process of the production of exigencies, their transmutation into expressible needs, and the mobilisation of action to satisfy those needs. The existence of a stable state or equilibrium is viewed as a special case, since collective patterns of action which are directed toward the alleviation or elimination of a need will themselves create new exigencies along the way. The stabilisation of patterns of collective action for the satisfaction of human needs, that is to say, institutionalisation, occurs because of the continued

existence of needs and/or because the generation of unanticipated consequences are supportive of the pattern. Zollschan points out that a crucial empirical question in any social system concerns the degree of autonomy of discrete institutions and their relationship to the general social structure.

Whereas Zollschan's theory is very generalised, Barnett's (1953) study of innovation examines in great detail the conditions that influence culture change. As Barnett sees it, human wants in their many forms provide the incentives to culture change. Change is initiated by individuals whom Barnett calls "innovators". Innovative potential is affected by peoples' predispositions, abilities, and personalities as well as two sets of external factors. The first set have to do with those aspects of the natural environment that are independent of human manipulation and which, if they change, will give rise to new innovative possibilities. The second set of factors are composed of the cultural constructs and mental configurations, the body of ideas about things and behaviours, that have been assembled by the innovators' predecessors during the lifespan of their societies and to which the innovators are heirs. The size and complexity of traditional bodies of knowledge, the extent to which they are concentrated among society members, the amount of collaboration and/or competition within societies and the degree to which individual inquiry is permitted within them, all place limits on the range of innovative potential.

The innovative process, according to Barnett, is a sequence of cognitive operations that begins with mental configurations. Mental configurations are defined as "any cluster of concepts that are organised into a unified pattern of experience" (p. 182). In the same place Barnett says:

Configurations are as varied in character as are human experiences involving organization. They can entail the ideas of things, of people, of ideas, or of the self, or of groups of things, ideas and people. They may take on an infinitude of forms. They may represent things, in the

conventional understanding of that term, or groupings of things conceived as a configured whole. They may be a rule or a principle or a theory. They may constitute a stereotype, or a dogma, or a belief that is organized on the basis of past experience. They are all normative thought patterns, even though they may have fluctuating and evolving limits...

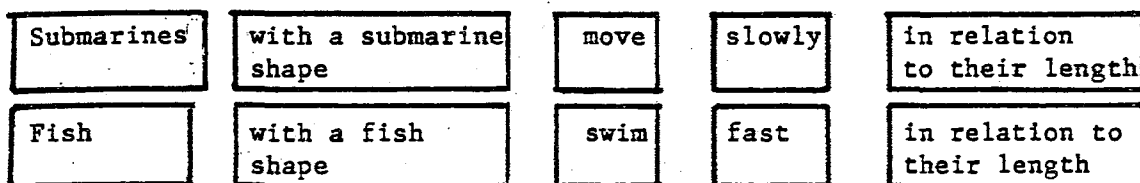
Every innovation is essentially a recombination of two or more mental configurations. "No innovation springs full-blown out of nothing; it must have antecedents and these are always traceable provided that enough data are available for analysis" (Barnett 1953:181). In the simplest case, innovation involves the analysis of two configurations. The term prototype configuration refers to the original pattern of ideas that is destined for reorganisation and change. The term stimulus configuration refers to the pattern of ideas that provides the basis for changing the prototype. With these two configurations the innovator does three things. The first step is to analyse each configuration, isolating its constituent elements and exposing the relationships among them. The second step is to match the two configurations and identify or equate elements of one with elements of the other. The third and final step is to recombine the elements in both configurations to produce a new configuration. This is done by substituting some of the elements of the prototype configuration with the matched elements from the stimulus configuration. Figure 1.2 provides an example of the process. The example has been taken from Wallace (1970: 167) but employs a format used by Spradley and McCurdy (1975:579).

Barnett notes that there is a high mortality among new mental configurations. The passage from private culture to the operating and public cultures of a group reduces to the particular relations between two sets of individuals. There are the donors or the carriers of the idea on the one hand and the potential recipients on the other. It makes no difference, says Barnett, whether an idea

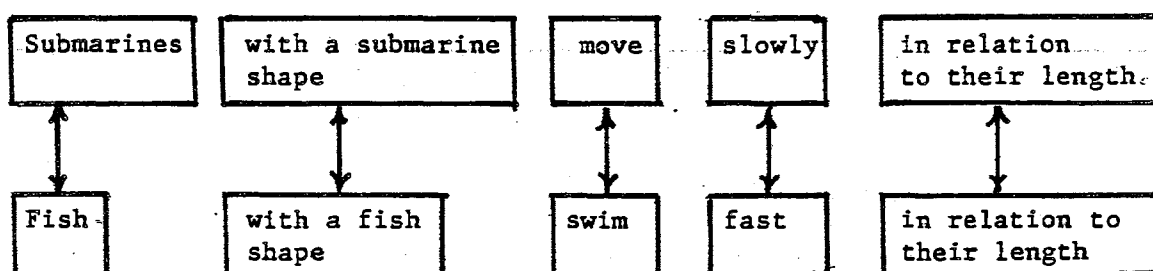
Prototype configuration: Submarines with a submarine shape move slowly in relation to their length.

Stimulus configuration: Fish with a fish shape swim fast in relation to their length.

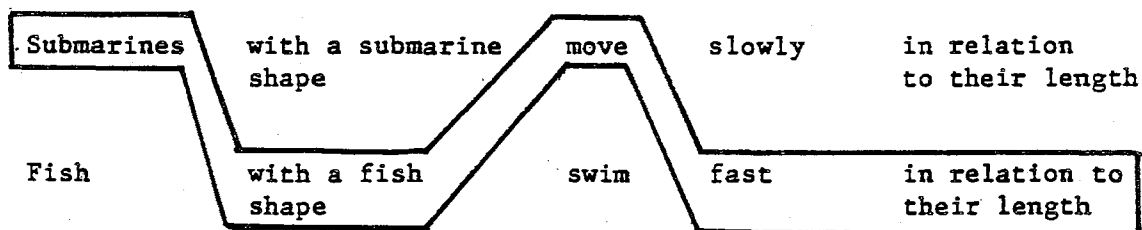
Step 1 ANALYSIS



Step 2 IDENTIFICATION



Step 3 SUBSTITUTION



New configuration: Submarines with a fish shape move fast in relation to their length.

Figure 1.2

An example of Barnett's process of innovation.

is being transferred within the cultural boundaries of a particular society or across the boundaries of two societies. An idea must have an advocate. The characteristics of the advocate, his prestige within the society, his personality, the quality of his relationships with others and the extent to which he is affiliated with the majority are significant variables affecting the success with which an innovation is communicated to others. The innovation itself, when compared against the cultural background of the potential acceptors will have certain novelty characteristics that may influence its acceptance. For instance, the innovation must be meaningful and congruent within the acceptors' individual values systems and fit into existing knowledge, beliefs and actions. As well, before an innovation is accepted it must be set in a more inclusive value system where acceptors compare the innovation with existing usages. Is it more efficient? What is its relative cost? What advantages does it confer? Is it more pleasurable? How long does it take to master? What penalties are involved in its adoption? Finally there will be individual variation among acceptors in their response to an innovation. Response variations will depend on the interplay and adjustment of the individuals' conceptions of themselves and the events of their life histories and their attitudes towards their own society. Marginal individuals such as the dissident, the indifferent, the disaffected and the resentful may be more likely to accept innovations because of a pervasive attitude of disaffection towards their own society.

While Barnett's analysis tends to concentrate upon single innovations, he is nonetheless aware of the chain reaction effects that may be set in motion by the modification of a cultural practice. As he says (1953:89):

A culture is not a jumble or mere assemblage of customs. The linkages between its parts may be strong or weak, and there are many ideas that are not directly related to each other at all. Still, the whole is a complex such that no concept is an isolate and each element through its associates participates in the characteristics of the whole.

Consequently if there is a change in one sector of the culture, there must be some reflection of the change elsewhere in those idea-sets that are correlated with it.

Any situation which promotes innovation or diffusion also then multiplies the potentialities for change beyond the initial idea. In fact the repercussions, the stresses and dislocations that acceptors anticipate might follow in the wake of an innovation may be sufficient to cause its rejection when compared in the calculus of existing satisfactions. We may represent the main stages of Barnett's theory of cultural change by means of the following sequence:

Wants → Innovations → Advocacy → Acceptance → Repercussions.

Spradley and McCurdy (1976:568-98) in the course of a study explicitly based on Barnett's paradigm of culture change present the sequence of stages somewhat differently:

Innovation → Social Acceptance → Performance → Integration.

Spradley and McCurdy point out that adopters must go through the same processes of recombination in their own minds before accepting a new idea as worth trying. The conditions favouring the creation of an idea are not the same as those which make for its acceptance into a cultural repertoire. They stress that for an innovation to result in culture change it must actually influence behaviour in some way. That is to say, it must be used by some members of the society to interpret experience and generate behaviour. In the study of culture change processes, performance is especially important in assessing the potential of some new competence. Integration in their adapted model refers to the process of adjustment that follows as a consequence of adopting an innovation. Innovations that are accepted and performed do not remain isolated islands of custom. Each new configuration has consequences for other areas of culture to which acceptors must adjust. These adjustments may or may not involve additional innovations.

Zollschan, Barnett and Spradley and McCurdy all focus on the same phenomenon, viz: how individual thoughts and actions are converted to stable socio-cultural structures. While the labels they attach to the stages of the process are different and not always equivalent, they are nonetheless conceptually compatible. An underlying assumption of the three perspectives treated here is that individuals exist in a state of tension vis-à-vis their social and non-social environments. They purposefully orient themselves towards their environment for the satisfaction of their wants. A perceived change in the variety and constraints of the environments impinging on the individual will tend to change the ways in which individual wants may be realised. New opportunities may come into being and previous opportunities may be stifled. This will come about whether a real environmental change has occurred or whether the individual has freshly mapped what in operational terms could be described as an unchanging environment. Such new opportunities represent exigencies for the individual. Whether the individual will act upon an exigency will depend on the salience of the want associated with the perceived change relative to the individual's other wants at the time. Obviously not every want will result in action nor can every individual want be fulfilled.

The selection processes involved in the emergence of new socio-cultural structures clearly require two kinds of action: individual action on the one hand and collective action on the other. If the want is salient enough and collective action is required for its fulfillment, an individual must articulate the exigency. That is to say, the individual must transform the exigency into a set of communicable ideas. This is accomplished by the process of innovation wherein revision in the percepts, concepts, propositions and beliefs relevant to the exigency take place through analysis, identification and substitution in the appropriate mental configurations. Articulation requires not merely the revision of cultural knowledge via innovation, it also requires a specification of how to deal objectively with the exigency (i.e. it requires the formulation of a

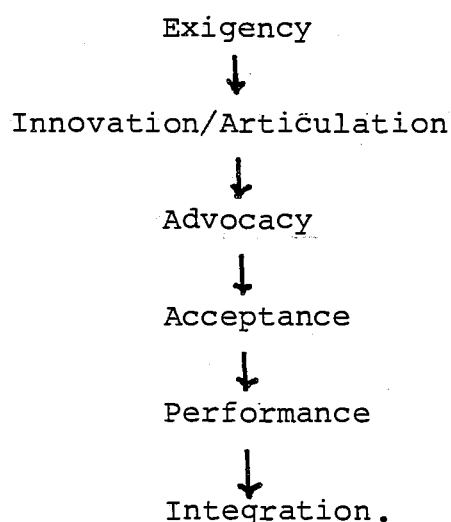
new recipe for action) and a justification for doing so in terms of the prevailing hierarchy of values.

As soon as the individual attempts to activate others towards the desired goal, we enter the sphere of collective action. As an advocate the innovator or goal originator seeks social acceptance by putting forward his/her innovation so that others may learn about it. The advocate attempts to establish valence, cognitive and normative consonances with the potential acceptors. Acceptance means that others too have revised their mental configurations, but ultimately the test of whether a new cultural competence has been internalised is signalled when the competence is manifested in performance. Only then can a new recipe for action be judged according to its efficacy in achieving its stated goal. By its performance, the innovation will enter the phenomenal world of the society as an observable entity in its own right, and in doing so may create exigencies for actors in other cultural domains. The perpetuation and transmission of an innovation will depend not only on the continuing existence of the original exigency and how well the innovative action meets the exigency, but it will also depend on the nature of the consequences set in motion by the innovation.

Integration links the innovative revision to other domains in the socio-cultural system. It is potentially the most intricate to follow and observe in its entirety. Analytically, the end point of the processes of adjustment that take place upon the introduction of an innovation is a situation of relative stasis where no further adjustments are required. Logically we may envisage at least several kinds of situation. The innovative revision may simply replace a previous culture grammar and have a marginal effect, or none whatever, on other domains. On the other hand, for actors in other domains, it may cause exigencies of such salience that revisions are also required in the grammars associated with those domains. Fresh innovations in other domains would then have to be followed through and their consequences in turn shown to be supportive of the original innovation. But the consequences of an innovation may be

non-supportive even though the innovation itself is successful in attaining its ends. The effect of the adjustments required in other domains may be such that too many other important goals are imperilled as a result of the innovation and hence the innovation may be dropped in favour of those other goals. Alternatively, the consequences of the revisions of other domains may present themselves as exigencies for the originating innovation, causing it to be revised in turn. Clearly the analysis of the secondary effects set in motion by a single innovation could invoke a labyrinth of positive feedback loops and sequences of revisions and counter-revisions before relative stasis in the affected sets of culture grammars is achieved. By the time the consequences have worked themselves out completely, the originating innovation itself might be changed beyond all recognition.

The forgoing discussion suggests that there are six crucial stages in the description and analysis of the events of culture change. By borrowing variously from the writers whose work I have been discussing, I would label these stages:



I present them with the object of establishing a paradigm of cultural change and lexicon of terms which should be found useful in the analysis of the final chapter.

It has to be acknowledged from the outset that while it is one thing to derive a theoretically plausible paradigm for describing the events of socio-cultural change,

it is quite another thing to be in a position to observe those events. With respect to cultural change, Goodenough (1974:62) has pointed out:

Ideally, ethnographic accounts of cultural change should be based on a record of continuous observation over an extended period. Anthropologists are rarely in a position to obtain such records, however, and commonly resort to the next best strategy, which is to make ethnographic studies of the same community at two or more different times. A comparison of the separate ethnographic records will presumably indicate how the local culture has changed in the interim. To control for the possibility that recorded differences reflect differences in the ethnographic observers rather than changes in the culture, it is preferable to have later studies done by the ethnographers who did the earlier ones.

The strategy employed in this study consists of a comparison of two ethnographic records separated in time by an interval of approximately 40 years. For convenience we might say that the period between 1930 and 1935 represents the "ethnographic past". It is a composite description based on fieldwork conducted during that time by McConnel, Sharp and Thomson and augmented by data of my own which attempt to reconstruct the patterns of pre-settlement life. The second set of data refers to an "ethnographic present" that spans my own period of fieldwork between 1968 and 1973. Clearly the data of different observers are involved and in section 1.7 I address the important problem of observer bias.

In making comparisons between one ethnographic record and the other, I have employed the functional classifications anthropologists normally use when comparing different cultures (see Goodenough 1970:119-20). Hence I compare economic and subsistence systems, marriage and kinship systems, world views and religious systems, systems of law and order and social control and so forth, rather than use culture scenes as units for comparison.

It should be noted that the time discontinuity between the two ethnographic records places limitations on

the recording of the events of socio-cultural change. As the theoretical discussion of the earlier paragraphs might have indicated, a cultural innovation has many hurdles to negotiate before it is firmly implanted as part of a tradition. The method of comparison used here is likely to be heavily biased in favour of the cultural changes that have been successfully integrated and are therefore obvious upon comparison. The method will not necessarily show what innovations were advocated but failed to be integrated into a cultural repertoire. While this bias is not important for my test of Sharp's hypothesis, it is important in both a practical and a theoretical sense. In the practical sense, Edward River society as it stands at the present time is a society dedicated to socio-cultural change. In attempting to understand the dynamics of directed change it is as necessary to know what does not induce change, as it is to understand what does produce change. Theoretically, non-change is as problematical as change itself. Zollschan and Perucci (1964:100) argue that separate and unconnected theories of change and stability are "...heuristically unsatisfying and logically incomplete", while Barth (1967:661) asserts that to understand social change we need to describe "...all of society in such terms that we see how it persists, maintains itself and changes through time". There is then a penalty involved in this particular observational strategy. The events of unsuccessful innovation will be understated.

It is necessary as well to characterise briefly the nature of the two kinds of communities being compared in the ethnographic records. It can be reasonably argued that the culture of the pre-settlement society and the observable patterns of its social organisation reflected the adaptive strategies of a homogenous society in relative equilibrium with a stable environment. The same cannot be said for the post-settlement society. That society is made up of both Aborigines and Europeans living in intimate contact. The presence of Europeans has vastly altered the phenomenal world of the Aborigines of the Edward River reserve. Since adopting a sedentary mode of life the

pressure for change has been continuous. In no sense can the present day community be seen as being in the kind of equilibrium that the pre-settlement society had achieved. Two kinds of innovators are involved in the change process. There are the Europeans who, as members of the donor culture, attempt to implement the changes that will serve the purposes of their community development programmes. In most cases, it is more appropriate to refer to the Europeans as advocates, rather than innovators, since many of the new cultural configurations they put forward for acceptance owe more to outside direction and European origins than to innovation in situ at Edward River. The other innovating group is made up of Aborigines. They are those who, in the light of their experiences with the donor culture, revise their mental configurations and advocate changes among their fellows.

Edward River society of the "ethnographic present" of this thesis has to be characterised as a bi-cultural grouping. The cognised models that serve to inform European behaviour towards Aborigines are as important as the ideas and beliefs that Aborigines entertain about Europeans. European culture at Edward River is not exactly a miniature representation of the wider Australian society even though the Europeans are expected to live in their accustomed manner in order to provide models for the Aborigines to emulate. The principal difference lies in the fact that the majority of Europeans who hold jobs within the community are employees of the DAIA or some other government agency which has a vested interest in changing Aboriginal behaviours. Foster (1973:179) has pointed out that change agents in such situations not only possess the beliefs, ideas and values common to the donor culture, but they are also greatly influenced by the premises that are specific to their profession and the bureaucracies that employ them. These professionally engendered beliefs, ideas and values materially affect their relations with their target populations. In this research the nature of the interface between the two cultural groupings is vital for understanding the course of socio-cultural change.

1.4 Selection of research population

The selection of a community in which to follow up Sharp's early research was not exactly straightforward. The original bush population studied by Sharp consisted of 267 persons, 109 of them belonging to the groups labelled by Sharp as Taior-Ngentjin and 158 persons identified as belonging to the Yir Yoront and Yir Mel language groups (Sharp 1937:302). Discussions with DAIA officers, held before entering the field, indicated that Sharp's Yir Yoront and Yir Mel had gone to Kowanyama where they were known as the Koko Mindjena. The population of Kowanyama in 1967 numbered about 570. It was a heterogeneous community with a long history whose component peoples, apart from the Koko Mindjena, had been little studied by social anthropologists. All of Sharp's Taior-Ngentjin group, it seemed, had settled at Edward River which was also said to have attracted a number of Yir Yoront speakers. The Edward River community also contained, it was said, a large proportion of "Munkan" speakers. Initially, I mistakenly assumed these people to be the Wik Mungkan of Ursula McConnel's researches. Being unwilling to study two communities, I chose Edward River for four reasons. Its population size of 279 in 1968 seemed commensurate with my abilities as a "tyro anthropologist". Its formation was relatively recent and I expected that people's memories of the events of socio-cultural change would be comparatively vivid. Thirdly, it seemed that there was a considerable body of anthropological research on its component peoples that could stand as a benchmark of sorts for my own researches. Finally, the manager of the settlement at that time was known to me and was favourable to my research.

1.5 Entry into the community and period of fieldwork

I arrived at Edward River in June 1968 to commence fieldwork. I had no wish to be identified with the administrative personnel of the community or with either of the two Aboriginal segments into which the settlement was clearly

divided. I therefore chose a site in the bush away from any European and Aboriginal houses, but close to a well used track linking both Aboriginal village segments. At the site I selected I built a small galvanised iron shed to house myself and my gear with the help of several Aboriginal men. Later, during the 1968 wet season when insect infestation made my small house uninhabitable, I moved into a screened room in the settlement's hospital. By the time I made this move my role as a "university man" and as someone quite distinct from other Europeans was firmly established. From then on the matter of where I lived had little influence on my relationships with the Aboriginal residents of the community.

In all, I spent a total of 23 months in residence at Edward River. Most of my data were obtained during the periods between June 1968 and April 1969 and between June 1969 and February 1970. In 1971 I returned with H. Hughes of the Australian Museum to make three craft films during the month of August. I relinquished my postgraduate scholarship in June 1971 to join the staff of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. Later in that year my family and I went to live at Kowanyama until the end of 1973. During my stay at Kowanyama I made a number of visits to Edward River which totalled about four months in duration. I was frequently visited by Edward River people while I was in residence at Kowanyama.

1.6 Language problems

I soon discovered that there was great linguistic diversity at Edward River. Contrary to my expectations, there were few speakers of Wik Mungkan and Yir Yoront. A major spoken language was Kuuk Thaayorre, then being studied by A. H. Hall, a doctoral candidate in linguistics with the University of Queensland. The so-called "Munkan" language group was composed of speakers of Wik Muminh, Wik Mu'inh, Wik Uwanh and Wik Iiyanh. Prior to entering the field I had had little linguistic training, and I feared that by learning one vernacular I ran the risk of cutting myself off

from communication with other members of the community. Therefore I commenced gathering data using the kind of English spoken at Edward River by Aborigines. Having had some exposure to Neo-Melanesian or New Guinea pidgin I discovered, as had other researchers elsewhere (e.g. see Sommer 1974, Sharpe and Sandefur 1976), that the Aboriginal English used at Edward River was best treated as a language in its own right. Aboriginal English was the vehicle of communication between Aborigines who spoke mutually unintelligible vernaculars, and it was certainly the language of the interface between Aborigines and Europeans from the Aboriginal side of the communicative fence. It seemed to me that before any serious study of vernacular language and meaning could take place, it was necessary to become fluent in this contact language. In fact most of my field-work was conducted in Aboriginal English.

Competence in the use of Aboriginal English varied widely at Edward River. Some of the older people did not use it at all, while others had such small vocabularies that they were restricted to one or two word utterances. Among those who were fluent speakers there were differences in speech performance that could best be seen as representing a continuum of speech competence constantly being modified in the direction of the donor language (e.g. see Decamp 1971, Sharpe and Sandefur 1976). At one end of the continuum were the "heavy" speakers whose use of English words was still strongly influenced by the phonemic and syntactic features of their vernaculars. Their loan words did not exhibit the diphthongs and triphthongs of the vowel range common to spoken English, and they had difficulties in discriminating and producing the labiodental fricatives, the sibilants and aspirated sounds of ordinary spoken English. The speech of the younger people at Edward River showed some accommodation to the features of regular English, but their speech was still demonstrably different from the speech of native English speakers. Because of these variations in spoken Aboriginal English, I have not attempted to present phonetic renderings of words and texts originally transcribed in Aboriginal English.

Among the Aboriginal residents of Edward River the vernaculars provided the main vehicles for discourse within the settlement. Most members of a particular language group had sufficient competence to be able to understand the speech of another language group. Wherever I have had occasion to make transcriptions in the vernacular, I have employed the practical orthography developed for Kuuk Thaayorre and the other Edward River languages by A.H. Hall. This orthography is currently being employed in a vernacular literacy programme at the Edward River State School. I have generally used Kuuk Thaayorre as the representative "language of ethnographic illustration" in this thesis. While I have a certain translation competence in this language, real verbal fluency eludes me.

1.7 Field techniques -- replication, reconstruction and bias

Because the research design calls for a description of an "ethnographic past" as well as an "ethnographic present" and because I also need to trace present changes back to their origins whenever possible, a certain amount of replication as well as reconstruction has been necessary. My predecessors in the field had an incomparable advantage over me by being able to observe a fully functioning hunter-gatherer society. They could elicit rules and principles of action and observe at first hand the patterns they generated. Forty years later I had only the memories of informants to supply me with rules and examples for those areas where the early ethnographies were deficient. As Barnes (1967:48) has observed, memory is a poor substitute for contemporary observation. The memories were of course fairly recent. As a check on the reliability of those memories I frequently compared the reconstructed patterns with the early ethnographies. With the odd exception there was generally excellent agreement between the two sources. It was helpful too that informants themselves clearly distinguished between the pre-settlement era and the post-settlement period. They referred to the pre-settlement

era as the "wildtime" to which belonged "old custom" or the patterns of behaviour of their forefathers. The post-settlement era was termed "this time now". "This time now" was further subdivided to correspond with the tenure of office of various superintendents and managers of the settlement. Thus people referred to "Chapman time" or "Father Brown time" or "Mr Green time". To "this time now" belong the new rules that have replaced or opposed "old custom".

Replication studies have disclosed two major sources of bias which Naroll (1970:928) terms preconception bias and exotic data bias. Preconception bias refers to a fieldworker's tendency to select field data in such a way as to fit a preconceived idea of the culture. The exotic data bias refers to the fieldworker's tendency to overlook the recording of the familiar and the mundane in favour of the exotic because it is conspicuous. I could detect neither bias in the work of Sharp whose very complete ethnographic record provides a principal source of material for this thesis. However, both kinds of biases did operate among my informants. They tended, in their accounts of things in the past, to present the "wildtime" as either a nasty, brutish period from which the mission had rescued them, or to invest the past with a golden glow of righteousness, while depicting the present as a falling away from the the proper "old custom" behaviour. A single informant could exhibit either bias depending on his mood at the time. There was also a tendency among informants speaking of the past to present the exotic and the bizarre if only, I suspect, to elicit a disbelieving gasp from me. The early recognition that these biases existed among my informants cautioned me against accepting any proffered generalisation without further probing.

As Edgerton and Langness (1974:13) observe, replication is a relatively unusual procedure in social anthropology. It has been noted that whenever anthropologists spend time checking the accuracy of the fieldwork of others, situations of personal animosity and emotional heat are generated if biases and errors are detected. Fortunately I have no reason to enter into such counter-productive debates.

I can only confess to admiration for the quality of the ethnographic record that emerged out of the efforts of Sharp and Thomson. The work of McConnel has not fared so well at the hands of others, especially in its interpretive aspects. These issues I discuss in detail in Chapter 3. As far as I could test it, I could find little fault with her ethnographic description per se.

1.8 Field techniques -- participant observation

For the description of the rules and principles underlying the activities of the settlement community, I relied on participant observation. Participant observation is not so much a single technique as a battery of them (McCall and Simmons 1969). The techniques I employed included the taking of genealogies, conducting surveys and censuses, map making, recording life histories, consulting official records and maintaining a daily log of events and activities. In the latter half of my period in the field I came to rely heavily on a small set of male key informants for instruction in the ways of the past and for interpretation of the events of the present. I had less success in developing female key informants. Indeed I gave up attempting to establish a similar body of mature female informants when, after several embarrassing incidents, it became apparent to me that my intentions were being severely misinterpreted. Otherwise, social invisibility came easily and for the most part my presence as a spectator or as a performer in the public scenes within the settlement caused no remonstrations or untoward comment from either Aborigines or Europeans. The four-wheel-drive vehicle generously supplied to me by the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Queensland, proved to be an invaluable aid in getting to know people because it put into my hands a source of transportation that was independent of official control. I paid informants for artefacts they made for me and for tasks such as house-building or for activities which I considered monotonous. The bulk of my information was obtained gratuitously in the course of daily social

interaction in the settlement. Some of my interviews did, however, take place away from Edward River when informants came to visit me at Kowanyama, Brisbane, and later, Townsville.

A certain amount of ethnographic research was conducted among the Europeans in order to delineate the socio-cultural features peculiar to that particular cultural enclave. During my fieldwork therefore, I had to comport myself in such a way as to prejudice neither Aborigines nor Europeans. Even when my own ethical standards were offended, as they were at times, by both Europeans and Aborigines, I tried to maintain a non-judgemental attitude towards my informants in both cultural groups. Because I was neither "staff" nor an Aborigine, I possessed a certain privileged marginal status that made me valuable to the members of both groups as someone to whom one could talk about things that were otherwise difficult to discuss or impolitic to mention. Thus, members of the DAIA staff could talk to me about "the Department" or other members of the white community, while Aborigines could talk to me about sorcery and love affairs, secure in the knowledge that I was outside both systems and thus would not use the information against them. It was, however, impossible not to be more than marginally caught up in the life of the community. At times there was some conflict between behaviour demanded of me by Europeans and that demanded of me by Aborigines. In resolving such conflicts I could rely only on my own sense of judgement at the time. Despite the problems in maintaining a balance on a cross-cultural tightrope, I nonetheless formed some enduring friendships among both Aborigines and Europeans. I count the months spent at Edward River as among the most richly satisfying of my life and I offer this thesis as a contribution towards the understanding and, hopefully, the resolution of some of the perplexities, doubts and confusions that surround what is in essence a remarkable adventure in socio-cultural change.

1.9 Organisation of thesis

The organisation of this thesis follows from the logic of the study design. The next four chapters present an ethnography of pre-settlement life on the reserve. For much of this ethnography I have used Kuuk Thaayorre speakers to provide the specific anthropological illustrations of a culture that, with minor exceptions, could be said to have been characteristic of all the Aborigines inhabiting the coastal strip between the Mitchell and Kendall Rivers. The width of the coastal strip corresponds fairly closely with the eastern boundaries of the reserves in that area. My pre-settlement ethnography of the Kuuk Thayorre group is no more a "tribal" description than was Sharp's description of the Yir Yoront. My reconstruction of pre-settlement life reflects some of the current theoretical concerns surrounding pre-contact Aboriginal cultural patterns. Chapter 2 deals with pre-settlement economy and subsistence. It focuses especially on land use, land tenure, resource management and the patterns of population dispersal generated by well defined strategies of resource exploitation. Chapter 3, which is about marriage, kinship and family, has been greatly influenced in its presentation by a contemporary debate concerning the nature of kinship systems on Cape York Peninsula (particularly those described by McConnel, Sharp and Thomson on the western side of the peninsula). I offer Chapter 3 as a contribution towards clarifying some of the issues involved in that debate since they centre around the nature of what constitutes the adequate description of kinship systems. Chapter 4 provides a description of the supernatural world the Edward River people created around their physical landscape and details how they managed their relationships with the supernatural entities with which they invested the countryside. Chapter 5 addresses the issues of law and order and social control and presents, hopefully, a coherent model of the dynamics of Aboriginal dispute resolution.

Chapter 6 is a bridging chapter, the purpose of which is to link the "ethnographic past" with the

"ethnographic present". It deals in some depth with the details of the argument that led Sharp to predict the cultural collapse for the peoples he studied.

The four chapters following Chapter 6 attempt to do two things. The first is to provide a set of cultural patterns characterising post-settlement life so that the patterns of the past and the present can be compared in order to test Sharp's hypothesis and to evaluate the degree to which socio-cultural changes have proceeded according to the expectations of those who planned them. The second purpose is to provide some account of the events of socio-cultural change. Such an account must of necessity be a sketch, although I think it will become evident that there is sufficient information to indicate the main factors underlying the acceptance or rejection of change, as well as to trace the consequences of many of the changes that have occurred. Each of these four chapters dealing with the "ethnographic present" is functionally equivalent to the earlier chapters of the "ethnographic past". I concentrate in Chapter 11 on the features that are peculiar to the culture of the European community at Edward River and which influence the behaviour of Europeans in their roles as change agents and cultural models. The final chapter assesses the two major hypotheses concerning the nature and the direction of socio-cultural change. Using the lexicon of terms developed in Section 1.3, I summarise what appear to me to be the most significant factors operating in the acceptance and rejection of change by this particular Aboriginal community.

CHAPTER 2 THE PRE-SETTLEMENT SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to relate people, landscape and subsistence activities in ecologically meaningful terms. In order to provide the fine detail necessary to achieve this I have concentrated on the description of the Kuuk Thaayorre. Most of the observations on which this reconstruction is based come from my own field notes, except in certain places (noted in the text) where I have found it more accurate to rely on the firsthand observations of Sharp and Thomson, rather than my informants' remembered accounts of the pre-settlement economy.

The first section of this chapter describes the topography and climate of the Edward River reserve. The next section provides a sketch of the way in which the Kuuk Thaayorre perceived their environment in the context of subsistence and survival. This is followed by a summary description of Kuuk Thaayorre technology in the early thirties and of the nature of the basic unit of production and consumption, which I call the "hearthgroup". The fourth section focuses on the seasonal organisation of subsistence strategies, while the final section outlines the nature of the Kuuk Thaayorre land tenure system which mediated access to resources.

In a sense, the Kuuk Thaayorre exemplify the patterns of subsistence and survival that held generally in their region before the mission was established. The systems of technology, environmental knowledge, the social organisation of production and consumption and land tenure were practically uniform throughout the reserve. It should be noted however that between local groupings exploiting particular domains, some degree of variation in subsistence patterns could be expected to have occurred, especially where there were variations in the distribution of landforms, habitats and water resources. These ecological variations are not pursued in this thesis.

2.2 Edward River -- topography and climate

The Edward River Aboriginal Reserve consists for the most part of flat plains formed by alluvium deposited by the Kendall, Holroyd, Edward, Coleman and Mitchell Rivers during their westward flow towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. Besides these major rivers, the plains are extensively riven with distributary channels, levees, floodouts and clay-bottomed swamps. There are no rock outcrops and apart from river gravels, no hard stone is to be found in the area at all. From the inland boundary of the reserve the country rises imperceptibly towards the foothills of the Great Dividing Range 150 km to the east. Until one reaches the western edge of the reserve, the general impression imparted by the landscape is one of great flatness and lack of surface relief. However, at the coast the plains give way to a low barrier of sand ridges which only the major watercourses penetrate. These ridges rarely stand more than six metres above the high tide mark and there are two distinct sets of them -- the beach ridges and the inland ridges.

The beach ridges are the most recent. They form a continuous fringe along the greater part of the shoreline and extend inland for distances that range between one and five kilometres. Rhodes (1980), using radiocarbon dating techniques, has demonstrated that the beach ridges began forming as a result of complex depositional and tidal forces some 6000 years BP (Before Present), when the sea level was perhaps 1.5 m higher than it is now. Rhodes argues that there were three major periods of ridge-building, the last occurring during the period 2300 to 500 years BP. The ridges are composed of sand and shell fragments lying over a substrate of marine muds. They have well defined crests and swales, and, being porous, are capable of storing large amounts of water within their structure.

The inland ridges are the remains of a Pleistocene shoreline (Rhodes 1980). They run parallel to the beach ridges but are separated from them by thickly grassed black soil plains, clayflats and saltpans laced with meandering tidal creeks. They are much smoother in profile and lack

the crest/swale configuration that typifies the beach ridges

The presence of the two sets of ridges exerts a strong controlling effect on the drainage of the area. They deflect the courses of the westward flowing creeks, and the larger watercourses tend to meander considerably before breaching them. During the wet season over-flowing floodwaters bank up behind them for considerable periods.

In the northernmost regions of Australia, the seasons are conventionally divided into the "wet" and the "dry". In Figure 2.1 it can be seen that most rain falls between the months of December and April. Rainfall statistics gathered at Edward River over a 20 year period indicate that the mean wet season rainfall is approximately 1200 mm (Whitehouse 1959), but wet season falls range from 600 mm to 1900 mm with an average variation from the mean of 22% (see Figure 2.2). Throughout the year temperatures tend to be high. No temperature statistics are available for the Edward River area, but records from Kowanyama, 56 km to the south, indicate maximum summer temperatures of between 29°C and 36°C and winter minimums of 15°C and 21°C (see Figure 2.1). Tank evaporation is of the order of 750 mm to 1000 mm per annum (Rhodes 1980:29). Northwest winds dominate during the wet season bringing moist air from the Gulf. In the dry season the winds reverse direction and blow straight from the interior. Cyclones periodically traverse the region during the wet season with major consequences for the landscape and its inhabitants.

The shallowness of the Gulf and the effect of prevailing winds make tides off this part of Cape York Peninsula erratic and unpredictable. Usually there is only one tide every 25 hours. Low tide exposes broad expanses of mudflat for considerable distances from the strandline. The tides are highest during November and December when they flood the low lying saltpans and clayflats.

According to the survey carried out by Pedley and Isbell (1971) there are five major kinds of plant communities within the reserve area. Low open woodland covers approximately 44% of the reserve. This is a very open textured plant community common to the alluvial plains of the southwest

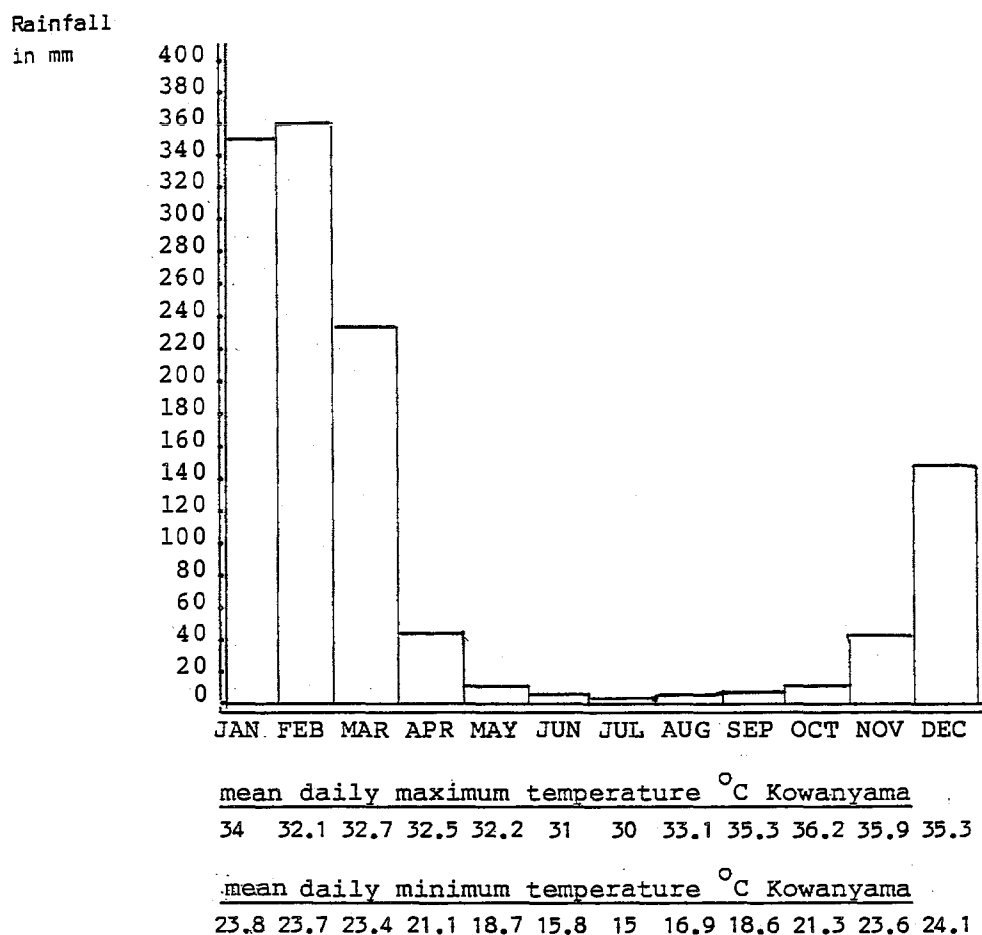


Figure 2.1 Representative statistics for mean monthly rainfall (Edward River) and temperatures (neighbouring Kowanyama area).

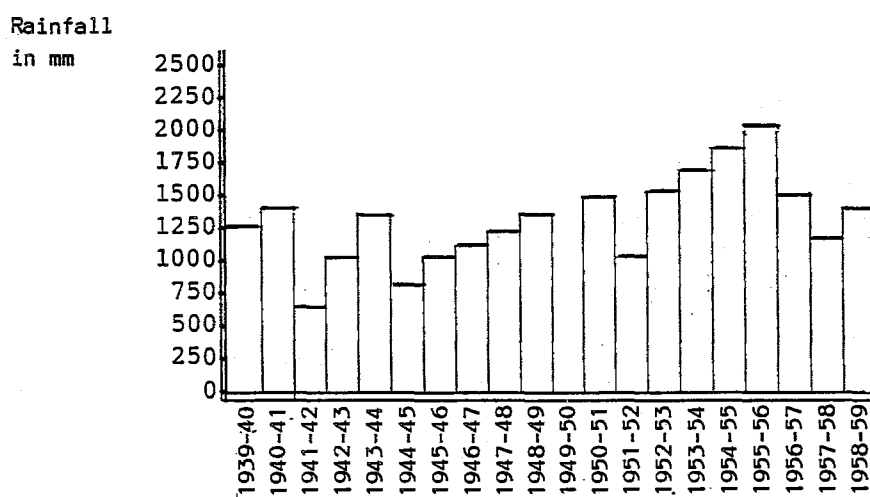


Figure 2.2 Wet season rainfall totals, Edward River 1939-59 (source: Whitehouse 1959. No figures available for 1949-50 wet season.)

peninsula. It often consists of large stands of a single species of tree (particularly Melaleuca viridiflora) interspersed with treeless areas. The claypan swamps of the plain are shallow and dry out quickly when the wet season stops.

About 32% of the reserve is covered in open forest. This plant community has a denser canopy and its taller trees stand out in sharp contrast against the open woodland. Eucalypts (predominantly Eucalyptus tetradonta and E. sp. aff. polycarpa) dominate, but acacias occur widely in the understory. A fruit bearing tree, the nonda plum (Parinari nonda) is common and dense stands of paperbarks (Melaleuca spp.) fringe the margins of the swamps. In the open forest the swamps usually last much longer into the dry season than those of the open woodland.

Grasslands occupy about 12% of the reserve and mainly occur near the coast. The soils of these treeless flats are composed of deep cracking clays whose pock-marked surface relief has earned them the title of "melonhole" plains. Apart from the annual inundation during the wet season when the plains are flooded, swamps and waterholes of any permanence are rare in the environment of this plant community.

A complex and highly variable plant community clothes the beach and inland ridges. Pedley and Isbell (1971:64) coined the term "dune woodland" to describe it. It covers approximately 11% of the reserve. The great richness of its plant life together with its situation on the ridges made this plant community a habitat of crucial importance for Aborigines in pre-settlement times. Eucalypts and melaleucas are common as well as species of Ficus, Pandanus, Acacia, Hibiscus, Grevillea and Syzigium. The water which ponds in the swales between the ridges during the "wet" forms permanent and semi-permanent swamps which support a variety of waterlilies, sedges and swamp canes. The so-called "cabbage tree" palm, Corypha elata, is especially common. The vegetation typically clumps to form scrub thickets which are festooned with vines including yams (Dioscoria spp.) and other edible plant species.

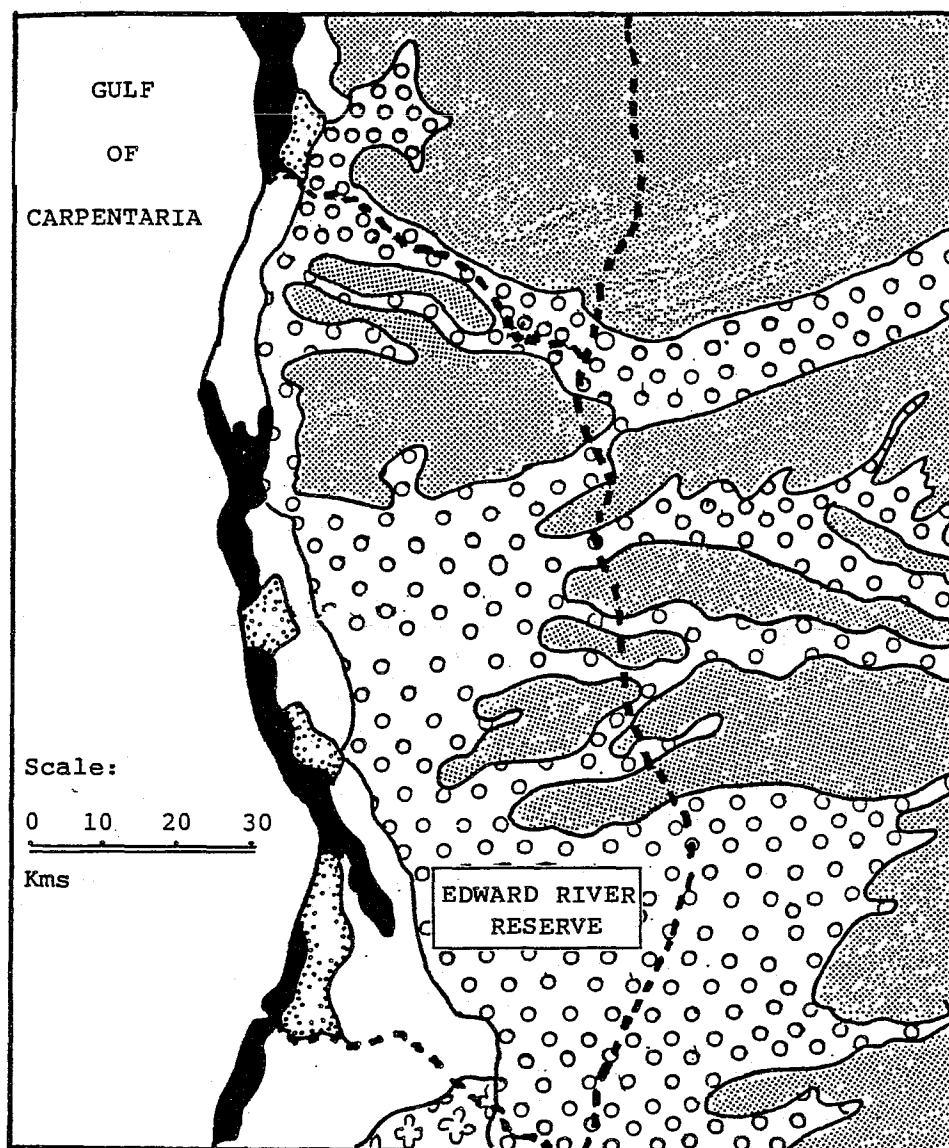
About 10% of the reserve area is covered by saltpans.

For most of the year they are salt encrusted scalds largely bare of vegetation except for the halophytic herbs and stunted shrubs on their margins. The high tides of November flood them every year and they remain inundated with tidal salt water and freshwater run-off during the wet season. The distribution of these plant habitats is mapped in Figure 2.3.

Pedley and Isbell note two other distinctive plant assemblages whose distributions are too narrow to be represented in Figure 2.3. The first of these is the strandline community that separates the beach proper from the dune woodland. Typically, the strandline community consists of creeping ground covers and spinifex grasses with she-oaks (Casuarina equisetifolia) forming a distinctive fringe. The second assemblage consists of the mangrove forests that flank the tidal creeks in bands that vary in width up to 50 m from the water's edge. Mangrove species within the forest tend to occur in zones. Rhodes (1980:115) in one transect counted 12 species of mangrove (including several types with edible seeds) in a representative stand along the banks of Christmas Creek.

To this list of minor plant communities I am tempted to add one not explicitly recognised by Pedley and Isbell but noted by Thomson (1935:12), namely, the plants that grow along the margins of the watercourses. These form a canopy over the streambeds and mark the channels of the watercourses in clear relief against the monotony of the low open woodland. Paperbarks (mostly Melaleuca leucadendron) figs, palms and lianas are the dominant species in this assemblage. Perhaps an appropriate term for this plant assemblage might be "melaleuca gallery forests".

The mosaic of shorescape and landform, of marine and terrestrial plant communities, of drainage pattern and tidal flow produces a variety of biotopes which in turn are the habitats of a great diversity of animal life. The annual inundation of the countryside sets in motion an ecological rhythm that patterns the processes and activities of all life-forms for the rest of the year. The onset of the wet season initiates the major growth period for plant life. At this time vegetation grows lushly and many trees



KEY







	Dune woodland
	Grassland
	Salt pans
	Low open woodland (<i>Melaleuca viridiflora</i> - <i>Petalostigma banksii</i>)
	Low open woodland (<i>Eucalyptus microtheca</i> - <i>Bauhinia cunninghamii</i>)
	Open forest (<i>E. tetradonta</i> - <i>E. sp. aff. polycarpa</i>)

Figure 2.3 Distribution of major plant communities, Edward River reserve (after Pedley and Isbell, 1971).

fruit. Rivers that were formerly dry begin to run. The swamps fill up. Aquatic vegetation springs to life and many waterbirds nest in the reeds. As the rains continue much of the countryside is flooded by the waters penned up behind the coastal ridges. Fishes, crocodiles and other water-dwelling creatures are released from the confines of their lagoons and can range widely through channels that were dry mid-year. There is a great turbulence when high tides and floodwaters mingle. Sharks, rays and sawfish occasionally swim inland to become ultimately landlocked in some lagoon, while some species of fish (e.g. barramundi, Lates calcarifer) leave their freshwater homes to swim to the ocean to spawn. By contrast, the mobility of terrestrial creatures is greatly circumscribed by the quagmire conditions. They seek shelter on whatever high ground there is, and the coastal ridges then become critical for the survival of many animals.

The land dries out gradually when the rain stops. In all but the major rivers, the water ceases to flow and the water-dwellers are once more restricted to lagoon and waterhole. Grazing animals can range widely at first, but their movements become more circumscribed when the shallower surface waters evaporate. By August, many swamps have dried up and their vegetation appears withered and lifeless. As the months wear on, the grass on the plains becomes seared and brown. Animal life tends to cluster around the more permanent lagoons and swamps. Thunderstorms and scattered falls of rain bring some relief from the parching conditions in November, but it is usually mid-December before the wet season commences in earnest and activates the cycle once more.

2.3 Aboriginal perceptions of the environment

The physical environment which I have just described was a familiar and predictable entity to the Aborigines who lived in it. Its parts (landforms, plants, animals etc.) were labelled, their characteristics catalogued and their interrelationships determined and organised into an extensive

knowledge base that was shared by all who lived there. This knowledge provided the foundation for creating successful recipes for daily living and for coping with the regularities and irregularities of the environment. As a key to understanding how a hunter-gatherer society related to its physical surroundings and exploited its resources, it is worth attempting even a cursory account of this store of knowledge. I shall begin with a brief description of the way in which the Kuuk Thaayorre used (and still use) linguistic labels to classify their surroundings and its inhabitants.

Kuuk Thaayorre, like many other Australian languages employs a small set of words or lexical classifiers that group phenomena into a limited set of domains. In speech the lexical classifier usually precedes the noun it classifies but it can also stand independently as a noun in its own right. Table 2.1 displays the principal classifiers the Kuuk Thaayorre used to describe landscapes and natural species. An examination of this table would suggest that the system is ordered although the basis for the assignment of some objects to classes might be surprising compared with European modes of classification. Thus the lexical classifier yuk which groups together trees and shrubs, also includes some insects that have tree-like characteristics such as mantids, stick and leaf insects. The class is extended to include crustaceans (prawns and crayfish) that resemble the terrestrial tree-like insects. The empty shells of molluscs are also included in this category, but their flesh is classified as may which, on its own, means fruit.

The degree of differentiation of environmental variety within the domains indicated by the lexical classifiers varies. Trees, shrubs, fruits, vines and grasses appear to be distinguished by a set of labels at least as numerous as that possessed by the Western scientific taxonomic system. For other natural species, the set of Kuuk Thaayorre are fewer. For example, Kuuk Thaayorre employs 86 labels to identify some 312 species of birds recognised by informants. The economy of the Kuuk Thaayorre bird classification comes about mostly through the merging of closely related species within families. Figure 2.4 provides

Classifier	Meaning as single word	Classifies
<u>raak</u>	place or time	names of tracts, e.g. <u>raak Kunchinan</u> ground surface features, e.g. <u>raak rem</u> , melonhole plain water courses, e.g. <u>raak yal</u> , small watercourse or creek time and season, e.g. <u>raak karrtham</u> , wet season
<u>ngok</u>	water	liquids, e.g. <u>ngok min</u> , fresh water bodies of water, e.g. <u>ngok menych</u> , soak or well tides, e.g. <u>ngok thaawkan</u> , high tide
<u>minh</u>	meat or animal	birds, e.g. <u>minh mepirth</u> , jabiru (<i>Xenorhynchus asiaticus</i>) land mammals and monotremes, e.g. <u>minh kuuch</u> , kangaroo (<i>Macropus</i> spp.) reptiles with legs, e.g. <u>minh piinch</u> , estuarine crocodile (<i>Crocodilus porosus</i>) frogs, e.g. <u>minh thatir</u> , most frog species eggs, e.g. <u>minh ngapun nhampi</u> , egg of emu (<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>)
<u>yak</u>	snake	all snakes, (terrestrial and aquatic), e.g. <u>yak meerkole</u> , taipan (<i>Oxyuranus s. scutellus</i>) eels, e.g. <u>yak kaalwopn</u> , salt and freshwater eels (<i>Anguilla</i> spp.) legless lizards, e.g. <u>yak kunkam</u> , most legless lizard species
<u>ngat</u>	fish	freshwater and saltwater fishes, e.g. <u>ngat pinporra</u> , barramundi (<i>Lates calcarifer</i>) sharks and rays, e.g. <u>ngat worklom</u> , sawfish (<i>Pristis zijsron</i>) marine mammals, e.g. <u>ngat thiit</u> , porpoise
<u>rurr</u>	insect	many kinds of insect, e.g. <u>rurr wongol</u> , mosquitoes
<u>yuk</u>	tree, branch, stick, wood	trees and shrubs, vines and ground creepers, e.g. <u>yuk yulu</u> , lady apple, (<i>Syzigium</i> spp.) some insects, e.g. <u>yuk minh piinch</u> , stick insects and mantids prawns and crayfish, e.g. <u>yuk puk</u> , freshwater crayfish mollusc shells, e.g. <u>yuk wele</u> , bailer shell (<i>Melos umbilicatus</i>). (but not the flesh)
<u>may</u>	edible plants	rootstocks, e.g. <u>may riitham</u> , bulguru (<i>Eleocharis</i> spp.) waterlilies, e.g. <u>may ngurp</u> , unidentified waterlily fruits, e.g. <u>may yulu</u> , lady apple fruit (<i>Syzigium</i> spp.) native bees and their honey, e.g. <u>may rat</u> , native bee (<i>Trigona</i> spp.) shellfish flesh, <u>may perpr</u> , oysters (<i>Ostreidae</i> spp.) edible insect larvae, e.g. <u>may wumpn</u> , unidentified caterpillar
<u>warrath</u>	grass	most grasses, e.g. <u>warrath wirpan</u> , blady grass (<i>Imperata</i> spp.)

Table 2.1 Environmental lexical classifiers in Kuuk Thaayorre.

an example of this merging phenomenon for birds that belong to the order Ardeiformes. Sometimes this general rule was broken, though usually in cases where even the English common names for the birds indicated a shared set of underlying features. Thus, the black-faced cuckoo shrike (Coracina novaehollandiae), the ground cuckoo-shrike (C. maxima), the grey shrike-thrush (Colluricincla harmonica) and the pallid cuckoo (Cuculus pallidus) are all referred to by a single term, minh way, in Kuuk Thaayorre.

ARDEIFORMES		
<u>Kuuk Thaayorre</u>		<u>English</u>
Classifier	Bird Name	Common and Specific Names
<u>minh</u>	<u>minh ripath</u>	White necked heron, <u>Ardea pacifica</u> Pied heron, <u>A. picata</u>
	<u>minh puun</u>	Great billed heron, <u>A. sumatrana</u>
	<u>minh puukath</u>	White faced heron, <u>A. novaehollandiae</u>
	<u>minh kirkn</u>	Cattle egret, <u>Ardeola ibis</u> Large egret, <u>Egretta alba</u> Little egret, <u>E. garzetta</u> Reef heron, <u>E. sacra</u>
	<u>minh mepirth</u>	Jabiru, <u>Xenorhynchus asiaticus</u>
	<u>minh yarrak</u>	Glossy ibis, <u>Plegadis falcinellus</u>
	<u>minh karrap</u>	White ibis, <u>Threskiornis molucca</u>
	<u>minh thaapuchir</u>	Straw necked ibis, <u>I. spinicollis</u>
	<u>minh pirpul</u>	Royal spoonbill, <u>Platalea regia</u> Yellow billed spoonbill, <u>P. flavipes</u>

Figure 2.4 Kuuk Thaayorre taxonomy for ARDEIFORMES and the English equivalents for the same birds.

The same merging of several closely related species or members of the same family occurs with fish, marsupial, lizard and snake names. In some cases, it was possible to discover the nature of the features in the animals that provided the basis for discrimination. Figure 2.5 sets out a key to the allocation of Kuuk Thaayorre labels for lizards

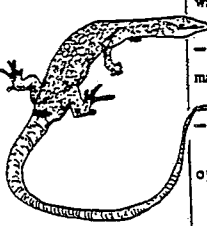

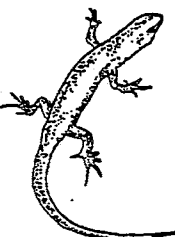

Body Shape	Other discriminating features	Kuuk Thaayorre term	Common & Scientific names	Family
	water habitat	<u>minh kovil</u>	Mitchell's water monitor (<u>Varanus mitchelli</u>) Merton's water monitor (<u>V. mertensi</u>)	VARANIDAE
	mangrove habitat	<u>minh ngap</u>	Mangrove monitor (<u>V. indicus</u>)	
	open habitat	<u>minh thapar</u>	Lace monitor (<u>V. varius</u>) Spotted tree monitor (<u>V. timorensis similis</u>)	
		<u>minh thutp-pinpan</u>	Fat-tailed gecko (<u>Diplodactylus vittatus</u>) White striped gecko (<u>D. taeniatus</u>)	GEKKONIDAE
	thin-bodied	<u>minh kumun-inthar</u>	Copper tailed skink (<u>Gtenotus taeniolatum</u>) Striped skink (<u>G. lesueurii</u>)	SCINCIDAE
	thick-bodied	blue tongue	<u>minh tharkuthir</u>	
		no blue tongue	<u>minh yonych gnamal</u>	
			Common blue tongue (<u>Tiliqua scincoides</u>) Northern blue tongue (<u>T. scincoides intermedia</u>) Land mullet (<u>Ecernia bungana</u>)	
	possessing frills, dewlaps, or neck pouches	<u>minh rathulk</u>	Frilled lizard (<u>Chlamydosaurus kingii</u>) Bearded dragon (<u>Amphibolurus barbartus</u>)	AGAMIDAE
	lacking frills, dewlaps, or neck pouches	<u>minh rirm-pirm-pen</u>	Jacky lizard (<u>A. inermis</u>) Eastern water dragon (<u>Physignathus lesueurii</u>)	

Figure 2.5 Taxonomic key for the assignment of Kuuk Thaayorre labels for legged lizards.

with legs. The important basic discriminator in this taxonomy is characteristic body shape.

The systems of taxonomy for natural species discussed so far can be, for the most part, reconciled with scientific nomenclature, since with minor exceptions, there is either an equivalent Kuuk Thaayorre term for the species involved or else related species in the same family are merged under one Kuuk Thaayorre label as in Figures 2.4 and 2.5. It is less easy to do this for shells and insects. Although the data I have are meagre, my evidence suggests that the characteristics used to differentiate members of these latter classes in Kuuk Thaayorre generate a taxonomic system that cannot be reconciled at all with the Western scientific one.

Turning to the physical environment it is clear that the Edward River people conceptualised their terrestrial environment in terms of broad landform units that bear a close resemblance to the classification of plant communities produced by Pedley and Isbell and referred to earlier in this section. The labels for major landform units are presented in Figure 2.6. This diagram shows an east-west cross-section of the reserve making plain the relationships of the landform units to each other and their relative extent. Within, or cutting across these broad units are smaller distinctive micro-environments which are also distinguished. For example, tidal arms are called raak yuk penkayer (literally "mangrove country"), large watercourses raak wa'ap, small creeks raak yal, and open places raak yawun, etc..

The commonest way of referring to localities in the Edward River environment is through the use of place-names. The entire landscape is divided into tracts each bearing a name. Between 1969 and 1973, I mapped over 200 named tracts in an area of approximately 260² km (Taylor 1976). For the majority of places visited I collected information concerning the ownership of the tract, rights of access to it, its uses and principal subsistence resources, when it was used and by how many people, where the tract fitted into the pre-settlement seasonal patterns of movement, and its post-settlement uses, as well as personal, religious and ceremonial associations.

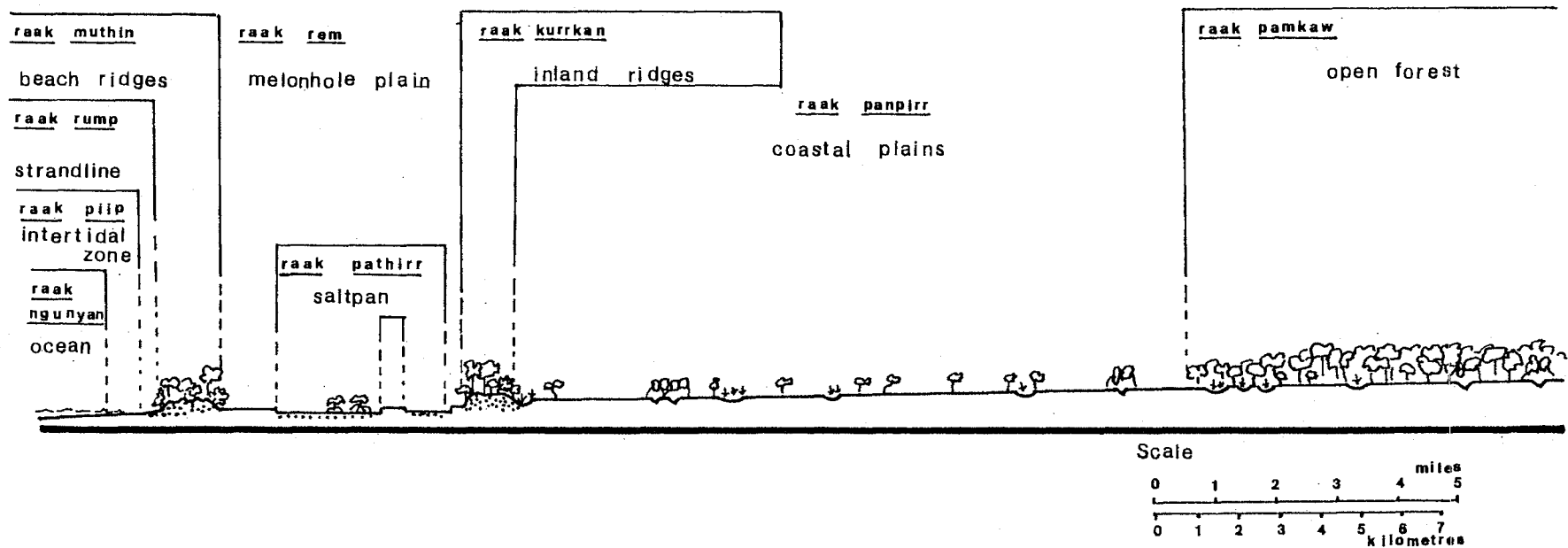


Figure 2.6 Kuuk Thaayorre categories of major landform units, Edward River reserve (vertical scale exaggerated).

My principal informants were men and women who were at least 25 years old at the time the mission was established. They provided this information without effort and with good agreement between informants. The patterns which emerged from the information gathered in this survey were, I judged, a valid representation of pre-settlement land holdings and usage.

The area mapped comprised about 30% of the Kuuk Thaayorre homelands and provides a representative cross-section of territory they used in pre-settlement times. Map 2.1 is a composite. The base map shows the natural features of the landscape and the area which I systematically traversed collecting place names. The transparent overlay gives an indication of the approximate locations of tracts. It was not possible because of time constraints to record tract boundaries but I have tried to locate tract names in the centre of particular tracts.

The tracts varied in size. Inland they tended to be large, encompassing many square kilometres. Nearer the coast they were smaller and, as Map 2.1 indicates, clustered densely along the coastal ridges. In the coastal country, the notion of boundaries between tracts was quite sharp. Outstanding trees often served as boundary markers and water-courses were frequently used to provide sharp lines of demarcation between neighbouring tracts. Inland boundaries between tracts were less well defined. This would appear to be due to the fact that the useful and productive areas of the inland tracts were separated by much country of little use to the Aborigines.

Some of the names applied to tracts were translatable and many of these referred to a mythological association. For example, Wangwanchil refers to the round yam devil, Kutakunmulwarrangan refers to a mythological dog that had a crooked tail and Ngunyanwarr refers to a myth about a man who created a tidal surge that nearly submerged the entire countryside. Other place-names, although translatable (e.g. Yinpanchir, female pubic hair), were not acknowledged as having any special significance other than that they were a place-name. Neighbouring language groups had their own

Map 2.1 was too large to include here.
It can be found in the sleeve on the
back cover of Volume I.

names for many of the Kuuk Thaayorre tracts. Where the place-name had a meaning that was mythologically significant, the meaning was translated and preserved in the non-Thaayorre place name.

Natural features within named tracts were not singled out by a special name of their own. Rather they were designated by the micro-environmental terms referred to earlier. Not all tracts were used as camping places. Only 122 tracts (59.6% of the sample) had regular campsites located in them. Many tracts simply did not possess the minimal requirements for campsites, which were good water and shade in close proximity together with paperbark trees (Melaleuca spp.) and termite mounds. The latter two items were necessary for earth oven cookery. In the same sample 98 (47.8%) of the tracts had mythological or ritual significance which might or might not be recognised in the place-name itself. Overall, the average area of each tract was 1.3 km², while for a representative section of coastal country, 119 named tracts occupied 93.2 km², with an average tract area of 0.8 km².

As noted above, each place-name had associated with it a store of information relating to ownership, occupancy, subsistence resources, mythic and totemic connections, as well as information relating to personal experiences and historical events. Equally, the terms used to denote natural species were also nodes around which clustered information concerning such things as distinguishing characteristics, edibility and food quality, seasonal location and typical behavioural patterns, relationship to other natural species, mythological and totemic status and so forth. At this point I do not intend to present this kind of information in any detail. My purpose will be to show how this fund of cultural knowledge was employed at the interface between a hunter-gatherer population and its environment to produce regular seasonal patterns, in this case in the distribution of the Kuuk Thaayorre and their activities throughout the pre-settlement annual cycle. Before describing the organisation of subsistence activities on a seasonal basis, it will be necessary to describe pre-settlement Kuuk Thaayorre

technology and the nature of the basic production and consumption unit.

2.4 Technology and hearthgroup

Basic economic decisions such as where to go, what to hunt and gather, when to move on and so forth were made within small independent groups which I shall call hearthgroups. Hearthgroup members camped together sharing their food, shelter and fireplace. By pooling their skills they made up the fundamental unit of production and consumption in pre-settlement society. The most frequent and stable form of the hearthgroup comprised a man and his wife (or wives) and their children. Other hearthgroups could be composed of couples whose children had left parental care, mourning widows and their children, or bachelors living apart from their parents.

There was a general sexual division in the organization of tasks. It was the men who hunted (and cooked) mobile and elusive quarry such as marsupials, large landfowl, lizards and fish, sharks and rays. Women on the other hand exploited and processed the relatively static concentrations of food resources composed in the main of rootstocks, fruits, crustaceans, molluscs and turtles. The hunt was often a cooperative affair with a number of males sharing what was obtained. Although women mostly foraged for their individual hearthgroup's needs (and occasionally for other close kin), they often did so in company with other women. In certain activities (see below) both sexes cooperated to procure their food needs.

Certain large scale material culture items, such as brush fish traps and weirs and some of the ritual representations made in the course of ceremonial activities, required the cooperative efforts of a number of people. For the most part, hearthgroups relied on their own skills to produce the material base for their survival. The people went about naked, adorned only by small items such as plaited fibre belts, armbands, nosepegs or earlobe plugs, or occasionally, they wore some temporary status marker such as mourning

strings or pre-pubertal aprons (for girls only). The most substantial structure built was a dome-shaped hut made from interlaced saplings and branches and covered with paperbark and/or palm leaves and grass. In these huts, hearthgroups endured the four months of the wet season, then abandoning them with the onset of the dry. Unless they were re-used the following wet season, these dwellings quickly fell into disrepair and rotted away. During the dry months, when camp locations were changed frequently, hearthgroups were protected by no more than a windbreak strategically placed about their fire. At the more permanent camp sites, personal possessions and foodstuffs were kept out of harm's way (and the reach of the camp dogs) on wooden platforms raised above the ground on forked sticks.

By convention, men worked in wood and bone, making all the implements necessary for their own hearthgroup's hunting, foraging and food preparation. Women worked with fibres to fashion most of what their hearthgroup required in terms of cordage, nets and carrying bags.

There were no craft specialists. Every adult was a master of the technology of his or her sex. Age and individual skill obviously modified performance in subsistence tasks and handcrafts. Girls, by virtue of their early marriage (usually not long after puberty), tended to realise their productive potential sooner than males, who were often in their late twenties before establishing their own hearthgroups with their attendant responsibilities. Elderly people spent less time hunting and foraging and more time in sedentary occupations such as child-minding, making and mending things. They relied to some extent on the surplus from other hearthgroups for food.

The material artefacts necessary for a hearthgroup to extract their requirements from the environment were relatively few and could easily be carried from place to place. The adult male's hunting gear normally included three kinds of hunting spear: a multi-pronged type on a hibiscus haft for fish, a lightweight bamboo hafted multi-pronged spear for the larger wildfowl and a heavy single-pronged spear with a short hibiscus butt for killing larger game

animals. A spear-thrower (the so-called "woomera") was always used to propel spears with power and accuracy. A woman's foraging gear would comprise a stout lancewood digging stick, at least one wooden dish for carrying water and processing food, as well as assorted string bags and strainers. Additionally, women possessed wooden pounders for pulverising rootstocks and dried nonda fruits and occasionally used stone grinders for milling waterlily seeds. At certain times of the year, scoop nets were used to catch fish and crustaceans in shallow waters and a kind of fishing rod with a wooden hook was employed to catch barramundi and two species of threadfin salmon (Polydactylus sheridani and Eleutheronema tetradactylus). Twist drills were used to start fires. Edge-ground, hafted stone hatchets owned by the men were used by both sexes in tasks such as cutting wood for tool-making, enlarging holes in trees to procure native honey or possums, cutting palm leaf shoots and so forth.

In addition to his hunting spears a man would normally own a number of weapons made for no other purpose than offence or defence. These included boomerangs, fighting sticks, wooden swords, shark's teeth duelling knives and fighting spears. There were at least seven different kinds of fighting spear, but few men would own a complete arsenal of every type. The male tool-making kit consisted of the stone hatchet, shells for cutting and scraping, strings and dried sinews for binding, bone gouges and awls, stones for sharpening and burnishing, an assortment of gums and native beeswax for hafting and binding, a gum-smoothing paddle and paints made from earth (red) and fish bones or pipeclay (white) for decorating implements. All this fitted neatly into a string bag. There was no equivalent female kit as such, apart from nimble fingers. Aids necessary for the manufacture of their items could usually be found at hand and were discarded after they had served their purpose.

Raw materials for implement making were not uniformly distributed throughout the environment nor were they always seasonally available when they were required. Apart from the natural wastage rate occasioned by the rotting of

wood and fibre, there was also a high breakage rate especially among spears. Large animals frequently smashed hunting spears in their death throes. Fighting spears, if they were not broken by "blockers" (see Chapter 5) before they were thrown, often broke on impact with earth, trees or shields. Making and mending then was a chief preoccupation of adults in hearthgroups and raw materials had to be stockpiled against future needs. Men did not have equal access to resources. Resources which were scarce had to be obtained by exchange. Certain raw materials such as stone blanks for hatchets and bamboo for spear hafts did not occur in the Edward River environment at all. These had to be traded into the area. Additionally, during the "ethnographic past" of which this reconstruction is a description, European items such as steel axe heads, fencing wire (for fish spear prongs), glass (for scraping and cutting), metal rods, bars and knife blades that could be substituted for digging sticks, gouges and spear prongs were finding their way into the material culture inventory as more efficient and durable substitutions for traditional items.

2.5 Seasonal subsistence activities

The Kuuk Thaayorre regarded the period between the onset of one wet season and the next as a progression of four major seasons. These seasons and their subdivisions are presented in the form of a calendar in Figure 2.7. The major seasons were named raak karrtham ("wet-time"), raak wurripan ("dry-wet time"), raak kaal kurrch ("cold-time") and raak papaath ("sun-hot time"). Each season was associated with a characteristic set of camping places, food sources, activities and movement patterns. As the glosses for the seasons suggest, the calendar was oriented towards natural environmental rhythms rather than some invariant sequence like the series of months that characterise Western calendars. Obviously, the correspondence between Western months and the Kuuk Thaayorre system as it is presented in Figure 2.7 is approximate. The length of each season was markedly variable since much depended on when the wet season

Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
<u>raak</u> (time or season)											
<u>Raak karrtham</u> (wet-time)			<u>raak wurripan</u> (dry-wet time)			<u>raak kaal kuurrch</u> (cold-time)			<u>raak paapath</u> (sun-hot time)		
<u>raak may mantam</u> (small fruit time)			<u>raak thaanguni</u> (grass burning time)			<u>raak may yulu-kn</u> (bush apple time)					
<u>raak wampu-</u>											
<u>raak yuur wampn</u> (hand's breadth high)		<u>raak wampn yangkar</u> (shin high)		<u>raak warrath wampn paathar</u> (wampn is flowering)		<u>raak wampu muthkaw</u> (wind bends grass to the east)		<u>raak wampu muthkuw</u> (wind bends grass to the west)			
December	January	February	March	April							

Figure 2.7 Kuuk Thaayorre seasons and divisions within seasons.

started (it could arrive early or late) and on how much rain fell. The basic dimensions for their calendar were provided by the contrasts between hot and cold, wet and dry.

There were other ways of indicating segments of time within the seasonal cycle. For example, the passage of time within raak karrtham and raak wurripan was keyed to aspects of a particular kind of grass that grew prolifically during the wet season called warrath wampn. Called raak wampu, time could be measured by reference to the height of the grass, the appearance of its plumes and its aspect during the prevailing winds. Additionally, periods of time within the annual cycle could be designated by referring to the fruiting season of plants such as raak may mantam ("small fruit time"), raak may yulu-kn ("bush apple time") or by referring to activities that characterised that particular part of the cycle, thus raak thaanguni ("grass burning time").

In passing it is worth noting that plant indicators did more than delineate segments of the seasonal cycle. Their growth and development patterns were often correlated with the development of other plant species and with the condition of animals and their locations. For instance when the warrath wampn flowered, it was said to be a good time to spear barramundi along creek banks and in the shallows of the mudflats. In wampu muthkaw, when the wampn grass bent towards the east under the prevailing winds, then that was the time to start looking for the first ripe yams. When the cotton tree, yuk tuuch, flowered, it was said the crabs were fattest then. Shark and stingaree livers were held to be richest when the Melaleuca trees flowered. Thus plants served as signs to trigger off the hunting and gathering activities correlated with them.

A lunar calendar based on phases of the moon was also employed and daily time was reckoned by referring to stages in the progress of the sun across the sky. Another series of words and phrases indicated future and historic time (see Figure 2.8), so that despite the fact that the language did not possess an ability for exact enumeration beyond the count of four, it was nonetheless possible to achieve a fairly fine degree of precision in referring to

<u>Kuuk Thaayorre</u>	<u>English Equivalents</u>
<u>raak kanpa minch</u>	in the beginning
<u>kanangkarr</u>	very long ago
<u>wurr moongthak</u>	many years ago
<u>karr-man inhth kanpa</u>	three years before
<u>karr-man kanpa</u>	the year before last
<u>karr-man</u>	last year
<u>pung-up kanpa</u>	last week
<u>ngerngkan kanpa</u>	day before yesterday
<u>ngerngkan</u>	yesterday
<u>yoorr</u>	today
<u>ngul</u>	later today
<u>melnk-elnk-arr</u>	tomorrow
<u>yuu-ka-rra</u>	next week
<u>wuurr yoorr</u>	next year
<u>raak yuu-karr-ontam</u>	for many years ahead
<u>thono-marr</u>	for always

Figure 2.8 Modes of reckoning time, Kuuk Thaayorre
(source: Hall, 1968).

past events, or arranging for things to happen in the future. With respect to time, such a fine degree of precision was necessary in order to integrate and dovetail the activities of many people during the course of the year. These activities are best described in terms of the patterns characteristic of each Kuuk Thaayorre season.

2.5.1 Raak karrtham -- "wet-time"

Raak karrtham was ushered in with storms which began in late November, replenishing the surface waters in the swales between the coastal ridges and allowing people to move from the permanent waters and wells of the "sun-hot time" camping places and select their wet season campsites on the ridges. The typical pattern was for people to camp in small clusters of hearthgroups, one or two to a campsite, scattered in a narrow band along the coast out of reach of the floodwaters. Bark and grass huts were built against the onset of the heavy rains. By the end of December, the countryside was usually flooded and grass grew thickly everywhere. Except along the ridges, movement was difficult in the quagmire conditions, and the fast flowing waters of creeks and rivers barred long distance travelling to all but the most hardy.

Many trees fruited during raak karrtham. They included various fig species, the yellow-wood tree yuk kuump (Vitex glabbra), the black fruit tree yuk mark (Pouteria sericea), as well as shrubs such as Morinda citrifolia and vines such as the native passion fruit, may porkal (Passiflora foetida). There was no staple food plant, but at least ten different varieties of rootstocks replaced the yams, Eleocharis and nonda fruit that provided vegetable mainstays of the diet in other seasons. Towards the end of the wet season, waterlilies could also be harvested. It was a time also for gathering molluscs in mangroves and on the mudflats, and occasionally shoal prawns could be caught in scoop nets in tidal backwaters.

At the beginning of the wet season, men would build brush barriers across certain creek beds between the coastal

and inland ridges in order to take advantage of a short-lived phenomenon during the first weeks of the flood run-off. The first floodwaters draining the inland plains usually flushed out and carried with them great numbers of freshwater fish. A dozen or so men would wait on the banks on the inland side of the barrier to spear the fish as they blundered into it. This state of affairs lasted no more than several days, but the hauls of fish were considerable. No further large-scale cooperative enterprises would take place for the next few months.

Although wallabies too sheltered on the ridges out of reach of floodwaters, hunting them was relatively difficult because of the cover afforded by the lush growth of plants. Instead, men turned to hunting possums in trees and digging smaller marsupials out of their burrows. Fishing in the tidal arms and on the offshore mudflats was, however, the principal activity. In favourable locations brush fish traps might be built by one or two men on the mudflats opposite small creek mouths to trap fish left behind by the falling tides.

Birds' eggs were an important addition to the diet at this time. Two large species of megapodes, the scrub fowl minh werkatr (Megapodius freycinct) and the brush turkey minh themthem (Alectura lathami), built large mounded nests on the ground and these were eagerly sought and rifled. From mid-February onwards the eggs of the pied goose minh mopngun (Anseranus semipalmata) were gathered in large quantities from where the birds nested among the reeds of the flooded melonhole plains. Because of their nesting activities and the presence of much natural cover, large waterfowl were also hunted.

In the wet season, food resources were more or less evenly distributed throughout the coastal environment. The distribution of the population in small scattered groups was a response to this fact. Each "wet-time" campsite was, for several months, the centre of a small range in which the members of co-residing hearthgroups sought their food. This range normally encompassed beach and mudflat, saltpan and melonhole plain, as well as coastal ridge. Its boundaries were circumscribed by the ranges of neighbouring camps and,

in a physical sense, by the floodwaters, mud and the difficulty of moving through bogs and undergrowth in strength-sapping humidity. It was a time of isolation and some discomfort. Mosquitoes and biting midges abounded. There were occasional periods of hunger when heavy rains lasted for several days curtailing all subsistence activities. Fish spearing on the mudflats was difficult when the sea was wind-whipped and muddied by floodwaters. Adults spent much of their wet season spare time making new tools and implements and weaving new bags and baskets to use in the coming months.

2.5.2. Raak wurripan -- "dry-wet time"

In a normal season the rains tailed off during March and April. Freshwater creeks fed by local drainage systems ceased to flow while the amount of water in the main river courses speedily diminished. Two major food plant staples, yams and Eleocharis (often called "bulguru" in North Queensland), reached maturity at this time and began to supplant the "wet-time" rootstocks and the mangrove seed pods which reached maturity in March and April also. The round hairy yam may wanch (Dioscoria sativa var. rotunda) required special processing to rid it of toxic substances. It was roasted, sliced and washed in several changes of water. After settling, the resultant floury sediment was poured into depressions in the sand where it drained and formed into hard cakes. The long yam may mula (Dioscoria transversa) needed no such processing and could be roasted and eaten immediately.

Bulguru, may riitham (Eleocharis dulcis), was a sedge that grew in dense stands in the swamps. Its roots yielded small round tubers that were roasted and then mashed between wooden paddles and compressed to form a mealy and nourishing cake. The concentration of Eleocharis in swamps permitted numbers of women to work together gathering the tubers. Harvesting the plant was most efficiently performed when the water in the swamp was ankle-deep and the mud in which it grew, soft enough for digging. The depth of water and the evaporation rate together determined the order in which the swamps were harvested for their Eleocharis. Camps in the

vicinity of Eleocharis beds tended to be large.

There was much cooperative hunting activity in raak wurripan. Fish weirs were constructed at vantage points in narrow tidal channels to trap fish that had swum upstream during high tides. The fish were gathered in by spearing as they turned away from the barrier. Barramundi were also caught at this time with fishing poles baited with small fish. Low tide fish drives could be organised in which a line of spearsmen advanced up some tidal arm stabbing blindly ahead of them in the murky waters. This seemingly haphazard method of fishing could produce enough fish for a large camp for several days. Hunts were organised for fledgling waterfowl, especially pied geese, among the reeds where the still flightless birds were easy to knock down. Towards the end of raak wurripan people began systematically burning off the rank growth of wet season grass and using the flames to drive wallabies and bandicoots towards a line of spearsmen waiting downwind. In these drives, women came behind over the burnt country probing with their yamsticks into holes and burrows for lizards, snakes and small marsupials that went to earth to escape the flames. Hunting in this way was to be a major cooperative activity over the next few months and signalled the start of raak thaanguni, "grass-burning time".

The plentiful supply of food resources at the end of the "dry-wet time" made it a favourite time for conducting ceremonies. While most food-getting activities centred on the coastal and inland ridges and on the swamps and plains that lay between them, occasionally men would make forays into the open forest country to seek out Acacia wood for making spear prongs and to make raids on fruit-bat colonies.

2.5.3 Raak kaal kuurrch -- "cold-time"

The fine weather months of this season saw much movement across the coastal plain country as people spread widely to gather the lilies and the turtles of the shallow swamps before they dried out. The basic patterns of food exploitation were a continuation of the activities set in motion at the end of raak wurripan. This was also

raak thaanguni proper, and great areas of dried grasslands would be set alight to clear the country and to make travel easier and firewood less difficult to locate. The heavy dews which condensed during the cold nights of raak kaal kuurrch promoted fresh green shoots and provided attractive herbage for grazing animals, which in turn could be hunted.

2.5.4 Raak paapath -- "sun-hot time"

As the days became hotter and the surface waters disappeared, animal life tended to congregate near the permanent waters. By the middle of this season most of the Eleocharis swamps had been baked brick-hard by the sun and palatable yams became difficult to find. At many campsites on the ridges, water had to be obtained by digging wells. Some trees fruited during this season. Among them were the bush apple may yulu (Syzygium spp.), the monkey nut may karltun (Sterculia quadrifida) and the nonda plum may puchir (Parinari nonda). The latter was particularly important as a staple food, and the tree bore prolific clusters of yellow, olive-sized fruit which could be eaten raw as they fell from the trees. More commonly, however, the fallen fruit were gathered and taken back to the camp where they were allowed to dry out. In their dessicated state the fruit were called may tanch. They were processed by smashing the whole dried fruit, including the seeds, with a stone pounder on a wooden paddle (see Thomson 1936b). The meal obtained was tipped into a water-filled wooden container and left to soak overnight. The resulting gruel would be eaten the next day without further preparation. Towards the end of this season the people also gathered and cooked the tops of the small palms they called may karrant (Livistonia muellerii).

Much fishing was done and the offshore mudflats reliably yielded sharks, rays, fish and crabs, while the beach itself occasionally provided eggs laid by marine turtles. Wallabies were often speared from hides built near trees whose fallen fruit or seeds the animals came to feed upon.

Not all people exploited the coastal complex of ridges, beach and plain. Many moved inland away from the

coast to the permanent swamps and waterholes of the open forest country, raak pamkaw. In pre-settlement times, the coastal peoples used to meet the inlanders: the Wik Mungkan, Bakanh and Wik Olkol speakers. When this occurred, camp sizes could be quite large. The nonda plum was distributed widely throughout the forest country and provided the staple of the vegetable diet, although waterlilies, of which corms, stems and seeds were eaten, also figured prominently. Honey from native bees was also gathered in the forest country. The main animal foods were turtles and freshwater fish, with crayfish, mussels, water snakes, mostly the file snake yak ngompunch (Achrocordus javanicus), fruit bats and waterbirds adding variety to the diet. Women gathered the turtles from the swamps by wading out in parties and feeling for them near the swamp bottom. Surplus turtles caught in this way were kept alive in pits to be cooked and eaten at later times.

The principal method of catching fish in this region was to employ a range of poisons, mostly obtained from trees, which when introduced into the water in sufficient quantities, stunned the fish and brought them to the surface where they could be easily speared or caught. There were two main methods of poisoning bodies of water. The first was essentially a technique for poisoning shallows and was called ngat thaanch theerngr. The second technique was called ngat riingar and was used to poison large bodies of water such as the narrow, rock-bottomed lagoons typical of the watercourses in this area. I shall describe shallow-pool poisoning first.

As the pools in the sandy parts of watercourses shrank, the fish in them concentrated and wading birds, especially jabiru and herons of various kinds, would gather to feed on them. In turn, both the birds and the fish were taken by the Aborigines. The birds were speared from the cover of the riverine vegetation, while the small fish in the pools were harvested using fish poisons that were derived from plants that grew conveniently in or near the watercourses. The two principal poisons used to stupefy fish were the inner bark of the roots of the river mangrove

yuuk thaanch (Barringtonia acutangula) and the dried seed pods of an (unidentified) Acacia called yuk wiil. The seed pods were placed in a dilly bag and soaked at the water's edge prior to dragging the bag through the pool. The bark of the Barringtonia was stripped from the roots and then pounded and squeezed at the upwind end of the pool until the active ingredient formed a soapy froth which floated down the pool in the breeze. Sometimes the fish poisons were tied to a makeshift raft which was then dragged through the pool to distribute the toxins. The operation could be performed by one person, although several people might help in the task, including women. The poisoning operation was usually accompanied by a certain amount of ritual incantation.

The fish caught in this fashion were cooked in earth ovens. Surplus fish could be treated to preserve their edibility for several days. This was done by pulling the cooked flesh away from the bones and squeezing and rinsing it in the water a number of times until a dry fish shred was obtained. The shred was compacted into balls about 20 to 25 cm in diameter, which were then quickly seared brown in a grass fire. Such fish balls were called ngat turrmar in Kuuk Thaayorre and "fish damper" in Aboriginal pidgin. The flesh of sharks and rays was invariably treated in this fashion. Often the livers of the fish, after being dried in the sun, would be poked into the centre of the ball before being eaten, making what was considered a delicacy that was also rich in vitamins A and D.

A more elaborate procedure was required for deep-pool poisoning. The poison for this technique came from the leaves of a eucalypt called yuk kampul that normally grew near lagoons and waterholes. Many ritual observances surrounded the implementation of the process. The camp would split up with the adult men camping in one area and the women and children camping in another some distance from them. Until the poisoning had been successfully completed, spouses were forbidden to cohabit for fear of spoiling the result. Food sharing between the two camps took place with as little contact as possible.

The process commenced with men cutting leafy branches

from the yuk kampul and stacking them to dry by the water's edge. (To this day, lagoons where the technique has been applied can be distinguished by the scars left on the trunks and main limbs where boughs have been stripped off in times past.) In the evening of the same day, the branches would be steeped in the waters of the lagoon. This would be repeated on successive days until the water became dark and discoloured. All activities were accompanied by the chanting of two senior men who sang to encourage the venture's success. While the process was being carried out it was essential to have another source of water for drinking. When it was judged that sufficient leaves had been thrown into the water (colour was used as a guide to indicate this), the lagoon was left undisturbed until the poison began to affect the fish. The time taken for this to happen varied with the volume of water and the length of time required to build up the toxicity level of the waterhole.

The first sign that the poison was working and that fish were coming to the surface was indicated by the behaviour of hawks as they swooped down to pick up the floating fish. When this happened, the two senior men could go to the water's edge and spear some of the fish, cook it "secretly" and eat it. The next day, both camps would be summoned to the lagoon. Everyone plunged in to scoop up and spear the fish now floating on the surface of the water. After cooking, great quantities of surplus fish would be made into "fish damper", ngat turrmar, for later use and families would resume their normal hearthgroup camping patterns. The poisoning affected not only fish, but watersnakes and turtles as well. The aquatic life in the lagoon would be re-established during the annual inundation which flushed out the pools, clearing them of their toxins, and allowing fresh stocks to come in from elsewhere.

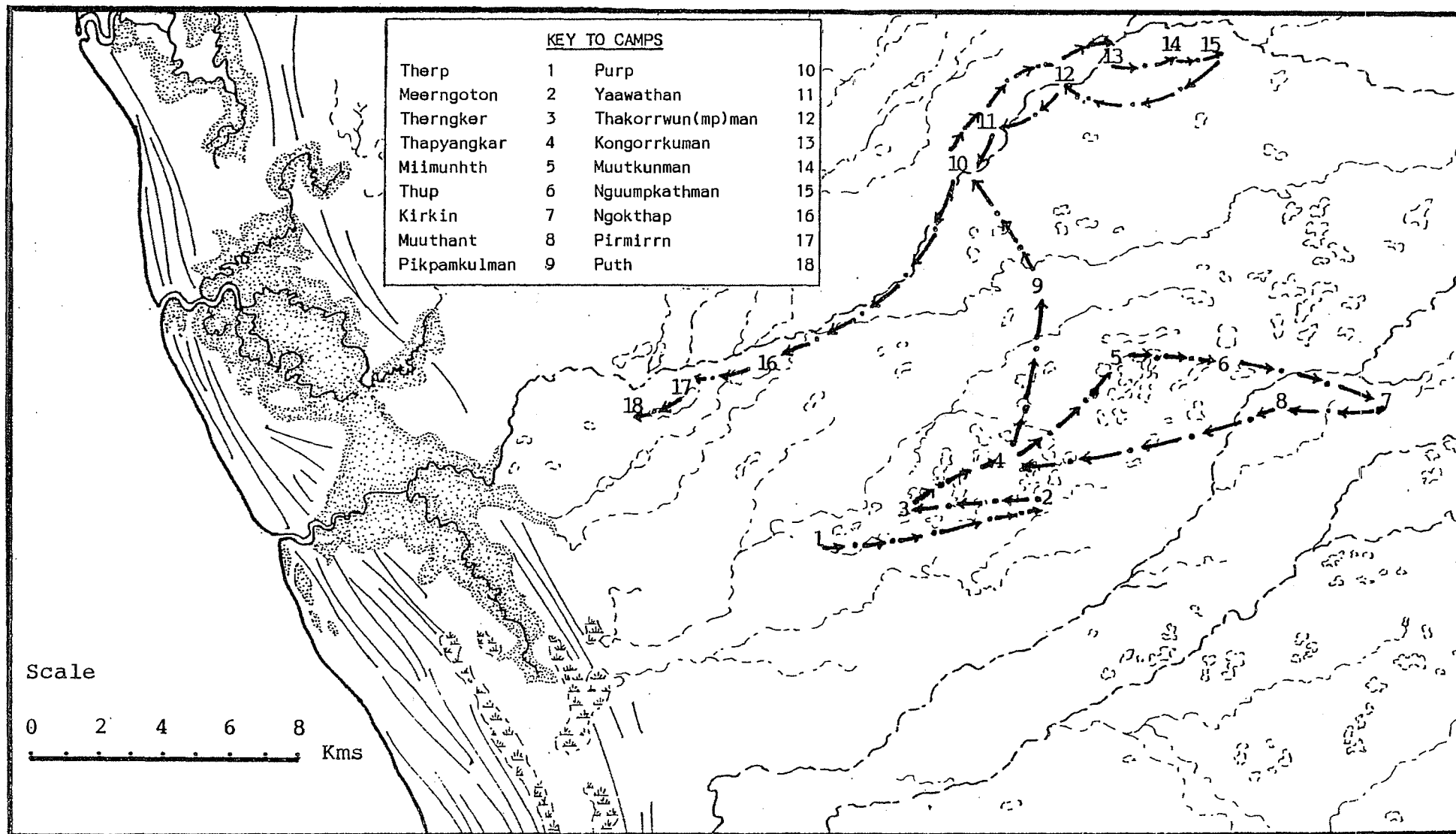
The exploitation of the swamps and lagoons was ordered and determined by three factors. The first was depth of water; shallower swamps that were likely to dry out were exploited first. The second was the need to vary the diet. Thus, several weeks in which turtle was the main food would be followed by several weeks when freshwater fish,

crayfish and mussels were the main items consumed. The third factor had to do with the fish poisoning techniques employed. Shallow-pool poisoning was used first and deep-pool poisoning was only carried out in particular places when there was no further need to camp there. All fish poisoning techniques fouled water supplies, so the larger bodies of water would be left until last.

It is worth describing an inland swamp/lagoon exploitation sequence in detail for the insight it offers into Aboriginal subsistence strategies. The places involved in the sequence to be described can be found in Map 2.2. The starting point was a tract which contained several shallow swamps named Therp (marked 1 on Map 2.2). While as many as 30 people could camp here for 10 days or so, more often than not, only one or two hearthgroups sought the turtles in its swamps. From here it was usual to go to Therngker (3), although if it was early in the season and there was still plenty of water in the swamps, small groups might camp at Meerngoton (2) searching for turtles in its large shallow swamp and in the swamps of the neighbouring tracts of Thinkamweneth and Kutapapurweneth. A major activity during this time was collecting lancewood for spear and woomera making, and for fashioning yamsticks, fighting sticks and wooden swords. Slabs of lancewood would be prised away from the trunks of suitable Acacia trees using stone hatchets as wedges and sticks for leverage. Later, at a succession of campsites, the slabs would be chipped and scraped into the desired shapes.

Therngker was a main meeting place for inland and coastal peoples. As many as 40 or more people would assemble there. During the ensuing couple of months they would hunt and gather together as a group. The large swamp at Therngker and the neighbouring swamps in Yukpetn and Thokoraawunum were rich in turtles and those that were surplus to immediate requirements would be stored alive in covered pits to be retrieved and eaten later, as was pointed out above, at places like Purp (10) and Yaawathan (11).

From Therngker the whole camp would move to a large long-lasting swamp in the centre of Thapyangkar (4)



Map 2.2 A pre-settlement sequence for exploiting swamps and lagoons in inland areas, Edward River reserve.

where the same kind of exploitation of it and the neighbouring tracts of Kirkyoongknakar, Thaathampurr and Yinpanchir took place. Perhaps 20 days might be spent there before the group moved on to Miimunhth (5) and Thup (6). The whole camp might stay together and exploit these two places one after the other, or they might split up and cover both places at the same time. After 10 or 14 days on these tracts the entire group would move out of the open forest country onto the plains nearby to vary their diet by seeking fish from the lagoons in the watercourse of Fishhole Creek. The first campsite was Kirkin (7) where the group would stay for about 7 days hunting wading birds, gathering freshwater mussels and crayfish and using shallow-pool poisoning methods to harvest the fish from the numerous small stretches of water. The neighbouring tract of Mulriinchar was also utilised from this campsite. From Kirkin the group would move downstream about 5.6 km to Muuthant (8) which had a deep lagoon and whose fish were obtained by deep-pool poisoning techniques over 5 or 6 days. When this was completed the group headed back across the open forest country to Thapyangkar (4) where they might stay for several days before moving off to Purp (10) some 8 km away on the north arm of Station Creek. Loads would be heavy, as people were weighed down with lancewood, dried nonda fruit, "fish damper", live turtles and containers of wild honey. The weather was hot. Those who were older, or had sore legs or were burdened with young children, often stopped overnight at Pikpamkulman, a deep waterhole on the plains in the south arm of Station Creek, before moving on to Purp.

Purp contained a series of lagoons and shallow pools. At first, only the shallow pools were poisoned to harvest the fish. Crayfish, mussels, birds, file snakes and occasionally round yams could be found there. However, the camp only stayed for about 3 days before moving off as a body and camping for one night at a succession of places, Yaawathan (11), Thakorrrwun(mp)man (12), Kongorrkuman (13), Muutkunman (14) and Nguumpkathman (15). Shallow-pool poisoning was used to extract the fish from the shallows of Station Creek which wound through all of these tracts. After Nguumpkathman, the group retraced its steps and returned to Thakorrrwun(mp)man.

There they used deep-pool poisoning to take the fish from the tract's lagoon. When the fish were gathered in (it usually took 6 or 7 days for the poison to work), the group moved down to the deep lagoon at Yaawathan to repeat the process. This larger body of water required about 10 days before it yielded up its fish. Finally the group returned to Purp, the last big body of water to be poisoned. When the fish from Purp were gathered in, the group which had remained together for so long would break up. The inlanders returned to their countries while the Kuuk Thaayorre headed downstream heavily laden. The first overnight camp in the trek back to the coast was Ngoktap (16), some 9.6 km downstream from Purp. The next day, the heavily burdened, the weary and the late starters camped at Pirmirr (17) before moving on to meet the others at the main camping place at Puth (18). This tract had permanent water and wells, and as many as 40 people would camp here for 20 days or so waiting for the first storms before dispersing to their wet season camping sites. Wallaby and brolga were hunted and turtles sought in stream banks. Nonda fruit and palm hearts provided the main vegetable staples. The men spent much time preparing the raw materials gathered inland, shaping them into artefacts. Expeditions would go out to Rirrant, a tract noted for its yuk rokonch (Hibiscus tilaceus) stands that provided the lightwood hafts for most kinds of spears. Another important male activity at that time was sweating gum from ironwood and beefwood trees to use in the hafting process of spear-making.

Similar large camps formed up and down the coast around the permanent waters as people gathered together to endure the last searing days of the "sun-hot time" and waited for the first refreshing storms that heralded the start of raak karrtham, when the cycle described in the previous subsections would begin all over again.

2.5.5 Summary

Clearly pre-settlement subsistence patterns were intimately meshed with seasonal factors. This can be seen in the distribution of campsites by season (Figure 2.9) where

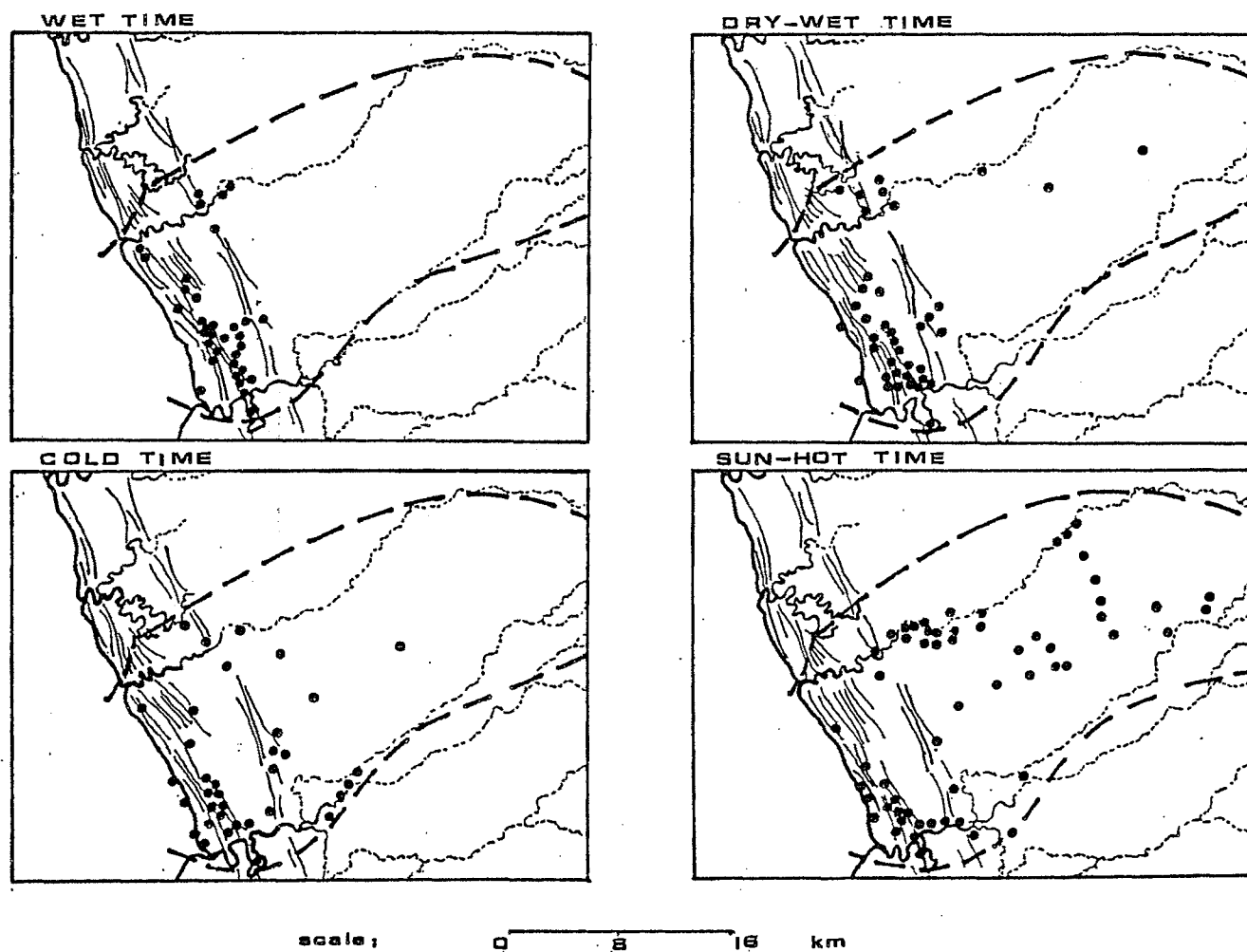


Figure 2.9 Seasonal distribution of pre-settlement campsites, Edward River reserve. (Heavy broken lines enclose area mapped.)

clear patterns reflecting the movements of people emerge. Only 5% of tracts could be camped in during all seasons. The majority of tracts, 66.4%, were used during one season only and 22.7% were used during two seasons. The size of groups using campsites varied throughout the year and ranged from the small group patterns characteristic of the "wet-time" season, to the very large aggregations characteristic of the "cold-time" and "sun-hot time". Two main factors seem to have conditioned the size of the camp group. The first was the nature of the distribution of static food resources. For example, the concentration of Eleocharis, waterlilies and turtles in swamps favoured larger camp sizes, whereas plants that were widely dispersed such as yams and the wet season rootstocks favoured the formation of smaller, scattered camps. A second factor was the degree of cooperation necessary to implement particular hunting techniques. Turtle hunts, fire drives, fish drives and deep-pool poisoning needed a relatively large number of participants to produce successfully their returns. Other hunting techniques such as stalking, spearing from hides, shallow-pool poisoning and fish spearing could be carried out successfully by individuals. There was no stable residential unit other than the hearth-group. But it should be borne in mind that the area was rich in resources and probably relatively densely populated in hunter-gatherer terms (1 person per 6.13 km²). Hunting and foraging groups were rarely separated by more than a few kilometres, or at most, a day's walk. Communication between groups was easy. Information could be quickly transferred between camps so that people could organise themselves into group sizes that best suited the purposes at hand.

The diet produced by such exploitation strategies appears to have been nutritionally adequate. Certainly the photographs taken by anthropologists on the western side of Cape York Peninsula during the 1930s show a muscular people with little excess body fat. The kinds of food gathered in the course of the seasonal round and their relative importance (in terms of quantity) are summarised in the three clock-face diagrams of Figure 2.10. These are drawn after the manner of Meggers (1972) from her work on selected societies in the

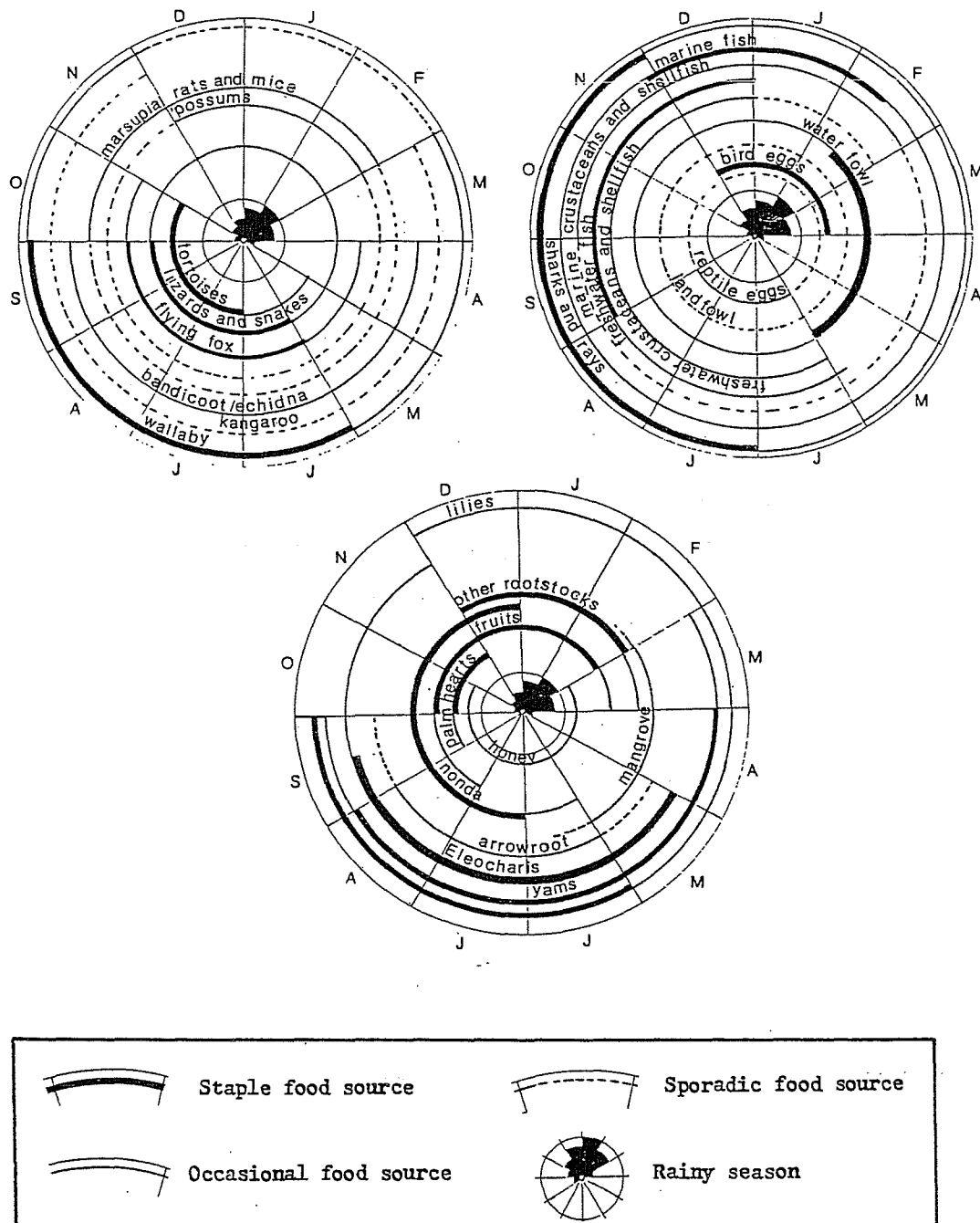


Figure 2.10 Seasonal patterns of resource exploitation for pre-settlement economy, Edward River reserve.

Amazon basin. It seems probable that animal flesh (including fish) supplied between 50% and 60% of the total food consumed in the Edward River region. Viewed throughout the year the diet was varied, although at particular times and places monotony of diet rather than food shortage was cited as the main reason for moving on.

A certain amount of preservation of surplus foods took place. Round yams gathered during the height of their season were sometimes stored in pits to be used later in the year. I have already referred to the keeping of live turtles and the preservation of fish flesh. Dried nonda fruit might be carried around for a week or so before being consumed and other foods such as the flat cakes made from arrowroot tubers (Tacca spp., a wet season rootstock) and waterlily seeds were esteemed for their long keeping properties. Men took these flat cakes with them when they had to undertake long journeys with little prospect of finding food along the way.

In ecological terms, it is difficult to say how well the Aboriginal exploitation of the Edward River environment maximised the yield from it in terms of time expended for calories obtained. The environment may not have always been as benign as the memories of informants would have it. For instance, although the monsoon brought a wet season with unfailing regularity, yet there was variation in wet season rainfall (Figure 2.2). I have suggested elsewhere (Taylor 1977b:422) that nutritional stress may have occurred when the rainfall was meagre. A short wet season meant a short growing season for plants and for the animals that depended on them. The quantity and quality of food resources would therefore be lower in such a season. Further, since the harvesting of concentrations of Eleocharis, waterlilies and turtles depended on water levels, as did fish poisoning techniques, then there would tend to be a compression of the normal hunting and gathering cycle as these major food sources were harvested earlier than usual, leaving perhaps a scarcity of resources in the latter months of the "sun-hot time". This is speculative. No informant could ever recall such a period of stress.

The patterns of resource usage described here were not the result of a consciously held master plan to which everyone adhered. Rather, they emerged as the outcomes of a multitude of decisions made by individual hearthgroups which throughout the year decided where they would go to get what. The next section looks at some of the factors that went into the making of such decisions.

2.6 Land tenure system

The named tracts that I have described earlier can be conceived of as units of exploitable land. An individual's access to these tracts of land was mediated by two clearly discernible sets of rights which I shall call primary and secondary rights following a terminology developed by Peterson, Keen and Sansom (1977). The hunting and gathering activities of individuals on land to which they had rights of access was also constrained by the custodial rights that certain individuals exercised with respect to each tract.

2.6.1 Primary rights

Primary rights took the form of an inalienable title vested in local groups which I call clans. The tracts owned by particular clans could be aggregated into "estates"; here I follow Stanner's (1965) usage which has gained wider currency than Sharp's (1937) phrase "clan domain" for the same thing. Each clan's title to its estate was justified by a mythological charter. Like most Australian Aborigines, the people of the Edward River reserve believed that at some time in the past, creative beings, sometimes human, sometimes part-human, entered the Edward River environment and travelled about in it performing marvels. In the course of their travels, these beings altered parts of the landscape and sometimes merged into it. They left behind them in many tracts centres of great potency (raak ngaanch) whose powers could be controlled and activated by the succeeding generations of men when they employed the appropriate ritual. These mythical happenings were termed woochorrm in Kuuk Thaayorre.

Each clan identified with a section of the mythic landscape and with the events that took place in it during the creative epoch. The mythic landscape itself was the core of a clan's estate (see Chapter 4). Each clan claimed many woochorm, but one or two were singled out to provide totemic emblems which symbolised the clan's corporate identity and its association with the landscape and by which others could refer to clan members. For example, Watersnake clan derived its totem from what appears to be a relatively minor episode involving the "old woman" (the clan's mythical ancestress) and a watersnake she caught for food. The emblems of the Wallaby/Lightning clan were derived from two major dramatic sequences celebrated in song and dance performance. The first emblem referred to the wallabies speared by the "two brothers". This pair of heroes, whose tracks cut across the lands of many clans, are often referred to simply as pul, "those two". The second emblem referred to an old man's flamboyant revenge upon his two faithless wives and their lovers whom he killed with a lightning storm. No dramatic presentations were associated with the Watersnake clan's emblem. It was only referred to obliquely in a single Watersnake clan song.

Unless other factors were operating (such as a within-clan marriage), clan members referred to each other by kinship terms appropriate to patrilineal descent, even when linkages between the component lineages of a clan could not be genealogically attested. However, the human members of a clan were not regarded as directly descended from the heroic beings of the creative epoch. Clan members were related in the sense that their essential spirits came from the same conception centre, ngok parr'r nerp, situated within the clan estate. These were usually pools or springs where it was held that the spiritual essences of the clan members had been deposited raak kanpa minch, "in the beginning". The conception theory of the Edward River people required that a "baby spirit" or parr'r nerp travel from the pool and enter the body of its prospective mother where it would be nourished as a foetus and ultimately would be born into the world as a human being. That spirit conception had taken

place was revealed by signs to one or other of the parents, either by some extraordinary event occurring on a particular tract, or by a dream which revealed the location of the spirit impregnation (the word for "dream" and "conceive" are the same in Kuuk Thaayorre, pitharr). The place where the spirit conception occurred was important. The finding of a baby spirit on the clan estate conferred clan membership on the unborn child. If the signs revealed that the baby spirit came from an estate other than that of the child's father, the child belonged to that other clan and shared, among other things, in that clan's primary rights to land. Most children's spirits were found within the estates of their fathers. Therefore it is only in a statistical sense that clans could be regarded as patrilineal descent groups. The basic ideology underlying the formation of clans was that of spirit conception, or to use Maddock's (1982:37) term; conception filiation.

Personal names provided a further public link between individuals, their clans and their woochorrm. A child, not long after its birth, had bestowed on it by its father a personal name that was drawn from a fund of names commonly used by clan members. Occasionally a father might "dream" a new name to bestow on the child, but in any event the name itself signified some aspect of event, place or person connected with the clan woochorrm.

Clan members had the duties to preserve and transmit the woochorrm, and to perform, in due season, the appropriate rituals of initiation, increase and celebration connected with the mythic landscape of the estate. These duties will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter 4.

2.6.2 Stewardship

While the ownership of the estate as a whole was invested in the clan, the right to control access to particular tracts and their resources was distributed among individual male and female members of a clan. Sharp (1937) called the people who exercised such rights the "owners" of the tracts. I will refer to them as "stewards", because that term, to my

mind, separates more clearly the essentially conservative functions performed by them from the notion of clan ownership as a whole. The primary role of the stewards was directed towards regulating the rate of exploitation of resources within the tracts which had been placed in their trust. It was their prerogative to decide who could enter (and who should leave) their tracts, and when and what kinds of resources could be exploited by others. Their control related especially to static food resources and raw materials. They acted as conveners for tasks that required the cooperation of many people such as grass burning, weir fishing, turtle gathering, fish drives and so forth. A tract could be under the stewardship of a single person or several clan members collectively. In the case of joint stewardship, the eldest of the stewards exercised final authority towards others and normally took the initiative in providing sanctions in the event of trespass.

According to Sharp (1937), what I term stewardship was conveyed or achieved in five ways:

1. By spirit conception. The convention was that a newborn child shared in the stewardship of the tract in which its baby spirit was said to have been found by one or other of the child's parents. This meant that everyone had stewardship responsibilities over at least one tract.
2. By inheritance. When a person died, his or her stewardships passed to the next senior member of the same lineage who was also of the same sex and clan. Stewardships could not pass to any member of a patriline who, by virtue of his or her spirit conception, belonged to some other clan.
3. By gift. A steward could transfer the stewardship of a tract to another member of his lineage and clan or to a non-lineage clan member. Stewardships could not be transferred in this

fashion between members of different clans.

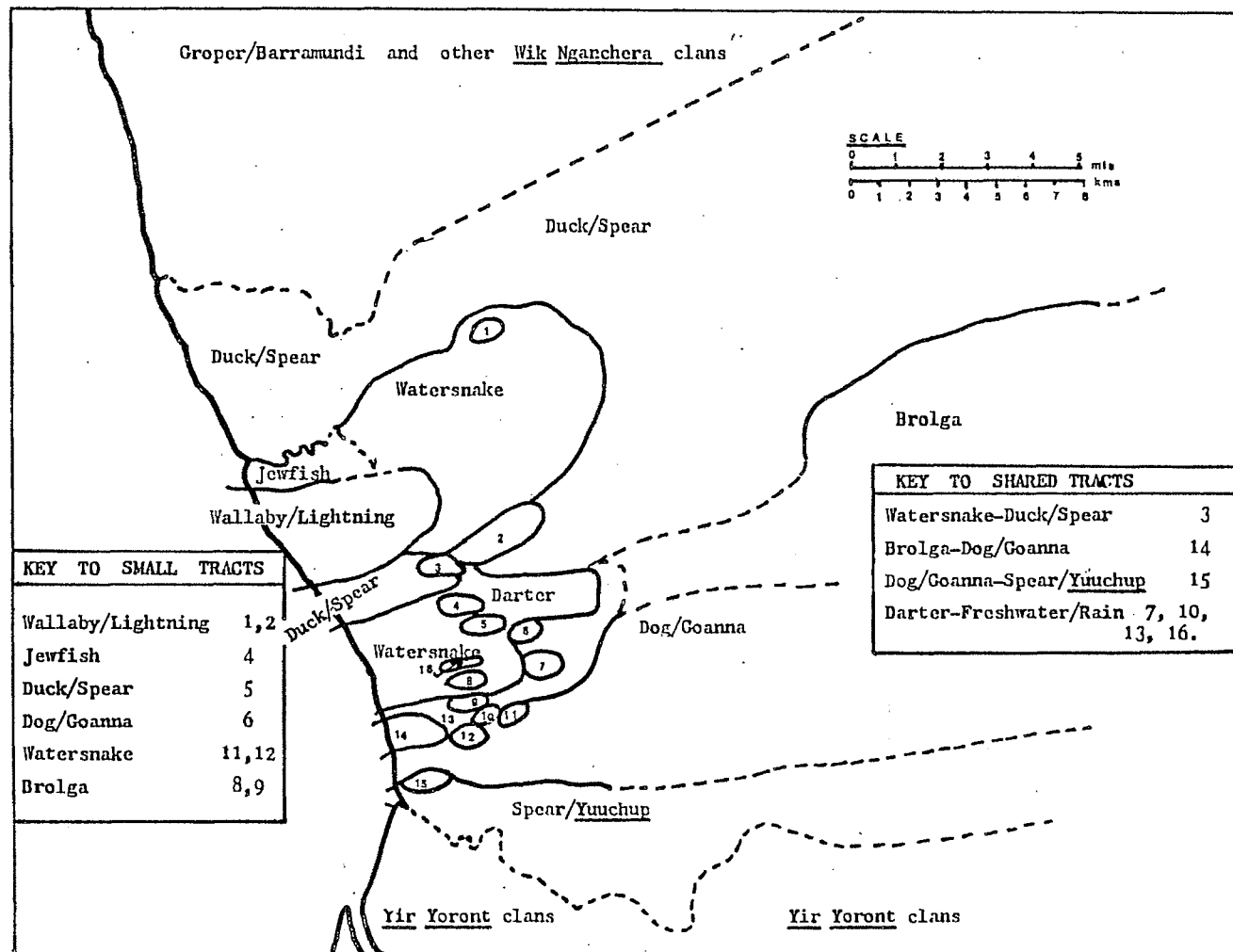
4. By personal name association. When a child was given a personal name that was directly associated with particular tracts as designated in the woochorrm, stewardship of those tracts was also conferred.
5. By ritual role. When a person succeeded to the role of custodian and convenor for a particular ritual or ceremony, stewardship over the tracts associated with the ceremony was also acquired by the newly installed incumbent.

During his fieldwork period, Sharp (1937) could find no example of co-stewards contesting the transfer of rights in tracts of land through any of the regular modes. The newborn received their stewardship rights without question from senior co-stewards.

2.6.3 Clan estates

The named tracts belonging to particular clans tended to be contiguous so that it was possible to draw lines around the boundaries of clan estates. Map 2.3 shows the location and extent of Kuuk Thaayorre estates as they were determined during my mapping expeditions. The solid lines on the map represent the real boundaries between estates and are based on actual inspection. The broken lines represent boundaries determined by informant's descriptions and casual visits. Only part of the total Kuuk Thaayorre domain has been mapped. Those sections not yet mapped in their entirety belong to Duck/Spear, Brolga, Dog/Goanna and Spear/Yuuchup clans.

It will be noted that not all of a clan's tracts were contiguous. Some were surrounded by tracts belonging to other clans. Thus, while the bulk of Wallaby/Lightning tracts lay in a contiguous patch just below the Chapman River



Map 2.3 Kuuk Thaayorre clan estates, Edward River.

on the coastal ridges, the clan also owned several tracts at some distance from their main estate. Kumunthaatarr (No. 1, Map 2.3) lay along a section of Station creek in the midst of Watersnake territory. During the "sun-hot time", the creek's shallows were systematically poisoned for their fish. This was the only piece of country where the Wallaby/Lightning clan could carry out fish poisoning. They also owned Pungkpiila, a tract lying on inland ridge country with late season Eleocharis beds nearby, and its neighbouring tract Thaawathkeycher, a stretch of saltpan and grass plain country that had a wet season fish trap site (No. 2, Map 2.3).

The bulk of the Brolga clan estate lay in a strip that extended along the coastal plains and into the open forest country. However, Brolga clan also owned a rich tract of coastal ridge country, Korngkun, that was capable of being camped in during all seasons and having an abundance of wallaby, wet season rootstocks, Eleocharis and yams. It was only a short distance from the beach and the resources of the littoral (No. 8, Map 2.3). The clan also owned another small tract, Matpi (No. 9, Map 2.3), a little to the south whose principal resources were round and long yams. On the beach front, they shared two neighbouring tracts with the Dog/Goanna clan, Pokethan and Kurp-thutman (No. 14, Map 2.3). The mudflats and shoreline mangrove stands of these tracts provided reliable crabbing and fishing. Pokethan also had a well and useful stands of the "small-leaved" spear-haft tree, yuk meno (Hibiscus sp.).

It would seem that the existence of such tracts lying outside the main portions of a clan's estate provided a certain amount of indisputable access to resources that might not occur elsewhere in the estate.

Given the strength of clan dogma concerning the transmission of land, it was surprising to find that a small number of tracts, comprising 3% of the total studied, were owned jointly by the members of two clans. How this situation arose is difficult to say. The following example may provide some insight into how such things might have come about in irregular ways. The example refers to land regarded properly

as belonging to the surviving members of the Darter clan, but which in the pre-settlement period came under the control of a Yir Yoront man.

Field Case No. 1

By all accounts, Yomantin was something of a villain. He belonged to a Yir Yoront clan, Storm, whose estate lay mainly in the pocket formed by the Melaman and Coleman Rivers. His first wife, M. B., belonged to the Darter clan which, in 1933, had no male members. Yomantin habitually camped in his wife's country and when she died he married a widow from the neighbouring Dog/Goanna clan. She too died. Yomantin then, using powerful love magic, seduced B. B., a Dog/Goanna clanswoman, and she went to live with him. This was considered to be an especially wrong liaison since Yomantin's second wife had been B. B.'s close classificatory mother. Nonetheless, Yomantin, by force of personality, weathered adverse public opinion. Moreover, he asserted stewardship control over his first wife's country and maintained it, according to my informants, by threatening to spear anyone who attempted to displace him. This he could do apparently because there was no male member of the Darter clan to challenge him. In 1973, four tracts of land were regarded as belonging to Yomantin and his son by B. B., E. B.: Wangkulman (No. 13, Map 2.3), Werrkerrkerran (No. 16, Map 2.3), Kunpungkan (No. 10, Map 2.3) and Minhman (No. 7, Map 2.3).

(Taylor field notes)

One thing that is quite apparent in Map 2.3 is the great variability in the size of clan estates. Table 2.2 compares the composition of Kuuk Thaayorre clans in 1933 with the size of their estates. The table is incomplete because no information could be recovered from Sharp's genealogies concerning the Spear/Yuuchup clan which my genealogies suggest contained a single lineage. The data in the table reveal a moderately strong association between the size of the clan and the size of the clan estate (Pearson's $r=.616$). Caution must be exercised in interpreting such a statistic.

The number of clans is small and in no sense do they constitute a probability sample. But had they been randomly selected, the correlation coefficient would have been significant at the .05 level. It is difficult to explain how such an association between size of clan and size of clan estate might have come about. Clans were quite vulnerable to demographic fluctuations. In 1933 at least two clans, Darter and Jewfish, seemed likely to disappear altogether because there were no male children. As I noted earlier, clan membership could be regarded as statistically patrilineal.

Clan	No. of males	No. of females	Total clan population	Estimated area of estate (km ²)	Percentage area of total homelands
Spear/ <u>Yuuchup</u>	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	76.9	9.7
Dog/Goanna	7	9	16	147.6	18.7
Darter	1	4	5	9.3	1.2
Wallaby/Lightning	10	8	18	19.4	2.4
Jewfish	3	6	9	6.7	0.9
Brolga	4	7	11	139.9	17.7
Watersnake	14	13	27	76.7	9.7
Duck/Spear	20	8	28	313.6	39.7
Average size of estate, 88.9 km ²					
Average size of clan, 16.3 persons					

Table 2.2 Composition of Kuuk Thaayorre clans and size of estates, Edward River reserve, 1933.

Sharp (1937:249) found that several Yir Yoront clans had apparently become extinct. The extinction of clans obviously poses problems for succession to primary rights. According to Sharp, when a clan became extinct, its tracts then passed from its last stewards to members of a

neighbouring clan with whom a connection existed in the woochorrm and who were referred to in classificatory kinship usage by terms appropriate to patrilineal descent. The recipients of the transfer not only exercised the usual stewardship controls over resources but also assumed responsibility for carrying out the ceremonial and ritual duties performed by the deceased clansmen.

In theory it seems possible that the membership of a clan whose numbers were declining could be augmented via spirit conception. That is, if parents-to-be found their babies' spirits on the tracts of a declining clan then those children would belong to the declining clan. This is a mechanism that operates elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia (Peterson, Keen and Sansom 1977). The finding of baby spirits outside of father's clan lands was a relatively rare occurrence among the Aborigines of the Edward River reserve, and of all the cases recorded by Sharp and myself, none of them could be interpreted as being inspired by a desire to build up a declining clan.

Equally, clans could expand in numbers as well as decline. When this happened there was no culturally articulated way a growing clan could annex for itself tracts of its neighbouring clans except in the unlikely case that a neighbour clan became extinct and the expanding clan complied with the conditions for taking over. In truth, there was no need for such a mechanism. In the ideology of traditional ownership, the size of the estate and the size of the clan were independent of each other. The balance between population and resources was achieved through secondary rights of access.

2.6.4 Secondary rights

Primary rights gave ownership in perpetuity and vested in individual clan members control over land usage. The amount of land to which an individual had access through primary rights was relatively small. Nearly half of the 1933 Kuuk Thaayorre population had primary rights to small coastal estates only. Given the strategies that had been

developed for exploiting the environment, it would appear that many would be disadvantaged if primary rights of access were all that they had available to them. Indeed, Sharp (1958:4) argues that for their survival needs, all individuals required access to more or different kinds of land than that controlled by their clans. Access to other tracts and their resources was achieved through a set of rights of usage based on close consanguineal and affinal links. Thus, in addition to undisputed access to tracts for which they held primary rights, individuals also had access, subject as always to stewardship control, to the tracts over which a group of kin comprising grandparents, mother and mother's siblings, spouse/s, parents-in-law and children's spouses had primary rights. For completeness it should be mentioned that rights of access could be extended by invitation to non-local groups travelling the countryside en route to ceremonies or to mission stations and pastoral properties. These rights were temporary and their conferral was accompanied by a fire presentation ceremony (e.g. see Thomson 1932). These additional means of access make up the set of secondary rights to land. They greatly increased the number and diversity of tracts to which a person could resort during his/her lifetime. Secondary rights could not be transmitted to others. Because of the mode of acquisition few people ever shared exactly the same set of tracts to which they had secondary rights.

Secondary rights of access through affinal links were critically important for the smaller clans. The estates of Jewfish, Darter and Wallaby/Lightning clans were none of them greater than 25 km². Of 30 marriages that had been contracted by the members of these clans, only three of them occurred within the Jewfish, Darter, Wallaby/Lightning group. The rest (90%) were contracted with members of clans that possessed larger estates. In essence these marriages provided links for the clan members with smaller estates to the resources of the larger estates.

The pattern of marriage alliances between clans not only determined secondary rights of access to land, it also shaped the composition of co-residential groups. I have presented the pattern of marriages between the Kuuk Thaayorre

clans and their neighbours in Figure 2.11. The circles, which represent the clans, are drawn roughly according to the geographical location and the approximate size of the clan's estates. Each line represents a woman given in marriage from one clan to another with an arrowhead pointing to the recipient clan. In effect, the number of marriages between clans is an index of the strength of the ties between them. The information presented in Figure 2.11 is drawn from Sharp's genealogies and represents a picture of marriage arrangements between clans as at 1933. Unfortunately data on the Kuuk Thaayorre Spear/Yuuchup clan were not collected. Despite this omission, general patterns emerge clearly enough.

The seven Kuuk Thaayorre clans of Figure 2.11 form a relatively tight inter-marrying group that included one Wik Nganchera clan (Groper/Barramundi) and two Yir Yoront clans (Spear and Freshwater/Rain). Of the total of 75 marriages recorded, only 13 fell outside the ambit of these 10 clans. Five women were sent to or received from Wik Nganchera clans to the north and eight women were sent to or received from other Yir Yoront clans to the south. While there was some reciprocal exchange between clans, the dominating pattern was one of cyclical exchange. For example, the men of the Wallaby/Lightning clan obtained most of their wives from Spear/Duck clan. In turn, Wallaby/Lightning clan supplied women for the men of Darter and Watersnake clans. The Spear/Duck clan received most of its women from Jewfish and Watersnake clans and one from each of Brolga and Darter clans and one from a Wik Nganchera clan to the north.

The cyclical pattern of marriage exchanges was the result, partly, of the marriage rule that stated that a man should marry his mother's younger brother's daughter, or someone classified as such. Theoretically (cf. Lévi Strauss 1949), we might expect a pattern of permanent asymmetric alliances between clans to emerge from this sort of marriage rule. However, more is involved than this. Firstly, it should be made clear that to speak of "clans exchanging women" is an artefact of the analysis of the pattern of exchanges. At the level of Kuuk Thaayorre ideology, lineages were the real units of exogamy and decisions regarding marriage

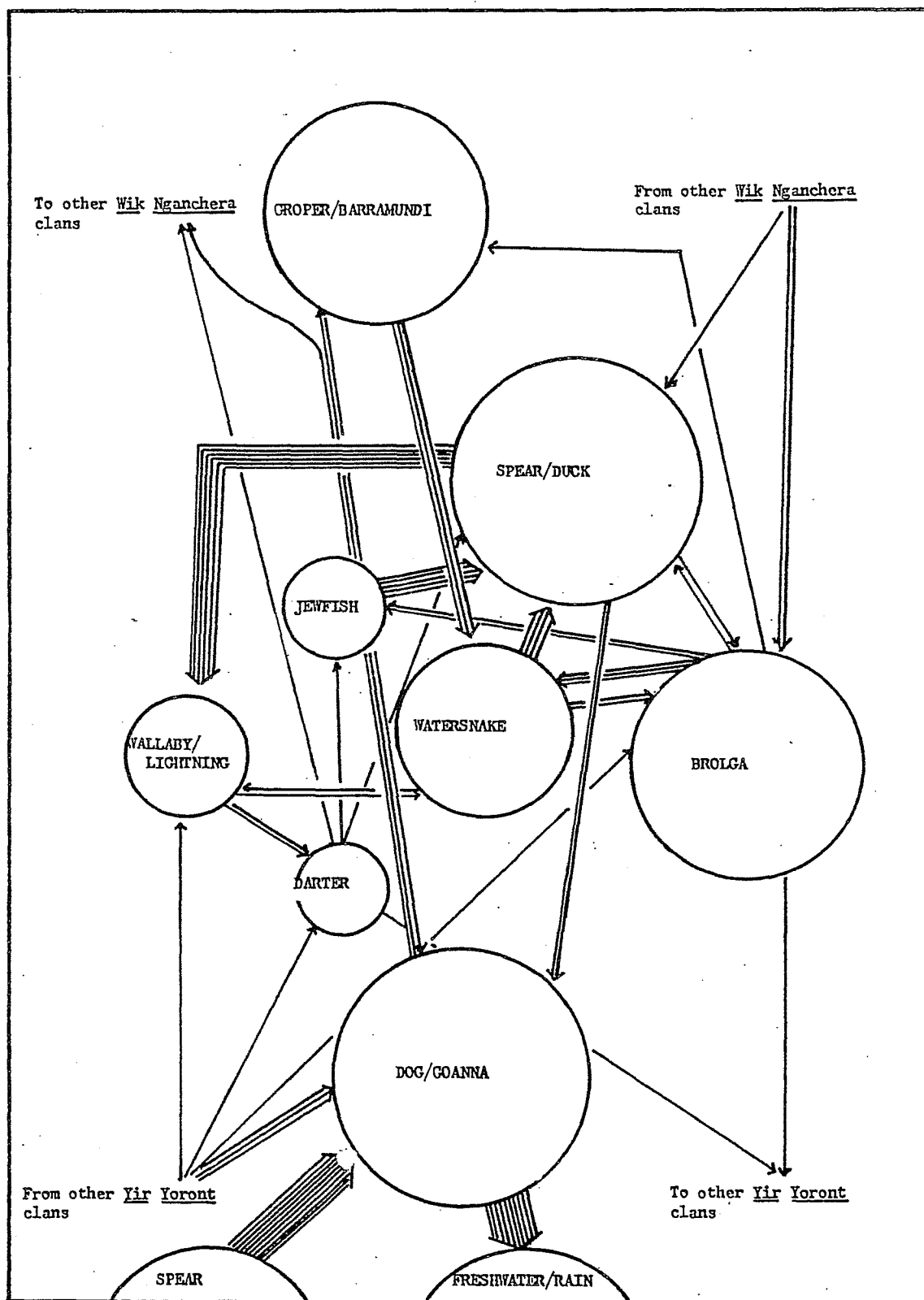


Figure 2.11 Marriage alliances between Kuuk Thaayorre clans and their neighbours, Edward River reserve, 1933 (information on Spear/Yuuchup clan not available).

arrangements were the prerogative of genealogically specified individuals rather than clan or lineage members. In addition to the rule, the pattern was also a result of a preference for marrying among close neighbours. This preference was frequently cited in defence of marriages contracted between partners other than the ones proscribed by the marriage rule.

The existence of primary and secondary rights determined the range over which individuals and their associated hearthgroups could forage and hunt. Of the situation in 1933, Sharp (1937:28) said:

Ego is publicly recognised as being formally related to the various countries of his range either directly or indirectly by the strongest and most definite clan and kinship associations; a country with which he cannot establish such clear-cut formal ties is not included in his range. The native is no cosmopolitan globetrotter and his wanderings are limited.

2.7 Local group composition

In his published work, Sharp took pains to point out that among the Yir Yoront (Sharp 1934a:31) and the Kuuk Thaayorre (Sharp 1958:2), the concept of the horde as a patrilocal band exploiting the estate of its patrilineally related core members (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1930:35) was not a relevant entity in the determination of the ranges of individuals and hearthgroups. Nor was it appropriate to explain with whom individuals and hearthgroups might camp and cooperate. Birdsell (1970:129) has challenged Sharp's insistence on the lack of hordes among the Yir Yoront, arguing that real local group integrity had probably disappeared before Sharp arrived in the area. Birdsell's critique, it seems to me, is mistaken, for there is little evidence to support the view of disintegration of the land tenure system. Sharp's description of the land tenure system of the Yir Yoront and Kuuk Thaayorre is logically coherent and self-consistent. It adequately generates the actual patterns of land usage. My own reconstruction for the general land tenure system

on the reserve agrees in all substantial respects with Sharp's description.

On the other hand, given the demographic fluctuations in the size of clans together with the actual disposition of clan estates within the local groups of the Edward River reserve, a model of resource exploitation based on the horde (or some version of it) would have constrained groups of people to their own estates, many of which were totally inadequate for even a meagre year-round subsistence. The system described here contained the necessary flexibility to distribute people over the landscape in a way that made more ecological sense within the framework of their extractive technology and knowledge of the environment.

For each tract there was a set of people who could exploit its resources. It was composed of those who had primary rights over the tract as stewards and clansmen and those who had secondary rights by virtue of their close blood and marriage ties with those who had primary rights. Together, this set of people formed the "company" for the tract. The word "company" is one used by the Edward River people themselves. When an informant referred to a tract in which he had no primary rights, he would name the owners or "bosses" (i.e. the stewards) and other clan members and then add the phrase "...but we all company together" and name the non-clan people who had rights in the tract. By the phrase "all company" he would mean all those people who had rights to the tract by descent or affiliation and who were the actual or potential users of it.

The set of people with whom a person could expect to camp throughout the year and to share joint tasks in foraging and hunting was a loosely organised group, the summation of all those who had primary and secondary rights of access to the tracts that formed the range of that person. Just as it was rare for two individuals to share the same cluster of tracts in their range, so it was rare for people to share exactly the same set of individuals and hearthgroups with whom to camp and cooperate. However, the existence of marriage alliances between clans did mean that members of particular clans had many overlapping members in their

"companies".

While rights of access determined where people could go, other factors, both personal and socio-cultural, influenced the actual decisions people made about where they would go. Personal factors included such things as preferred kinds of foods and preferred companions. People usually sought to avoid those with whom they were in dispute and preferred to camp with their intimate associates. Distance, age and degree of physical exertion necessary to work particular tracts were also important in decision-making. Thus, older people tended not to make the arduous journey into the forest country during the "sun-hot" time, but rather remained on the ridge country along the coast. Socio-cultural factors mainly included ritual and mortuary prohibitions placed on the use of tracts. These latter factors will be discussed in the appropriate chapters.

CHAPTER 3 KINSHIP, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

3.1 Kinship studies on western Cape York Peninsula

The purpose of this chapter is to show how an individual in pre-settlement times conceptualised his or her social world and acted within it. Like all Australian Aboriginal social systems, the patterns of interaction between individuals were generated by codes of conduct articulated primarily in an idiom based on kinship. In using the term "kinship" rather than "relationship terms" or "social categories", I am taking a particular stance on the meaning of Aboriginal kinship terminologies. I will explain this stance in a later section (see pp. 185-7). However, the primary orientation is social-structural rather than formal-semantic (cf. Scheffler 1978:3). It seeks to show how individuals identified and labelled others and to describe the principles underlying the allocation of rights and duties among particular sets of those labelled as kin by individuals.

I noted in Chapter 1 the Edward River reserve contained many Aboriginal languages. Each language, and even some of the dialects, possessed a distinctive lexicon of kin nomenclature. Researchers and Aborigines alike have asserted or implied a family resemblance inherent in the various systems of kin terminologies and their usages. The exact nature of the resemblances has never been very clear.

Two of the pre-settlement kinship systems in the study area have been described in some detail in the literature, the Yir Yoront by Sharp (1934a, 1937, 1958) and the Wik Mungkan by McConnel (1934, 1939, 1940, 1950) and Thomson (1935, 1936a, 1946, 1955). Both sets of information, all or in part, have been subsequently used as material for comparative studies on the nature of marriage systems (Homans and Schneider 1955, Needham 1962b, Lévi-Strauss 1969) and systems of Aboriginal kin classification (Scheffler 1978). The material has also been a source of debate and controversy (Needham 1962b, 1963, 1965, McKnight 1971, Scheffler 1972).

It is appropriate at this point to review briefly the issues that have arisen in the wake of the early descriptions, because they have a general relevance to the kinship systems of the western side of Cape York Peninsula and because they provide a context against which the nature and purposes of the present analysis can be assessed.

3.1.1 McConnel

In her general survey of the social organisation of the tribes of Cape York Peninsula, McConnel (1939) argued that many of the tribes, including the Yir Yoront and the Kuuk Thaayorre, observed a rule of unilateral cross-cousin marriage. She was especially adamant that the Wik Mungkan, among whom she had spent much time in the field, practised this form of marriage. In this respect she characterised the Wik Mungkan as similar to the Murngin, Karadjeri, Yir Yoront and Kandyu. This interpretation of the Wik Mungkan marriage rules differed from Radcliffe-Brown's earlier (1930) characterisation of them as a special variant of the Karia system. McConnel argued that not only did the Wik Mungkan practise matrilineal marriage, but they also engaged in what she called "junior marriage". This involved among other things, the terminological recognition of six lines of descent, the recognition of "age lines" coinciding with descent lines, and the marriage of male and female siblings in opposite directions. Males married their MBDs or their classificatory equivalents in younger age-descent lines while the females married their FZSs or their classificatory equivalents in older age-descent lines.

While McConnel's description of the Wik Mungkan was accepted pretty much as it stood in the comparative accounts of Lévi-Strauss (1969) and Homans and Schneider (1955), Needham (1962b) disagreed quite vigorously with her interpretation. He presented a very damaging critique of McConnel's description and offered a fresh interpretation of the materials, while at the same time confessing to a sense of uneasiness about criticising the work of a deceased anthropologist who could not offer a rebuttal.

3.1.2 Needham

Needham's central point revolved around the nature of Wik Mungkan kinship terminology. The system of kin nomenclature simply did not have the characteristics typical of reliably reported asymmetric or matrilineal marriage systems. There ought to have been at least three lines of descent recognised in the terminology marking the difference between Ego's patriline, the patriline to which women were given and the patriline from whom women were received. Needham could only find two lines of descent. McConnel's six lines of descent, her notions of "junior marriage", and the concomitant terms such as "direction", "up", "down" and "spiral", Needham argued, were largely reified constructs proceeding from McConnel's presentation of kinship diagrams rather than "...renderings or explications of Wikmungan social ideas" (Needham 1962b:239). Further, Needham took McConnel to task for failing to provide sufficient relevant information for a study of social organisation, for making very large and consequential statements on inadequate evidence and for failing to exploit appropriately what empirical evidence there was. He then offered his own interpretation of Wik Mungkan society which, despite the scantiness of data, he felt was truer to the native ideology.

According to Needham (p.224), the Wik Mungkan kinship terminology suggested that the social organisation of that society was based "...on symmetric alliance, marriages being contracted by direct exchange", rather than being based on asymmetric generalised exchange as Lévi-Strauss had typified it when he uncritically accepted McConnel's depiction. Needham arranged the kin terms into a table of Wik Mungkan categories of social classification which, he argued, clearly revealed the nature of the society. It was a two-section system composed of "kin" on the one hand and "affines" on the other, formally allied by the prescriptive prestation of women by direct exchange. Needham felt that McConnel had unconsciously projected her own society's cognatic structures into those of the Wik Mungkan and thus had failed to recognise what he regarded as the basic categories of a lineal

descent system. She had, so his argument ran, elevated what was in essence merely a matrilinear preference into a fundamental principle for the organisation of Wik Mungkan society. Needham identified the local descent groups or clans as the basic exchange units involved in the alliances because they exercised a corporate claim on the widows of deceased members and assumed the responsibility for supplying a wife when a clan member who initiated a marriage exchange could not supply a wife. Further, Needham conducted an analysis of marriage alliances between Wik Mungkan clans based on McConnel's data which revealed patterns entirely consistent with exogamous moieties, even if their existence was not specifically recognised by the Wik Mungkan.

Needham examined other aspects of Wik Mungkan culture to demonstrate that their general principles of symbolic classification were characteristically dualistic and thus concordant with a two section system. In his concluding remarks, Needham (1962b:259) urged the necessity of trying to apprehend lineal descent societies like the Wik Mungkan through their systems:

...of social categories conceived as the classification which they in fact compose. The moment we reduce this to the triviality of 'kinship', conceiving it genealogically and in an individual and familial context, we have miscast the indigenous ideology, which it must be our first and continuing concern to understand, in a form which may well defy true recognition. (italics Needham's).

Needham concluded that the examination of other so-called unilateral marriage systems in north-eastern Australia would probably also reveal symmetrical exchange systems and dual structure, because of the failure of anthropologists "...to distinguish genealogy and category" (p. 126).

3.1.3 McKnight

A further commentary on the Wik Mungkan was provided by McKnight (1971) who spent ten days among them in 1968.

He was familiar with the arguments about the Wik Mungkan up to that time, and having copies of McConnel's articles on hand, he attempted to clear up some of the ambiguities in McConnel's accounts and to augment the paucity of field observations.

In the first section of his paper he reviewed McConnel's analysis and kinship models and agreed with Needham that she had failed to distinguish between genealogical and classificatory relationships. She had extended a taboo concerning the marriage of a male to an actual FZD to embrace the entire class of women into which actual FZDs were classificatorily subsumed. Consequently, in her diagrammatic representations of the nature of the marriage system she was led astray by her attempt to represent actual and classificatory relationships at one and the same time. McKnight offered a fresh kinship chart whose purpose was to show how kinship categories (not genealogically defined kin) were "linked by marriage" (1971:155). His chart, which was constructed around two descent lines rather than the six McConnel had postulated, also cleared up some ambiguities in the field data concerning Wik Mungkan kin nomenclature.

In considering the Wik Mungkan marriage system, McKnight turned firstly to the question of exogamous moieties. Here both Thomson and McConnel had offered confusing and contradictory statements about their existence among the Wik Mungkan. McKnight determined that there were no named entities that corresponded with moieties, nor did the notion of moiety organisation figure in discussions of marriage arrangements. He suggested that there may have been unnamed patrilineal moieties, but he did not elaborate on how he came to this conclusion or on the possible functions of such entities. He noted the various descriptions of the marriage rule said to be operating among the Wik Mungkan. McConnel (1934, 1939, 1940, 1950) had claimed the rule was a matrilateral cross-cousin type; Thomson (1955) had said it was a second-cousin type; Needham's (1962b) re-analysis suggested a bilateral cross-cousin marriage rule; Lévi-Strauss (1969) had argued for two forms of marriage -- one patrilateral, the other matrilateral -- together with a gradual transition from

generalised exchange to restricted exchange. McKnight's informants justified the Needham interpretation by stating that a classificatory cross-cousin was the proper marriage partner.

In the fourth section of his paper McKnight presented additional information concerning the patterns of behaviour between Ego and certain kin, actual and classificatory. In the final sections of his paper he used these data to refute certain theories of Homans and Schneider (1955) and Lévi-Strauss (1969). This refutation does not concern me here. What he said about the distinctions between actual and classificatory kin and the role of kin in marriage arrangements is, however, pertinent to this thesis.

The Wik Mungkan made a distinction between their own family members and others whom they addressed by kinship labels. The family was called kampan and although McKnight did not precisely describe how it was constituted, the kampan seems to have been composed of close consanguines and affines. McKnight noted general differences in behaviour between kampan members and other "relatives". Behaviour varied in such things as the language of address, food sharing patterns, the application of pollution taboos and the degree of familiarity or constraint exhibited in a relationship. McKnight (1971:164) observed that the classificatory relationship often magnified the degree of familiarity or constraint that existed in a kampan relationship:

Thus if the accent is on reserve and deference with an actual kin or relation, it is even more so in the classificatory relationship. If the actual relationship is one of warmth and friendliness, and allows humour, so to a greater extent is this the case with the classificatory relationship.

It is clear from McKnight's table of behaviour patterns between Ego and MB+ and MB- (p. 165) that kampan members had moral, ritual and jural responsibilities towards Ego, not possessed by their classificatory namesakes. Kampan members had roles to play in Ego's marriage arrangements, in disciplining Ego, in responsibility for Ego in disputes, in sharing

and borrowing material possessions and in Ego's mortuary ritual.

Although McKnight (1971:162) viewed Wik Mungkan patriclans as the units involved in marriage exchange, his presentation of a disputed marriage arrangement stressed the importance of maternal kin (specifically M and MB+) over patrilineal kin (specifically F) in deciding marriage destinies. Too close a relationship between prospective marriage partners was cited as a principal reason to forbid marriages (1971:166 and 170-1). Marriages outside the appropriate cross-cousin class could take place, albeit with some opposition to them. The opposition varied. The marriage of a man to a "DD" would encounter fewer problems than a man's proposal to marry a "SD".

3.1.4 Scheffler

Scheffler provided two further contributions to the debate. In the first of these (Scheffler 1972) he presented some additional data from Thomson's unpublished field notes and manuscripts on the Wik Mungkan, Yir Yoront and other Cape York Peninsula kinship systems. He attempted to reconcile some of the conflicting accounts and offered a partial structural-semantic analysis of Wik Mungkan and Ompela kinship terms. In addition, he supplied some fresh materials on the Wik Nganchera kin terminology and usage which he had collected himself.

Scheffler's view of the nature of unilineal descent and prescriptive alliance systems differs radically from Needham's (Scheffler 1973). Scheffler argued that Needham himself had seriously miscast Wik Mungkan ideology by assuming that their kinship terms were monosemic. That is to say, Needham asserted that Wik Mungkan kinship terms had only one kind of meaning and that was one of social classification. Individuals were ascribed to social relationship categories in terms of social status connotations and interclan alliances. In fact, said Scheffler, Thomson's data clearly underscored the polysemic nature of Aboriginal kinship systems. Scheffler argues that Aboriginal kinship terms have more than one sense; they designate more than a single category.

According to Scheffler, when appropriate formal semantic analysis is undertaken, each term can be seen as having a structurally primary and specific sense, together with a derivative, expanded or broader sense (or set of senses). Furthermore, they are essentially systems of egocentric relations of genealogical connection in which terms for primary kin are extended to cover more distant relations and others to whom no genealogical connection can be traced. Those who espouse the "social categories" argument (e.g. Beattie 1958, Leach 1958, Needham (1962b) gloss over the complex structure and polysemy of kinship terms and thereby lose the means of specifying "...how the jural statuses are allocated" (Scheffler 1978:33).

In the analysis of kinship terms, Scheffler argued the necessity for keeping the structural-semantic analysis of kin terms (which attempts to provide rules by which individuals are assigned kin class membership) distinct from the social-structural analysis of kin terms (which should attempt to describe the ways in which rights, duties, privileges and obligations are distributed over classes of kin). Scheffler's own predilection lies in the formal semantic mode where he (1978:ix) attempts:

...to isolate a set of elementary structures of which, in varying combinations, all kinship positions are constructed, and to order the empirical diversity among these systems by showing how any one may be derived from any other by certain rules of transformation or permutation.

Scheffler's 1978 publication was an impressive formal semantic study of Australian classificatory kinship systems. In an attempt to construct a satisfactory set of genealogical equivalence rules to account for the extension of Yir Yoront primary kin terms to more distant relatives, he combed both Sharp's and Thomson's published studies and field notes. There is little point here in traversing Scheffler's detailed minutiae concerning the Yir Yoront, Wik Mungkan and Wik Nganchera kinship systems. It is, however, pertinent to summarise the difficulties he encountered in his attempt to come

to terms with the ethnographic materials, because they bear directly on what ought to be included in an adequate ethnographic account of a Cape York Peninsula kinship system (see below, p. 105).

In the Wik Mungkan data he found confused and contradictory statements concerning the application of cross-cousin terms and marriage taboos and insufficient information about the principal parties involved in bestowal arrangements and the extent to which the exercise of marital claims was a matter for families or a function of clans. He suspected, too, that there were serious blanks in the record with respect to the rules underlying the designation of marriage partners. His own explorations of Wik Nganchera spouse designation rules suggested a more complex system than had so far been described. Both Sharp's and Thomson's genealogical materials showed that unions outside the "orthodox" rules occurred regularly and these often required adjustment of kinship terms. From an individual's point of view it was possible for people to be moved between kinship categories. Clearly a complete description of how kin labels were applied in all circumstances was missing from earlier accounts, and, in the case of the Yir Yoront, Scheffler found himself unable to specify an adequate spouse equation rule without knowing "...how in-laws are classified in the event of an irregular or wrong marriage" (1978:280). Scheffler also suspected that vocative and referential kin usages were confounded in the accounts and that generally more research was needed to solve these difficulties.

3.1.5 Outstanding issues

Scheffler's appraisal of the Yir Yoront data and of the debate on the Wik Mungkan materials has drawn attention to the descriptive inadequacies of the earlier accounts of McConnel, Sharp and Thomson, at least insofar as they relate to present day theoretical concerns. In any further account of the nature of western Cape York Peninsula kinship, the following substantive issues stand in need of further

clarification:

1. the nature of the rules of marriage and the meanings to be attached to terms such as "preference" and "prescription", "right" or "orthodox" versus "wrong" or "irregular" marriages;
2. the main actors or units involved in marriage exchanges;
3. the nature of the rules for distinguishing between actual and classificatory kin, i.e. the polysemic nature of Aboriginal classificatory kin terms;
4. the way in which jural statuses are allocated across various actual and classificatory kin;
5. the rules underlying the apparent adjustment of kin terms;
6. the existence of moieties.

The following description of pre-settlement kinship, family and marriage seeks to provide as complete a picture as possible of how the system worked. The account is grounded largely in material elicited from, or observed in connection with, informants who were at least in their teens at the time of the formation of the settlement and who could be said to have been continuously applying their systems of kin classification and their role entailment within the settlement ever since. I should make clear at the outset that there have been changes in the nature and content of kin-determined behaviours since settlement. These changes could be articulated by informants and compared by them with "old custom". Such changes will be dealt with in Chapter 8.

3.2 Kinship terminologies on the Edward River reserve

The purpose of this section is to describe the general principles underlying the application of kinship terms in the pre-contact systems of kin terminology.

There are two complementary methods for eliciting kin terms. One may ask how terms are distributed over kintypes or one may ask how an individual distributes kin labels over the members of his or her community. Both methods were used in this study.

3.2.1 Vocative terminology and real kin

To elicit how kin terms are distributed over kintypes, one usually asks a question of the form: "What, in your language, do you call your [.....]?" The slot is filled with an appropriate relationship term or kintype such as father, father's brother, mother, son etc.. The reciprocal term is obtained by asking: "What, in your language, does [.....] call you?", then substituting the first elicited term in the slot. When responding to questions in this form, my informants invariably tendered the vocative terminology. That is, they supplied the term of address used when speaking directly to a person. The labels supplied even included terms for people between whom a speech taboo existed as, for example, between a man and his FZD or his WM. The number of kintypes that can unambiguously be grouped under relationship terms in this way is limited. The form of the question, "What do you call your [.....]?" by employing the second person pronoun, encourages respondents, I suspect, to think of specific individuals rather than abstract kintypes. Genealogical memory was short. Few of my informants could recall ancestors beyond the second ascending generation nor could they describe what FFF should be called. It was equally difficult to obtain kin terms for the third descending generation.

Table 3.1 shows the distribution of kin terms over kintypes in Yir Yoront, Kuuk Thaayorre, Kuuk Yak (a dialect of Kuuk Thaayorre) and Wik Uwan. They are all classificatory

Yir Yoront		Kuuk Thaayorre (Kuuk Yak)		Wik Uwanh	
Term	Kintypes	Term	Kintypes	Term	Kintypes
<u>pan</u> :	FF, FFB, B-, FFZ, FZ-	<u>puumin</u> (<u>puumin</u>):	FF, FFB, B-	<u>ngathake</u> :	FF, FFB, B-
		<u>wiln</u> (<u>panin</u>):	FFZ, Z-	<u>ngathule</u> :	FFZ, Z-
<u>ping</u> :	F, FB	<u>nganhin</u> (<u>nganhin</u>):	F, FB	<u>pibi</u> :	FB+
				<u>ngaychi</u> :	F, FB-
<u>pemer</u> :	FZ, MFZD	<u>pinharr</u> (<u>pinharr</u>):	FZ, MFZD	<u>ngathinye</u> :	FZ, MFZD
<u>pula</u> :	B+, δ SS, BSS, FBS	<u>waanhin</u> (<u>waanhin</u>):	B+, δ SS, BSS, FBS	<u>ngathunye</u> :	B+, δ SS, BSS, FBS
<u>luana</u> :	Z+, δ SD, BSD	<u>yapan</u> (<u>yapan</u>):	Z+, δ SD, BSD	<u>ngathepe</u> :	Z+, δ SD, BSD
<u>kawn</u> :	δ C, BC, MBDC, WZC	<u>ngothon</u> (<u>ngothon</u>):	δ C, BC, MBDC, WZC	<u>nhengka</u> :	δ C, BC, MBDC, WZC
<u>pa'a</u> :	FM, FMB, MF, WFF	<u>ngethin</u> (<u>ngethin</u>):	FM, FMB, MF, WFF	<u>ngathunge</u> :	MF, FMB, WRR
				<u>nhingope</u> :	FM, FMZ
(<u>ng</u>) <u>ama</u> :	M, MZ, δ SW, BSW	<u>kalin</u> (<u>kalin</u>):	M, MZ, δ SW BSW	<u>ngathide</u> :	M, MZ, δ SW, BSW
<u>moror</u> :	MB+	<u>mokr</u> (<u>mokr</u>):	MB+	<u>ngathupe</u> :	MB+
<u>kalang</u> :	MB-, WF, MBSS δ SWB, BSWB	<u>kaaln</u> (<u>kal</u>):	MB-, WF, MBSS, δ SWB, BSWB	<u>ngathale</u> :	MB-, WF, MBSS δ SWB, BSWB
<u>warna</u> :	W, MBD, δ SSW, BSSW	<u>rorko</u> (<u>mara</u>):	W, MBD, δ SSW, BSSW	<u>thuman</u> :	W, MBD, δ SSW, BSSW
<u>minera</u> :	WB, MBS, BWB, δ SSWB, BSSWB	<u>kuthn</u> (<u>minirem</u>):	WB, MBS, BWB, δ SSWB, BSSWB	<u>munhtha</u> :	WB, MBS, BWB, δ SSWB, BSSWB
<u>marang</u> :	FZC, H, ZH, HZ, ZHB, FFZH, HFF	<u>maarn</u> (<u>maarn</u>):	FZC, H, ZH, HZ, ZHB, FFZH, HFF	<u>muyu</u> :	FZC, H, ZH, HZ, ZHB, FFZH, HFF
<u>tua</u> :	FZH, HF, δ C, ZC, oDH, FFZS	<u>thuuwun</u> (<u>thuuwun</u>):	FZH, HF, δ C, ZC, oDH, FFZS	<u>orthom</u> :	FZH, HF, δ C, ZC, oDH, FFZS
<u>kar</u> :	δ ZSC, δ SC	<u>ngethe</u> (<u>kangkur</u>):	δ ZSC, δ SC	<u>papin</u> :	δ ZSC, δ SC
<u>keme</u> :	MM, MMB, WBW, WBWB, MMBSS	<u>kaman</u> (<u>kaman</u>):	MM, MMB, WBW, WBWB, MMBSS	<u>ngathame</u> :	MM, MMB, WBW, WBWB, MMBSS
<u>wimi</u> :	MMBC, MBW, WMB, WM,	<u>mayath</u> (<u>mayuu</u>):	MMBD, MBW, WM	<u>pinyekanchi</u> :	MMBD, MBW, WM
		<u>thaaman</u> (<u>thaaman</u>):	MMBS, MBWB, WMB	<u>pibikanchi</u> :	MMBS, MBWB, WMB
<u>kowpona</u> :	δ DC, δ SDH, HZH	<u>kemeth</u> (<u>kemeth</u>):	δ DC, δ SDH, HZH	<u>kamin mukam</u> :	δ DC, δ SDH, HZH
<u>paug</u> :	HZC, δ DH, FZDC	<u>paangun</u> (<u>paangun</u>):	HZC, δ DH, FZDC	<u>kamin kanchi</u> :	HZC, δ DH, FZDC

Table 3.1. The distribution of kin terms over kintypes in Yir Yoront, Kuuk Thaayorre, Kuuk Yak (a dialect of Kuuk Thaayorre) and Wik Uwanh.

systems equating collateral kin with lineal kin (i.e. $FB=F$, $MZ=M$, $FBS/FS=B$ etc.). And, because of the way the terminologies distinguish between cross and parallel cousins beyond the range of parent's siblings and Ego's cousins, they may be described as variants of the Dravidian class of kin terminologies (Scheffler 1972:49). Since in-laws are equated with consanguineal relatives and Ego's wife is equated with MBD but not with FZD, the terminology also fits the patterns that are said to typify asymmetric marriage systems in which a male is enjoined to marry one particular kind of cross-cousin (MBD) or someone classified with her. In the distribution of terms over kintypes, the four systems can be seen to bear a general resemblance. The Kuuk Thaayorre and the Kuuk Yak systems differed only in some of the terms they used to distinguish kintype clusters. For the same clusters of kintypes (those framed within the lines of the diagram) Yir Yoront employed 19 kin terms, Kuuk Thaayorre and Kuuk Yak 21 kin terms and Wik Uwan employed 23. The finer terminological distinctions of Kuuk Thaayorre, Kuuk Yak and Wik Uwan were made on the basis of sex or relative age.

3.2.2 Vocative terminology and classificatory kin

The application of kin terms at Edward River extended far beyond the kintypes of the diagram, and individuals normally applied kin terms to all members of the community whether or not a relationship could be traced between Ego and the person addressed. It has often been pointed out that with classificatory systems of this sort it is not necessary for an individual to remember the exact links between people because the principle of classifying lineals with collaterals has the effect of "collapsing" distant collaterals and making them equivalent to lineals (e.g. $FFB=FF$, therefore $FFBS=FFS=FB=F$). All that is required is the knowledge of how one's parents address people whose relationships cannot be traced in order to orient oneself appropriately. As Keesing (1975:103) has succinctly put it:

If you know how your father and mother are related to people, you know how you are related to them, and how you are related to their children.

In the case of the Edward River kinship systems, it was not quite as straightforward and simple as Keesing suggests. It was true that children oriented themselves towards others on the basis of their parents' relationships, but the choice of kinship terms often depended on which parent's relationships acted as the guide for the assignment of a child's relationship terms. The distribution of parents' kinship terms did not mesh in such a way that children could unequivocally select an appropriate term. Thus a child's mother and father might both call an unrelated man "younger brother". Did the child call the man by the appropriate "MB" term or did the child equate the man with its own father? Because of the role implications of the terminology, the differences were not trivial. If the child was a male and followed mother's kin term designation the "MB" was a potential father-in-law towards whom the child would have to act with restraint while the man's daughters were possible future wives (or lovers) for the child. The child, as a consequence of designating the man "MB", could incur ritual obligations (especially with respect to initiation) towards the sons of his "MB". Alternatively, if the child followed the father's designation, the man was regarded as a "father" and relationships towards him and his sons were free and easy while those towards the man's daughters were marked with the same degree of restraint characteristic of males towards their sisters. To understand much of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships it is necessary to understand how decisions about the application of kin terms beyond genealogically specified relatives are made.

The starting point for the analysis of kin term application was provided by sets of individual distributions of kin labels over members of the community. When a sufficiently complete and reliable collection of genealogies had been obtained, a small number of informants were

asked to state what term they used to call each person in the genealogies and how they were called in return. The genealogies contained the names of about 200 people. Appropriate circumlocutions were used to refer to the recently dead, and those whose personal names were not known were specified in terms of their relationship to those whose names were known.

The application of kinship terms beyond the range of traceable relations may be approached by means of a conventional kinship chart like that for the Kuuk Thaayorre in Figure 3.1. Similar diagrams may be drawn for the other sets of terminology. Much criticism has been directed towards diagrams of this sort because of the tendency of compilers and others to confuse what are essentially ideal, non-demographic structures with ethnographic reality (Leach 1961:61). For example, McConnel's representation of the Wik Mungkan system has been convincingly shown to be an artefact of the way she drew her chart (Needham 1962b, McKnight 1971). Scheffler (1972) commented on the inability of such diagrams to represent important aspects of Australian kinship systems such as super-class and sub-class structures. They were also misleading, he claimed, because they implicitly and wrongly suggested that marriage rules governed the collateral extension of kin terms and that this gave rise to pseudo-problems such as how many descent lines there were. But, provided it is understood that the diagram is nothing more than a serviceable anthropological model representing the way in which kinship terms are allocated, there is little risk of inferring more from the model than is warranted by its derivation from actual usages and rules stated by informants. The difference between Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 is this: Table 3.1 serves as a convenient guide to the application of kin terms to real kin while Figure 3.1 can be taken to represent a guide to the application of kin terms over classificatory non-kin (cf. McKnight 1971:156).

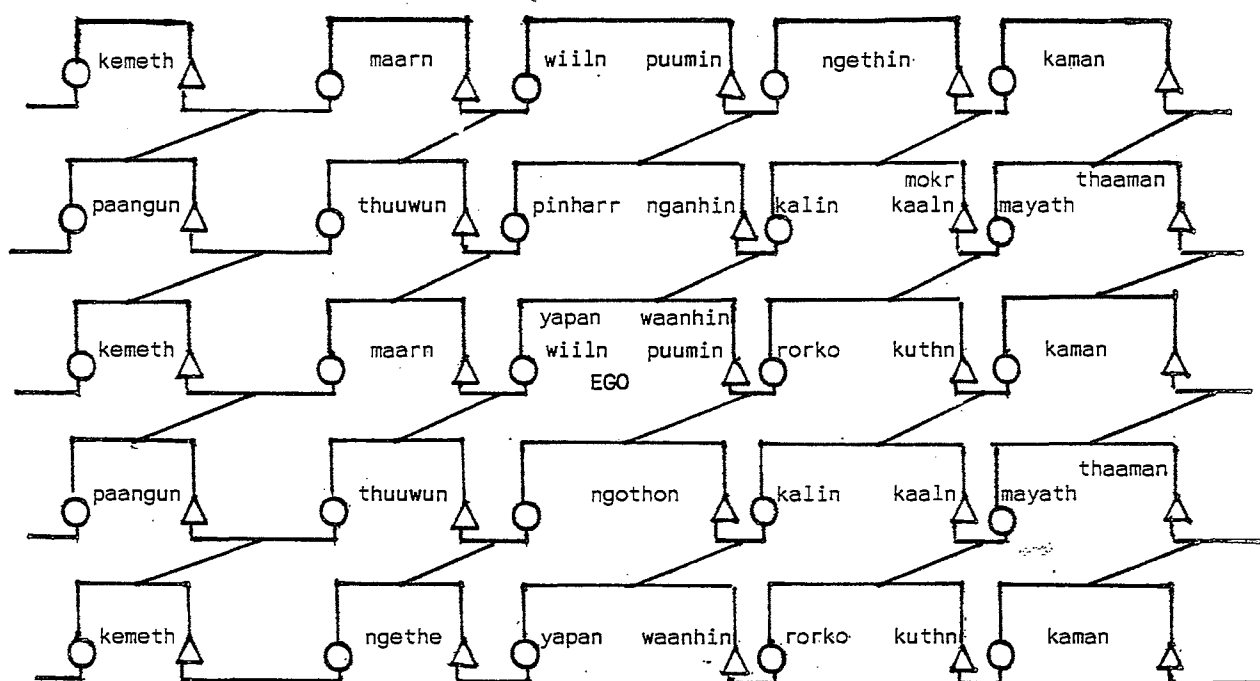
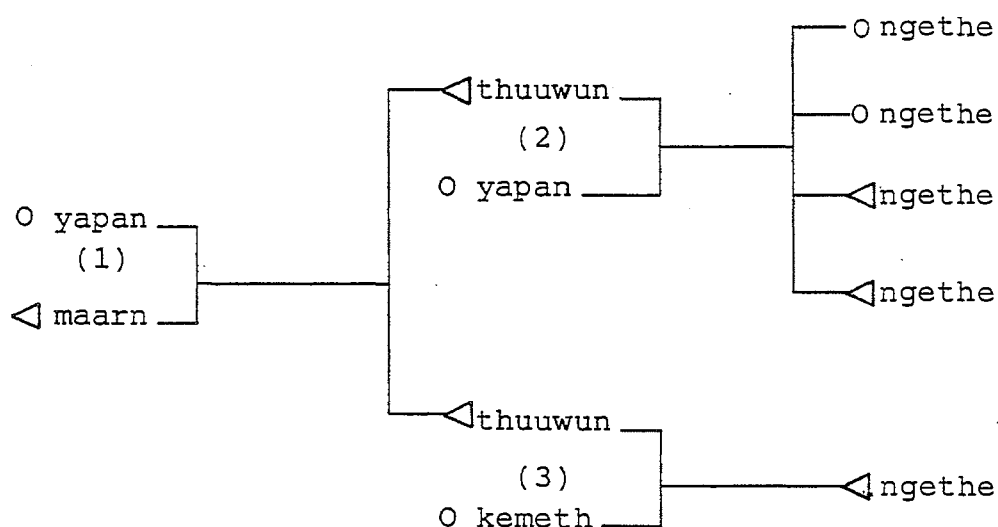


Figure 3.1 Kuuk Thaayorre classificatory kinship terminology (vocative).

3.2.3 Departures from the ideal -- the problem of "wronghead" marriages and kin term rearrangement

The regular asymmetric appearance of the chart is based on the convenient fiction that each member of the classes depicted married, as Edward River English has it, "straight". A man contracted a "straight" marriage when he married a MBD or someone classified with her; a woman contracted a "straight" marriage when she married FZS or someone classified with him. In Kuuk Thaayorre, a "straight" marriage was termed thakaraw. However, the distribution of an actual person's kin terms over married pairs did not always mirror the patterns of the kin term applications of the model. There were many married pairs that were terminologically wrong according to the chart in individuals' allocations of kin terms. Figure 3.2 provides two examples of this. Terminologically wrong pairs came about for two reasons. Firstly, the chart does not provide "straight" marriage partners for the males at the right lateral terminations (kaman and thaaman), or for the females at the left lateral terminations (kemmeth and paangun). It would be conceptually neat if those designated by these terms married each other, thus closing the diagram in on itself in a kind of circulating connubium. In practice nothing like this happened. It was possible to elicit a correct spouse for every other kin term in the chart, yet informants were unable to specify who the appropriate partners were supposed to be for the terminating lateral kin terms. Sharp (1934a:420) discovered the same phenomenon for the Yir Yoront. In part then, an individual's distribution of kin terms over married pairs reflected this lack of specification in the traditional cognised model which the chart purports to represent.

The other source of departure from the patterns of the model occurs because many marriages were not "straight". While to marry thakaraw was the commonly professed ideal, nonetheless, many marriages for reasons that will be discussed later did not conform to the ideal. Such marriages were termed paanth warrth (literally "wrong head") in Kuuk

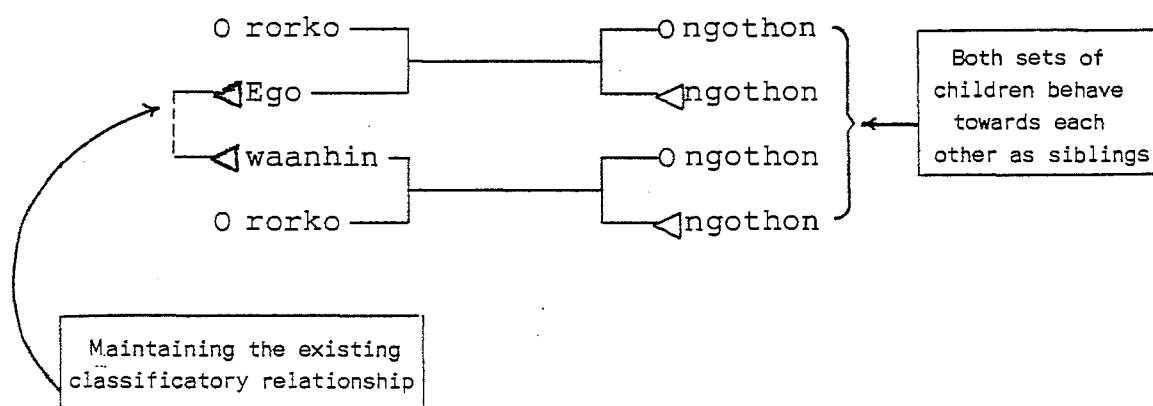


Notes: Marriage (1) was a "straight" marriage and this was recognised terminologically. Marriages (2) and (3) were "wronghead" marriages. Although each marriage was terminologically recognised as "wronghead", in neither case was the real nature of "wronghead" marriage recognised -- a "brother"- "sister" pre-marriage relationship in (2), a "father"- "daughter" pre-marriage relationship in (3). In both marriages (2) and (3) the offspring were allocated their kinship terms "by the father".

Figure 3.2 An example of a female informant's application of kin terms, Kuuk Thaayorre language.

Thaayorre. Whether a particular marriage was thakaraw ("straight") or paanth warrth ("wronghead") was general community knowledge. I presented several adults with a list of married pairs and asked them to sort the marriages into "straight" or "wronghead" liaisons. A comparison of the sortings showed good agreement. Of 97 marriages for which the information was clear-cut, 64 (66%) were regarded as "straight". Informants all seemed to follow a general strategy in deciding whether to allocate a marriage to one or other category. If before marriage the couple concerned referred to each other by terms indicating they were in the appropriate marriageable categories (i.e. when a man prior to marriage referred to his partner as rorko, and she to him as maarn) then the marriage was "straight". If the couple, prior to marriage, referred to each other by terms other than the "straight" ones, then their parents' marriages were examined to see if there were alternative or suppressed routes by which the marriage could be seen to be "straight". If no suppressed route was found, it was "wronghead" and people described the departure from the ideal in the terms by which the married couple referred to each other before marriage (see notes, Figure 3.2). To understand how alternative or suppressed routes occur in the allocation of kin terms it is best to consider a hypothetical example. The kin terms used will be Kuuk Thaayorre. Let us suppose a male Ego's classificatory waanhin marries a woman of their own generation whom they both call kaman. The marriage is "wronghead". The major problem confronting Ego is what to call the offspring of the "wronghead" marriage. In practice there are two ways of resolving it. Ego may change the terms he uses to address one or other of the newly married pair in order to make the marriage conform terminologically to the ideal pattern. The designation of the children will then follow automatically. The situation is illustrated below in Figure 3.3. In practice adjustments of this sort were normally made only by the close kin of the married couple who incurred definite role obligations as a result of the alliance. Most members of the community lying outside the circle of close kin continued to refer to newly married

Alternative 1: changing the wife's pre-marriage term to conform with the ideal.



Alternative 2: changing the husband's pre-marriage term to conform to the ideal.

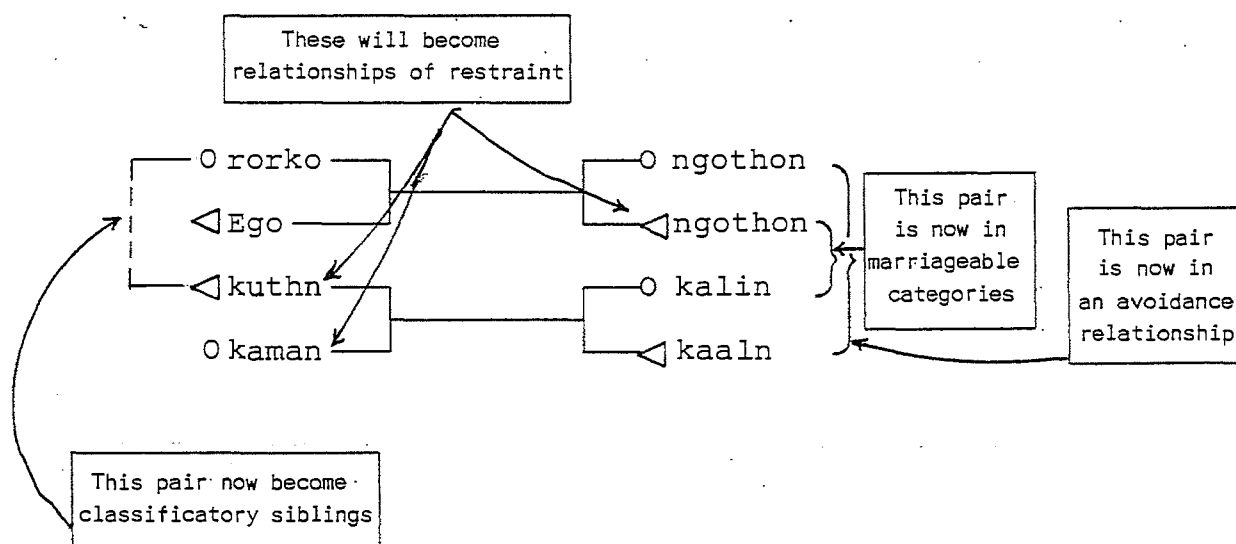


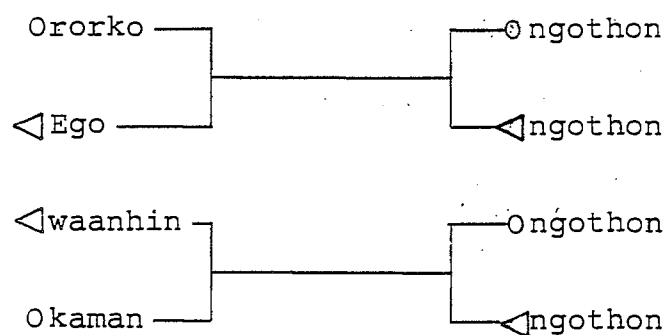
Figure 3.3 The effect of changing pre-marriage kin term designations of "wronghead" marriage partners on the kin designation of offspring.

couples by the same terms as they did before their marriage even if these did not conform to the ideal pattern. For such people, the problem of determining what to call the offspring of a "wronghead" marriage remained. The problem was resolved by calling the children "by the father" or "by the mother".

When a child was called "by the father", a person referred to the child by a kin term that reflected the way the person referred to the child's father. When a child was called "by the mother", its kinship designation reflected the way the person referred to the child's mother. Figure 3.4 illustrates the situation in the case of our hypothetical example. The decision to call offspring "by the father" or "by the mother" was made in consultation with the child's mother at some time during the firstborn's infancy. Individual representatives of families informally conferred with her and sought clarification on the matter. She decided which terms were to be applied by that person and his or her family. Apart from the fact that demonstrable genealogical connection took precedence in determining whether to call a child by one or other parent, no other emphasis (patrilineal, matrilineal, or of clan affiliation) seemed to operate in a regular fashion in the choices made. How various members of the community referred to the child would, of course, influence role behaviour in later years. There could be, at times, complaints about the mother's decision, but what these complaints meant in terms of individual perceptions of micro-political processes and potential interpersonal dynamics I found difficult to discover.

While one route to kin term designation was settled upon by either of the strategies discussed, the other alternative route that might have been chosen was suppressed but not forgotten, at least not when it came to the selection of marriage partners. For example, if in Figure 3.3 alternative (1) had been chosen, Ego's son could still marry the daughter of his father's classificatory brother because, going "by the mother" (the second alternative), she would be a "straight" marriage partner. The search for alternative or suppressed routes did not extend beyond the first ascending generation.

Alternative 1: calling "by the father"



Alternative 2: calling "by the mother"

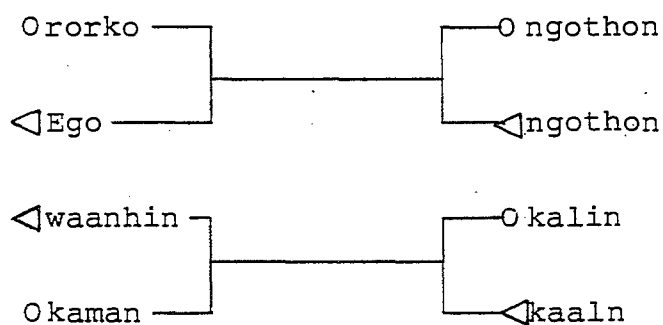


Figure 3.4 Alternative ways of applying kin terms to offspring when retaining pre-marriage kin term designations for parents.

The consequence of having alternate routes in calculating "straight" marriage partners imparted much more flexibility to the marriage system than a surface analysis of the marriage rule would suggest. This is an important point since the ethnographic adequacy of descriptions of so-called asymmetric preferential and prescriptive marriage systems has been severely criticised by Kunstadter, Buhler, Stephan and Westoff (1963). In the course of their attempts to model such systems by computer simulation they came to the conclusion that it did not seem possible for any society of whatever size consistently following a preference for marriage with a female genealogically specified as MBD to attain to the professed ideal in more than 25% to 35% of the cases. They argued that their results could be extrapolated to prescriptive systems (like those of Edward River) where marriages took place within a certain category of relatives. They predicted that in such prescriptive systems there would also be a considerable divergence from the ideal pattern thus raising the question of "...how such an ideal is maintained in the face of the impossibility that it can be achieved or even approximated" (Kunstadter et al. 1963:518). The operation of the real system at Edward River resulted in a ratio of 64 "straight" marriages to 33 "wronghead" ones. This proportion, even if it falls short of perfection, can scarcely be described as "considerable divergence" from the ideal. The process of kin term selection as I have described it here was the key to understanding how the marriage rule could endure as an ideal in spite of the sort of random demographic fluctuations which plague small breeding populations like those of the Edward River reserve. In essence, the more "wronghead" marriages there are in one generation, the more "straight" marriages there will be in the next generation because there will be more alternative routes available by which to calculate "straight" marriages. The system, in other words, tends to self-equilibration.

To summarise then, kinship terms seemed to be applied on the basis of two sorts of rules. One set classified those to whom Ego was related by blood and marriage.

The other set of rules consisted of an ideal pattern that described how kin terms ought be extended to those not demonstrably related to Ego together with a set of decision-making procedures that came into play when the realities of mate selection and kin term designation were at odds with the patterns of the ideal system. Thus an individual's distribution of kin terms over community members reflected many things, viz., the person's genealogical links, readjustments of kin terminology in the face of unorthodox marriages, and the choices other individuals made in the designation of offspring from terminologically irregular marriages.

3.2.4 Referential, bereavement and gestural kin terminologies

So far the discussion has been confined to the vocative set of kinship terms which people preferred to use, rather than personal names, when talking to each other. There were three other sets of nomenclature for designating kin: referential, mourning or bereavement, and gestural.

Referential terms were used in conversation when referring to third persons. The set of referential terms was larger than the vocative and primarily designated real kin through the use of possessive pronouns, "my father", "your brother", "his uncle" etc. To aid specificity, adjectives indicating birth order were used to qualify referential terms such as "your oldest father" (=FB+).

The set of mourning terms is smaller than the vocative and was used by other people to designate certain of the bereaved kin of a deceased person. This group of people who were assigned special roles in the mourning observances for the deceased was composed of real kin and classificatory surrogates for real kin.

Finally, there was a set of signs which grouped both related and non-related people together by means of a small set of gestures. This set of signs along with the gestural language of the area of which it was a part was used during ritual performances, when speech was inconvenient (as during hunting), when it was banned (as it was

for initiates during some parts of their ritual seclusion), when it was impossible (e.g. when speaking to a deaf-mute or when there was a need to convey messages over long distances). The gesture vocabulary was also used in a social custom associated with sneezing. When a person sneezed, those within hearing touched that part of their body that symbolised their relationship to that person.

The Kuuk Thaayorre sets of terms for referential, vocative, bereavement and gestural lexicons are presented in a comparative framework in Table 3.2. As may be seen from the table, the terms themselves form an ordered, hierarchical set that suggests the existence of a logically consistent semantic structure underlying the designation of kin terms in all sets.

3.3 Kinship, kindred and role structure

It is frequently stated that kinship nomenclature provides the key to understanding the role structure of Aboriginal society. Thus Tonkinson (1978:43) observes that as "...a system of social relationships that are expressed in a biological idiom, kinship provides a kind of blueprint for all interpersonal behaviour". Sharp (1958:4) described the Yir Yoront kinship system as a set of roles in the following way:

As an orderly organization of a very limited number of highly standardized roles which an individual plays over and over again in almost all of his interactions with others, the Yir Yoront or any other Australian kinship system constitutes an extremely simple but almost complete social system. Any Yir Yoront can lead a full and active social life with a repertory of only twentyeight kinship roles, fourteen for interaction with kin of his own sex and fourteen for interaction with the opposite sex. Practically the entire range of aboriginal activities and sentiments in which the behavior of two or more people is involved, overtly or covertly, is encompassed in these few roles. Kinship roles, of course, have varying aspects with a variety of possible behaviors

Relationship to Ego	Referential	Vocative	Bereavement	Gesture
B+ SS	<u>pam kanam</u> <u>parr-punt-waanha</u>	<u>waanhin</u>	<u>piluump</u>	shin
Z+ SD	<u>yapa</u> <u>parr-punt-yapa</u>	<u>yapan</u>		
B- FF	<u>ngan puumi</u> <u>punt-puumi</u>	<u>puuman</u>		
Z- FFZ	<u>wiila</u> <u>punt-wiila</u>	<u>wiiln</u>	<u>kuminiya</u>	
F, FB	<u>nganhip</u>	<u>nganhin</u>	<u>kaalmangk</u>	biceps
FZ	<u>ngan pinharr</u>	<u>pinharr</u>		
♂S ♂D	<u>pam-nerngk-ngatn</u> <u>paant-nerngk-ngatn</u>	<u>ngothon</u>		
FM, MFZ MF, FMB	<u>paant-ngan-ngethe</u> <u>pam-ngan-ngethe</u>	<u>ngethin</u>	<u>yuumanthaar</u>	acrommion
ZSS ZDS	<u>pamnemthinthin</u> <u>paantmenthinthin</u>	<u>ngethe</u>	<u>thaa-ngethe-kaar</u>	
M, MZ	<u>nganam</u>	<u>kalin</u>	<u>kuukum</u>	breast
MB-	<u>ngan kaala</u>	<u>kaaln</u>	<u>raprrm</u>	
MB+	<u>ngan mokr</u>	<u>mokr</u>		
ZS, ♀S ZD, ♀D	<u>pam rothom</u> <u>paant rothom</u>	<u>thuuwun</u>	<u>ngamkaar</u>	
MBD, W	<u>rorko</u>	<u>rorko</u>	<u>yuk-warr-mungkam</u>	thigh
MBS, WB	<u>ngan kuth</u>	<u>kuthn</u>	<u>thaknham</u>	
FZD FZS, H	<u>paant-mer-mele</u> <u>pam-mer-mele</u>	<u>maarn</u>	<u>muthyurum</u>	
MM MMB	<u>paant-kamtil-mele</u> <u>pam-mer-mele</u>	<u>kaman</u>	<u>thaa-keme-kaar</u>	ribs
DS, ZDS DD, ZDD	<u>pam-ngan-keme</u> <u>paant-ngan-keme</u>	<u>kemeth</u>		
MMBS	<u>ngan thaam</u>	<u>thaaman</u>	<u>yenchil</u>	buttocks
MMBD	<u>ngan-mayath</u>	<u>mayath</u>		
FZDS FZDD	<u>pam-parr-punt-wayump</u> <u>paant-parr-punt-wayump</u>	<u>paangun</u>	<u>yanganwarra</u>	

Table 3.2: Referential, vocative, bereavement and gesture codes for kin labelling, Kuuk Thaayorre.

between any two kin; but these aspects, and the situations in which they are manifest or active, are well and clearly defined, so that little room is left for role improvisation. Thus the role behavior of two male cross-cousins at any given time will depend on factors or conditions such as frequency of interaction, distance of relationship, the health or physical state of one or the other, relative age or absolute stage in the age-grade and initiation hierarchy, the recent death of a wife or sister of one, whether they are interacting publicly or in private, at a ceremony or in a secular situation, or whether a spear just thrown in a general fight by one has, even by accident, come dangerously close to the other.

In his analysis of kinship roles, Sharp (1937) described only two of the twenty eight role sets in detail. These were the "father-son" set and the "mother's brother-sister's son" set, in which ZS marries MBD. Both sets of relationships were focally important in pre-settlement society. However, a proper appreciation of Aboriginal kinship systems requires a more detailed discussion in order to reveal the dynamics involved in kin nomenclature and role prescription.

Scheffler (1972:58) has argued that since Aboriginal kinship terms are polysemic rather than monosemic, role prescriptions are likely to vary with the focal and extended senses of particular kin terms. In general, most researchers have implicitly acknowledged the polysemic nature of kin nomenclature, and terms such as "real", "close", "distant" and so on, abound in the literature as qualifiers for particular kin labels. Oftentimes, however, what such qualifiers imply for role prescriptions is never clearly spelled out. Notable exceptions to this can be found (e.g. Shapiro 1979:51 and Chase 1980:168-176), but in general most descriptions tend to gloss over how role obligations are distributed over various kintypes and other non-related people who are subsumed under the same term. Moreover, most descriptions tend to leave unstated the social limits for the discharge of role obligations. The present analysis addresses these issues rather more squarely.

As a starting point for the analysis of kinship

terminology and role prescription we may note that Kuuk Thaayorre people characterised kin relationships as falling into one of two categories. The categories were called ngaanch and murrkam. In the context of interpersonal relationships, ngaanch meant "longway", "poison" or "to be avoided or approached circumspectly". Relationships that were ngaanch usually involved avoidance behaviours and taboos of speech, touch and food. They were relationships involving restraint and affected the distribution of food and information within particular congeries of hearthgroups. These formal constraints on behaviour in particular relationship sets fell more heavily on men than on women since they were conceptualised in terms of respect behaviour owed by wife-receiving men to their wife-giving kin. By contrast the term murrkam implied relationships that were couched in a style that was relaxed, informal and even intimate, and in which a free exchange of information and food could take place.

There were parallel distinctions to the Kuuk Thaayorre ngaanch/murrkam set in the other languages of the reserve. They set the basic emotional tone that pervaded the interaction between members of reciprocal sets. Beyond this basic interactional code, kin nomenclature was not a good guide to role behaviour. For example, let us consider the term of address, kalin. The group of women to which an individual would apply this term included the person's mother, mother's sisters, father's other wives, son's wives (male speaking), brother's son's wives, together with other women to whom no connection by descent or affinity could be traced. The relationship between Ego and all kalin fell into the murrkam category. This meant that a certain etiquette of interaction pervaded all dealings with those called kalin after due allowance was made for contingencies such as relative age, personality and the current state of disputes. In this sense, all kalin were treated alike.

There was a crucial sense in which all women a person called kalin were not alike. An individual designated some of the women s/he called kalin as members of her/his family. Referentially, s/he referred to those women as ngan-nganam-ngathn, which meant literally "family-mother-mine".

Towards women designated in that fashion, the individual acknowledged distinctive sets of rights, privileges and obligations. Such rights and duties themselves varied according to relative age and generation level, as well as to the nature of the kin link, (i.e. whether consanguineal, affinal or classificatory). The term ngan then referred to an egocentrically defined cluster of lineal, collateral and affinal relatives together with certain non-kin "surrogates" who were incorporated into a person's family on a permanent or temporary basis when real kin were not available. I shall discuss the conditions affecting incorporation into the ngan group in more detail as well. I find it convenient to refer to this group as a "kindred". A person had no role obligations towards other kalin who were not part of that person's kindred. The distinction between kindred and non-kindred was clearly recognised in the use of referential kin terminology. Thus, where a speaker and a hearer referred to the same woman as kalin, but the woman belonged only to the hearer's kindred, the speaker would refer to that woman as ngan-nganam-nhangkn, "family-mother-yours". The individual's kindred was also specifically identified by the community at large through the use of bereavement terminology. Bereavement terms applied only to a subset of the deceased's kindred.

During life, people were linked to their kindreds by skeins of dependence and responsibility that varied according to their progression through the life cycle. Some of the roles involved long-term commitments and liabilities such as parenthood, while others were short-term imperatives produced by life-crisis or status-changing events such as birth, initiation, marriage, illness, disputes or death. At the emotional level, an individual's relationship with the kindred was normally marked by expressions of loyalty, affection, trust and other behaviours that continually affirmed her/his personal worth. When disputes occurred between a person and other kindred members, forces were brought into play to bring about a speedy resolution of the issue and to restore benevolence as quickly as possible.

Kindred membership was recruited primarily on the basis of descent and marriage ties. Thus every person's kindred varied in size through time as new members were acquired through birth and marriage, and others were lost through death. No two people had exactly the same kindreds, although the composition of the kindreds of siblings, for example, reflected the fact that they contained many members in common. Certain roles performed by kindred members were considered so essential for an individual's welfare that surrogates had to be found when the normal role incumbent died or was otherwise absent when role performance was required. When such surrogates could not be found among those who had a genealogical claim to membership in the person's kindred, then some other principle was invoked (such as shared clanship, shared totemic emblems, length of association or friendship) to elevate a person identified by an appropriate kinship term to the role.

Conceptually we can depict the pre-settlement native's view of her/his social world as in Figure 3.5. All persons who came within an individual's ambit were addressed by one or another of the vocative kinship terms. In effect, the vocative nomenclature grouped people into one of seven distinct sets of reciprocal terms. Some members of each set of people so addressed belonged to Ego's kindred and towards them Ego had specific duties and rights. No such obligations and duties were entailed towards non-kindred members other than the observance of a certain etiquette of interaction.

As I pointed out earlier, the distribution of roles over kintypes within each set of reciprocal kin terms varied. In the description which follows I have provided a sketch of the nature of the role variation in each of the seven sets of kin terms, but like so many accounts of kinship systems the description is an ideal one wherein role obligations and rights are distributed over a variety of consanguineal, affinal and classificatory links. I have chosen to present the material in a tabular form in order to convey as clearly as possible the nature of the contrasting roles within reciprocal kin term sets. This kind of presentation

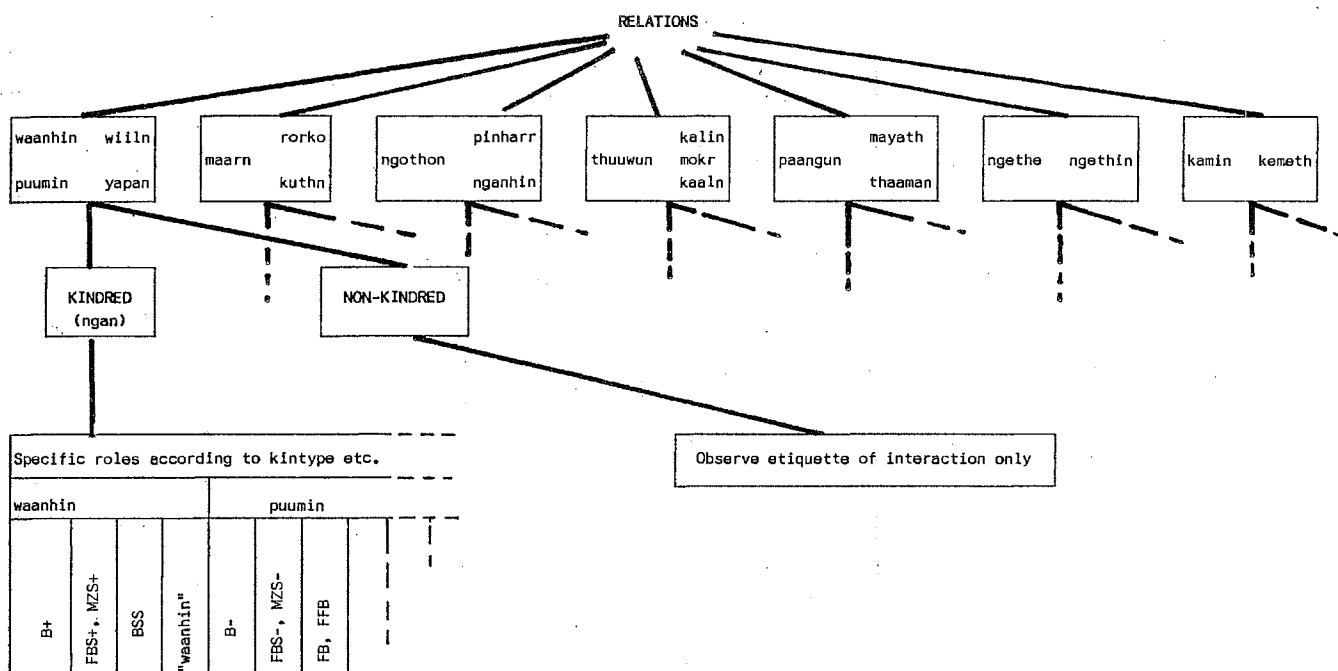


Figure 3.5 A conceptual schema for the allocation of kin-based roles, Kuuk Thaayorre vocative kin terminology.

tends to filter out the real world interplay between demographic accident and culturally prescribed needs and duties. In fact, the actual distribution of roles over actual and classificatory kin often departed from the ideal patterns presented in the tables.

The distribution of roles over kin-defined statuses makes some kintype/role configurations focal in the life of an individual. Thus from birth to death, a man had to have what Edward River people described in English as a "proper" or "blood" father. Both terms meant someone who exercised the full panoply of duties involved in the status, from the observance of pre-birth taboos through to special mourning duties (e.g. see Table 3.11). The primary or first incumbent of this status was normally an individual's genitor. In ordinary circumstances it was usually impossible for a person's genitor to discharge every duty and obligation implied by the status of "blood" father, if only because the father usually died before the child. When a man's genitor died, rules of succession operated to ensure that another member of the kindred, also addressed as "nganhin" or "father" stepped in to occupy the status and assume the relevant duties. Thus an individual's kindred members classified by a single vocative kin term can be regarded not only as occupiers of a set of statuses defined primarily in terms of kin criteria, but also as a pool from which kindred members were elevated to focal statuses. By the same token, rules also operated to bring non-kindred members into a person's kindred permanently or temporarily in order to play key roles. I shall only attempt a cursory description of the rules of succession underlying the movement of kindred and non-kindred members into such key roles. In reality, they deserve separate study in their own right (e.g. see Scheffler 1973:773).

The data upon which the following description is based derive from a number of sources. These include value statements about expected behaviours (e.g. "a son should always look out for his mother"), observations of people acting out traditional roles, discussions with informants about kin roles, analyses of disputes in which

kin role infractions brought to light jural imperatives and, finally, my own experiences as a temporary participant in a number of Aboriginal kindreds. It should be noted that the description is flimsiest with respect to female-female roles. This reflects the fact that most of my key informants were males and that there were many situations involving female-female interaction which were denied to me as an observer because my presence as a male and a non-kindred person was socially inappropriate.

3.3.1 The waanhin, yapan, puumin and wiiln reciprocal set

At a person's own generation level the kindred members of this relationship set normally encompassed her/his own siblings together with MZC and FBC, and occasionally for some women, husbands' other wives. Also included were lineal kin of the second ascending generation, such as FF and his siblings and kin in the second descending generation such as δ SC, δ BSC and η BSC. From time to time persons of the same generation level who were non-kin but who were classified by one or other terms of the set played important roles as temporary members of a person's kindred as well. In general terms, relationships between a person and all members of this reciprocal set were governed by the murrkam interactional code, except for interactions between male and female siblings and parallel cousins. These cross-sex relationships were surrounded by a good deal of restraint and avoidance behaviour.

The bond between male siblings formed one of the basic solidary groupings in Edward River society. Normally brothers were raised in the same hearthgroup and shared the same conception centres, clan estate and responsibilities towards the ritual estate. In adult life they frequently camped together and cooperated in joint hunting ventures. They shared food and material resources and supported each other in quarrels and disputes. There were no communication barriers between brothers. They interacted with relaxed familiarity and among themselves could discuss any kind of topic with propriety and confidence, including

sorcery technology (which was passed on to them by their fathers), esoteric curing ritual, love magic and love affairs.

Notwithstanding the easiness of their interpersonal relationships, seniority among male siblings was important. Older brothers had disciplinary responsibilities towards their younger male siblings. In adulthood they had the right to chastise physically their younger brothers whenever they were derelict. Older brothers also took precedence over younger brothers in the order of marriage. Once a senior brother had a wife he was expected to waive any rights and expectations to the bestowal of future wives in favour of his younger brothers, if they were of marriageable age. Thus there was an element of conflict underlying the bonds uniting brothers and this conflict or rivalry was a frequent theme in myths.

When a man died, it was usually expected that one or other of his brothers would marry the deceased's widow/s and assume responsibility for the rearing of his children. Brothers of a deceased person played an important role in the mortuary ceremonies. They assisted in the preparation of the body and, more importantly, imposed and lifted the mortuary taboos on those members of the deceased's kindred that had to undertake them. They also assisted in the divination of the murderer when sorcery was thought to be the cause of death and sometimes actively participated in revenge expeditions.

In many respects the relationship between a man and his parallel male cousins was similar to that obtaining between him and his brothers. Parallel male cousins were also preferred camping companions and workmates, and they constituted a second line of resort for help, food and material resources when these were not available from more closely related members of the kindred. The bonds between parallel cousins were closest when, as not infrequently happened, father's brothers were also married to mother's sisters. In disputes parallel cousins were more likely to be mediators rather than active supporters as brothers were. However, expectations concerning the dominance of

seniors, the waiving of marriage rights and the operation of the levirate did not extend beyond the sibling set. For instance, if a widow had no husband's brother to marry her, then there was no search for a suitable husband among the sons of husband's father's brothers before looking elsewhere for a suitable marriage partner. On the other hand, when a person who had no male siblings died, then parallel cousins from the patriline, because of their common association with the clan estate, took first priority as surrogates who imposed and lifted the taboos on other members of the kindred and oversaw the preparation of the body.

In the second ascending generation, the terminological identification of father's father as a younger sibling and, reciprocally, the identification of son's son (male speaking) as elder sibling might seem odd at first sight (e.g. see Scheffler 1972:50). The same kind of identification occurs in the other three kinship terminologies presented in Table 3.1. Scheffler (1978:284) suggested that by referring to SS as elder brother, FF might be signifying that SS had a prior claim to the class of women they both called rorko, and hence they would not be competitors for wives. This may well be so, for it was customary for FFs to joke with their SSs about the "wives" they shared in common. The joking took the form of a series of bawdy suggestions on the part of FF about what they might together do with their "wives". The point of such jokes was that usually the FF was too old and the SS too young to carry out any of the proposed obscenities. At any rate, the joking indicated the nature of the relationship between FF and SS. It was one of great warmth, intimacy and spoiling indulgence. Father's father was an important source of technical education (e.g. wood-crafting) and mythological knowledge. Grandparents usually employed whatever powers they had to keep their son's sons healthy and free from malign influences that might cause sickness. They often imparted special personal abilities such as second sight and innate healing skills to their grandsons. It was difficult to determine whether there was any real difference in behaviour between FF and SS on the one hand, and that between FFB and BSS, on

the other. It was rare for an individual to have a FF and a FFB alive at the same time. My evidence suggests that the roles were identical.

When a man, whether for ritual-ceremonial reasons or for trading purposes, went outside his usual range and circle of kinfolk, he required a sponsor who would guarantee his welfare and who would act as a guide to the resources and dangers of an unfamiliar countryside. A "waanhin" was often selected to act as such a sponsor. During Ego's residence in the strange territory his "waanhin" acted as a real brother would, looking after Ego's physical needs, including him in his hearthgroup and arranging access to hunting tracts for him. If Ego was travelling by himself "waanhin" could also arrange for him to share his wife's sexual favours provided she was agreeable. By the same token a man who had attained a position of some influence (i.e had become a pam thulum) would sponsor visiting "puumin" in his own country, assuming responsibility for them and controlling their behaviour. The choice of a sponsor was usually determined on the basis of shared myths or totemic emblems, common initiation experiences or simply on the basis of sponsorships in previous generations.

The relationship between female siblings was also one characterised by strong ties of sentiment and intimacy and much mutual support. These ties continued after marriage primarily because sisters tended to marry men of the same clan (occasionally the same man, or more often, the same set of brothers), which meant that they were often in the same bands exploiting similar tracts of country because their patterns of access to resources overlapped. Often as not, sisters formed the nucleus for a wet season camping group. Sisters looked after each other's children and fed them on occasion. Elder sisters often assisted at the births of their younger sisters' children. Sisters supported each other in quarrels and helped each other manage their pre-marital and extra-marital love affairs. Sisters also practised the sororate. That is, other things being equal, it was expected that an unmarried sister would replace a married sister who died. Typically,

elder sister married before younger sister, but this was not so much a function of a rule of priority in marriage as it was among brothers. Rather it was because of the early age of marriage for girls.

During mortuary ceremonies the sisters of the deceased played a minor and subdued role. Their principal duty was to share, with the mother and mother's sisters of the deceased, the responsibility for looking after the bones of the deceased until they were finally interred or cremated.

While many men had only one wife at a time, a number of the pre-settlement unions were polygynous as a result of bestowal arrangements, widow remarriage or, very rarely, wife-capture. When co-wives were not actual sisters, their relationship became very like, if not indistinguishable from, that of real sisters. A senior wife, as yapan, inducted the junior wife into her role and helped with the birth of the younger woman's children and their upbringing. The focus of the co-wives was on the joint maintenance of a shared domestic unit and on cooperation in its associated tasks. Jealousy or competition for the husband's favours was said to be uncommon.

The relationship between FFZ and BSD was a warm and nurturant one. It was comparable to that obtaining between FF and SS, although without the formalised joking aspects. The grandmother often acted as child-minder and taught her granddaughters some of their female-specific skills such as fibre-weaving. In return, FFZ could expect occasional gifts of food in her old age from her adult granddaughters.

Concerning the role of female parallel cousins (FBD and MZD), my data are meagre and I am uncertain whether they had any significant roles to play as part of a woman's kindred. Presumably the role was similar to that played by a man's male parallel cousins.

Women also acquired sponsors or temporary kindred when they made journeys into unfamiliar country. Women probably made fewer such journeys among strangers than men did, and on such travels they were usually accompanied by the domestic entourage of husband and children.

In pre-settlement times single family groups occasionally went to pastoral properties on the fringes of their domains or to the mission stations. Such expeditions were motivated by a combination of curiosity and the desire to obtain European manufactured goods. If at their destination a man found a suitable "waanhin" among the Aboriginal residents of the place to sponsor him, the sponsor's wife played a similar role towards the visiting "younger sister" guiding her through the complexities of finding foodstuffs, trade goods and a place for her family to camp.

In contrast to the relaxed relationship that characterised the interaction between siblings of the same sex, the relationship between brothers and sisters became more reserved as the children grew older. From puberty onwards, brothers avoided any sort of close or familiar contact with their sisters. Brothers could not sit near their sisters nor could they eat or sleep by the same campfire. Adolescent males usually slept apart from their family in bachelor camps with age mates. Older brothers had disciplinary responsibilities towards their younger sisters as they had towards their younger brothers and could admonish them whenever their sisters' actions warranted intervention. Elder brothers had the right to initiate conversations with their younger sisters, who had to reply with their faces averted. Conversation topics between older brother and younger sister were confined largely to requests for information or food and were unmarked by any display of warmth or emotion.

There was somewhat less formality in the relationship between elder sister and younger brother. Elder sisters could initiate conversations with their younger brothers, although face to face interaction was avoided. In marriage or domestic disputes, younger brothers could be called upon to act as duellists on behalf of their sisters. Ideally, a woman's younger brother's daughters were the appropriate marriage partners for her sons. There was a general expectation that such children should marry.

In general brothers were authority figures for their sisters' children and they were expected to upbraid

their nieces and nephews when their behaviour called for it. Further, brothers had a controlling interest in the marriage arrangements of their sisters' children, and their consent had to be obtained before marriages could be publicly acknowledged. Brothers and sisters had the same mortuary responsibilities towards each other as they had towards their same sex siblings.

The restraint and avoidance that characterised the dealings of male and female siblings was even more marked between male and female parallel cousins. In fact, they seemed to have little to do with each other except to provide a pool of first preference classificatory surrogates to perform roles that real siblings should have performed, but which for some reason they could not. On the other hand, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren of the opposite sex was characterised by warmth and indulgent nurturance. As adults, the grandchildren occasionally sent food to their grandparents.

The conventions of opposite sex sibling interaction were also supposed to govern the public behaviour of non-related males and females of the same generation level who found themselves in "waanhin"-"wiiln" or "puumin"-"yapan" relationships. Nonetheless, 13% of "wronghead" marriages were contracted between couples who, before marriage, referred to each other by "brother" and "sister" terms. When marriage partners in the appropriate category were not available, it was permissible to seek among certain classes of non-kin for spouses. Sometimes this was done in an "official" kind of way by the betrothal-makers of the "wronghead" pair (see next section); sometimes such marriages came about through clandestine courtships. When such courtships became public they were often the subject of much dispute before the ambiguous nature of the relationship was satisfactorily resolved by either permitting it to continue (with changes of kin terminology where appropriate to reflect the changed status) or by breaking up the relationship.

Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 summarise the various roles associated with the waanhin, puumin, yapan and wiiln

A man...

could interact freely with

provided education and care-taking services for

cooperated in daily tasks with

gave support in the quarrels of

mediated in the quarrels of

had disciplinary responsibilities towards

could marry the wife (or wives) of a deceased

could exercise a prior right in marriage partners over

was responsible for imposing and lifting mortuary taboos on the mourning kin of a deceased

adopted the following mourning term on the death of

<u>Waanhin</u> kintypes				<u>Puumin</u> kintypes			
B+	FBS+ MZS+	SS BSS	" <u>waanhin</u> "	B-	FBS- MZS-	FF FFB	" <u>puumin</u> "
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
		yes					
yes			sometimes	yes			sometimes
yes				yes			
	yes				yes		
				yes			
yes				yes			
				yes			
yes				yes			
<u>piluump</u>		<u>piluump</u>		<u>yankarkaar</u>		<u>yankarkaar</u>	

Table 3.3 A man's duties towards those males he called waanhin and puumin (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A woman...

interacted freely with
supported in quarrels and love affairs her
minded the children of
helped at the birth of the children of
who was not married might marry the
widowed husband of a deceased
shared in the daily tasks and maintenance
of her hearthgroup with
could provide education and childcare
services for
sent food occasionally to
when making visits among strangers
would expect help from certain
adopted the following term on the
death of
during mourning observances was entrusted
with carrying the bones of

Yapan kintypes					Wiiln kintypes				
Z+	HW+	FBD+ MZD+	BSD	"yapan"	Z-	HW-	FBD- MZD-	FFZ	"wiiln"
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
yes					yes				
yes	yes				yes	yes			
					yes	yes			
yes					yes				
	yes					yes			
			yes					yes	
			yes						
<u>piluump</u>			<u>piluump</u>		<u>kuminiya</u>			<u>kuminiye</u>	
yes					yes				

Table 3.4 A woman's duties towards those females she called yapan and wiiln (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

observed formal speech and spacing conventions towards

had disciplinary responsibilities towards

could act as a duellist for

had an important role to play in the marriage
arrangements of the children of

was expected, if possible, to provide his
daughters as wives for the sons of

acted as disciplinarian for the children of

might act as caretaker for

sent food occasionally to

might find a "wronghead" marriage partner among

was responsible for imposing and lifting mortuary
taboos on the mourning kin of a deceased

adopted the following mourning term on the death of

Yapan kintypes				Wiiln kintypes			
Z+	FBD+ MZD+	SD	"yapan"	Z-	FBD- MZD-	FFZ	"wiiln"
yes	yes		of same generation level	yes	yes		of same generation level
yes				yes			
yes				yes			
yes				yes			
yes		yes				yes	
			yes				yes
yes				yes			
<u>piluump</u>		<u>piluump</u>		<u>kuminiya</u>		<u>kuminiya</u>	

Table 3.5 A man's duties towards those females he called yapan and wiiln
(Kuuk Thayorre vocative terminology).

A woman...

observed formal speech and spacing conventions towards

consulted with the following concerning the marriage arrangements of her children

could expect her sons' wives to be provided by

shared the disciplining of her children with

might act as caretaker for

sent food occasionally to

might find a "wronghead" marriage partner among

adopted the following term on the death of

during mourning observances was entrusted with carrying the bones of a deceased

Waanhin kintypes				Puumin kintypes			
B+	FBS+ MZS+	BSS	"waanhin"	B-	FBS- MZS-	FB FFB	"puumin"
yes	yes		of same generation level	yes	yes		of same generation level
yes				yes			
				yes			
yes				yes			
		yes					
			yes			yes	
							yes
<u>piluump</u>		<u>piluump</u>		<u>yankakaar</u>		<u>yankakaar</u>	
yes				yes			

Table 3.6 A woman's duties towards those males she called waanhin and puumin (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

set of reciprocal kin terms as I have described them above. These tables (and those that follow) have been constructed to show the clusters of duties and expectations associated with particular kintypes. It should be clear both from the previous discussion and from the tables, that of the kinds of relations making up this kin-set the most significant in an individual's life were real siblings. While the cluster of roles associated with real siblings was focal for an individual's welfare, only some of those roles were obligatorily subjected to rules of role succession. Such role succession occurred when the social implications of the role extended beyond the basic dyad, as it did in betrothal arrangements and mortuary ceremonies. When a real brother was not available to ratify publicly the marriage decision of a sister and her intended husband or to perform the proper duties involved in the organisation of a deceased person's obsequies, then substitutes had to be found. On the other hand, certain of the expectations and duties of the sibling set were not assumed by others. Thus there was no role succession involved in the disciplinary prerogatives of elder brothers over other siblings. Nor was role succession involved in the priorities of marriage expectations. I have already noted that the duties of the levirate and the sororate were also confined to full siblings. In fact to be more precise, disciplinary prerogatives, the priorities of marriage expectations and the levirate and sororate were confined to children of the same mother. On the other hand, some of the roles were subject to what could be termed optional role succession. Thus a man without male siblings might develop brother-like relationships with, say, a FBS, or with a WZH, in daily activities and task cooperation and extend this, perhaps, to giving and receiving support in quarrels. Optional role succession was very much a matter of personal preference.

Finally I should note that when certain incumbents of kin-defined statuses died, such as FF, FFB, FFZ, FBC and MZC, individuals did not seek to replace such kin.

3.3.2 The maarn, rorko and kuthn reciprocal set

In attempting to understand the general patterns of relationships between people who call each other by the terms maarn, rorko or kuthn, it is useful to refer to the ideal kinship chart, Figure 3.1. Terminologically, it can be seen that this set of terms groups together actual or potential "straight" marriage partners and their siblings. However, because of the asymmetry of the marriage rule, the general specifications governing behavioural etiquette varied according to the sex of Ego. Towards women he called rorko and their brothers, a man was murrkam and he could behave with more or less complete familiarity. On the other hand, towards those women he called maarn, a man was ngaanch. He was enjoined to avoid such women totally (but not their brothers). Reciprocally, a woman behaved with relative familiarity towards all men she called maarn, but avoided all men she called kuthn. A woman's interaction with females she called maarn and rorko was unmarked by any ngaanch-type behaviours.

At the kindred level, specific sets of rights and duties clustered around certain kinds of relations real and classificatory. These kin-defined role clusters are summarised in Tables 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10. I shall now deal with these roles in detail, beginning with a discussion of male-female roles, followed in turn by discussion of male-male and then female-female roles.

In terms of their entailments, the husband-wife role cluster was the most important of the whole set. Marriage was seen as a relationship of long-term commitment and was held to be the normal destiny of all men and women in this society. Only those who were in some way incompetent, that is through physical disability or mental incapacity, never married. As far as I could calculate it, the average age of marriage for girls lay between their fifteenth and seventeenth years. Men were usually well into their late twenties before they acquired their first wife.

Marriages were often agreed to while the female partner was still a child. When a betrothal was made, the

A man...

had to observe the strictest of speech, spacing and touching taboos towards

could receive food via intermediaries from

was absolutely forbidden to seek a "wronghead" marriage partner among

could not give food to

could talk freely with

would normally consider as suitable marriage partners for his daughters the sons of

if he had daughters would also maintain good relations with

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

played a restrained role during the mourning observances for

Maarn kintypes			
FFZSD FZD, ZHZ	female "maarn"	FFZSS FZS, ZH	male "maarn"
yes	yes		
yes			
yes	yes		
		yes	
		yes	yes
		yes	
			"maarn" who had eligible sons
<u>muthyurum</u>		<u>muthyurum</u>	
yes		yes	

Table 3.7 A man's duties towards those males and females he called maarn (Kuuk Thayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

could expect to be betrothed to an appropriately aged

contracted a "straight" marriage with

could conduct sexual liaisons with

was usually circumspect in public with married women who were

shared in the allocation of tasks in the maintenance of the domestic hearthgroup

could speak on any topic (except secret/sacred) with

shared the observance of pre- and post-birth taboos with

concerning the marriage of his children had to be in agreement with

in a brother's absence might assume responsibility for

on a brother's death could be expected to marry and provide paternal care for the children of

went into seclusion on the death of

adopted the following term on the death of

Rorko kintypes,			
W	BW	MMBDD MBD	"rorko"
		yes	
		yes	yes
		yes	yes
	yes	yes	yes
yes			
yes			
yes			
yes			
	yes		
	yes		
yes			
<u>muthyurum</u>		<u>muthyurum</u>	

A man...

could not accept food from

could talk freely on most subjects with

if initiated, could act as guardian during the initiation of

could expect the following to provide wives for his sons

if he had sons would also maintain good relations with men who were

adopted the following term on the death of

played a leading role in the mortuary observances concerned with the death of

Kuthn kintypes	
MMBS MBS, WB	"kuthn"
yes	
yes	yes
yes	
yes	
	and who had eligible daughters
<u>thaknham</u>	
yes	

Table 3.8 A man's duties towards those females and males he called rorko and kuthn (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A woman...

could expect to be betrothed to an appropriately aged
contracted a "straight" marriage with
could conduct sexual liaisons with
was usually circumspect in public with married men who were
shared in the allocation of tasks in the maintenance
of the domestic hearthgroup with
could speak on any topic (except secret/sacred) with
shared in the observance of pre- and post-birth
taboos with
concerning the marriage of her children had to be
in agreement with
during a husband's absence might expect help from
during the wife's absence should send food to the family of
on the death of a sister might be expected to marry
the widowed
went into seclusion on the death of
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Maarn kintypes			
H	HB ZH	FFZSS FZS	"maarn"
		yes	
		yes	yes
		yes	yes
	yes	yes	yes
yes			
yes			
yes			
yes			
	yes		
	yes		
	ZH		
yes			
Yuk-warr- mungkam			

A woman...

could expect her daughters
to marry the sons of

if she had daughters
might maintain cordial
relations with women
who were

adopted the following
bereavement term on the
death of

played a restrained role
in the mourning cere-
monies of

Maarn kintypes	
FFZSD HZ, FZD	"maarn"
yes	and who had eligible sons
muthyurum	
yes	

Table 3.9 A woman's duties
towards those males
and females she called
maarn (Kuuk Thaayorre
vocative terminology).

A woman...

could talk freely with

observed the strictest of speech, spacing and touching
taboos towards

could send food via intermediaries to

was absolutely forbidden to seek a "wronghead" marriage
partner among

would normally consider as suitable marriage
partners for her sons, the daughters of

if she had sons would maintain cordial relations
with women who had eligible daughters
and who were

played a restrained role in the mourning
ceremonies of

adopted the following bereavement term
on the death of

Rorko kintypes		Kuthn kintypes	
MMBDD BW, MBD	"rorko"	MMBDS MBS, BWB	"kuthn"
yes	yes		
		yes	yes
		yes	
		yes	yes
yes			
	yes		
yes		yes	
<u>yuk-warr-</u> <u>mungskam</u>		<u>thaknhan</u>	

Table 3.10 A woman's duties towards those females and males she
called rorko and kuthn (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative term-
inology).

young man began to send food and other gifts to his promised wife's parents and brothers. The pre-marriage relationship between a youth and his bestowed partner was unrestrained and anticipated the intimacies of the permanent union. The wife-to-be assumed her marriage responsibilities gradually, sometimes setting up camp temporarily with her betrothed and then shifting back once more to her parent's hearthgroup. After a year or two of these alternating liaisons, or if the girl became pregnant, the union was publicly acknowledged by the girl's female relatives establishing a separate hearth and shelter for the pair and moving the girl's domestic belongings into it.

Both partners contributed complementary technical and subsistence skills to the domestic economy of the hearthgroup. Day to day tasks were arranged with respect to each partner's spheres of knowledge and competence. Married partners shared rights of access to the tracts they could exploit. Neither partner was necessarily dominant in decision-making concerning subsistence matters. The relationship was, of course, more than one of simple economic interdependence. Despite the fact that marriages were arranged and sometimes had stormy beginnings, mature unions were characterised by warm affection and high regard between the partners. In a society where many of the activities of the sexes were segregated, marriage provided one of the few areas where gossip lines intersected to allow information about the respective worlds of males and females to be shared between the sexes. Marriage bonds grew stronger with the responsibilities that attended conception, birth and the subsequent raising of children. Both partners punctiliously observed pre-birth and post-birth taboos concerning the health of their children. Among women with few or no children, the desire for children was so strong that false pregnancies were not uncommon.

A certain degree of variety in sexual partners within the marriage bond was permitted, or at least condoned, in both husband and wife. Thus a man might allow his wife to have a dalliance with a sojourning "younger brother" of the husband, if she was so minded. One of the

Kuuk Thaayorre rituals, Wuuchpaanhthmeer, concluded with a degree of sexual license in which some men permitted their wives to make themselves available for intercourse with other ritual participants. Infatuations and love affairs did not seriously threaten the stability of marriages. The existence of a lively ideology and technology concerned with love magic and seduction provided a rationale for both women who sought sexual partners other than their husbands and for men who sought to find face-saving reasons to excuse their wives' peccadilloes. Men were generally circumspect in their extra-marital love affairs, not so much because of what their wives would say or do, but rather because of what their lovers' husbands or betrothed partners might do out of jealousy. Repeated or flagrant infidelities gave cause for complaint and action. What happened in these instances is taken up elsewhere (see Chapter 5, Subsection 5.3.3).

Most marriages were monogamous. Sharp's 1933 census data for 23 Kuuk Thaayorre men showed that 17 of them had one wife only, 2 of them were widowers and only 4 had polygynous marriages. For the combined Yir Yoront and Kuuk Thaayorre groups living in the bush on the reserve at that time, 34.3% of the men had contracted polygynous unions (Sharp 1937:304). Divorce was infrequent. Among my records of 98 pre-settlement marriages I could discover only 2 that had ended in permanent separation. The process of dissolving a union was normally messy and full of disputation before a marriage tie was publicly recognised as severed. The death of a partner was the normal cause for the dissolution of a marriage union. The mourning behaviour of either spouse was formally prescribed and the bereft partner underwent a period of seclusion before being free to seek another partner. During the seclusion the widowed spouse observed a series of food taboos related to the deceased partner's totems.

A man, whether married or not, had specific duties towards his brother's wife. These included the responsibility for sending food to her and her children during her husband's absence and, in the event of his brother's death, the right to marry his brother's wife when her period of

widow seclusion was terminated. A woman similarly would send food to her sister's husband and children when the sister could not, for whatever reason, attend to those domestic duties herself. An unmarried sister might expect to be a replacement wife for her sister's husband should her married sister die prematurely.

In public, the behaviour of men towards married women they addressed as rorko and of women towards married men they called maarn was one of polite restraint and formality. This contrasted markedly with the bantering familiarity that typified the interaction of single men and women in the relationship. Such conventional formality was said to avoid any suggestion of an appearance of intimacy which might be interpreted by the maliciously-minded as a sign of an extra-marital liaison.

For an unmarried man the group of women he called rorko (or could call rorko by an alternate route) constituted the set of women from among whom a straight marriage could be arranged. For single women, the field of potential husbands was similarly defined by those they called maarn (or could call maarn by an alternate route). Men had a claim of sorts on their MBD and MMBDD, women on their FZS and FFZSS. The claim was not so much an inviolable right as an expectation that, other things being equal, such kin were preferred marriage partners and bestowals could be legitimately expected to occur between young people so related. It was normally among the broad class of potential marriage partners that people chose their pre-marital and extra-marital sweethearts and lovers.

The relationship between a man and the women he called maarn and between a woman and the men she called kuthn was hedged about by the strongest set of interpersonal constraints that operated in Edward River society. People in this relationship set were called "longway" relatives. That is to say they could not be in each other's close presence and they could not speak or call out to each other under any circumstances. If a person was about to come into face to face contact with one of these "longway" relatives, others would normally shout a warning. The

avoidance behaviours were imposed by parents on their children at a relatively early age. In explaining the stringency of the avoidance rules, informants specifically linked it with the asymmetry of the cross-cousin marriage rule and said it prevented the wrong cross-cousins from forming relationships that could lead to marriage. Publicly there was no difference in the behaviour of genealogically related members of the set and others, except that men might receive food through appropriate intermediaries from females who were related as FZD, ZHZ and FFZSD. The flow was one way. Females could not accept food from men they called kuthn.

Despite the strength of the taboo on interaction between members of this set and the ideology supporting its imposition, it is interesting to note that marriages between men and women in this set accounted for slightly more than 17% of all "wronghead" marriages. Investigation shows that some of these marriages came about by arrangement, while the others were subject to much scandal and dispute before being accepted by the community at large.

Behaviour between males who called each other kuthn or maarn was generally free of interactional constraints, except that a man could not accept food from kuthn who were closely related to him. A man had two specific sets of responsibilities towards those kuthn who were MMBDS, MBS and WB. One set related to initiation ritual and the other to mortuary ceremonies. It was a duty of men who were already initiated to act as guardians for their MMBDS, MBS and WB throughout their initiation. During the neophytes' ritual seclusion, their guardians ensured that they had sufficient to eat and generally protected them from malign supernatural influences. They also played an important sustaining role during the actual ceremonies, conducting their cross-cousins and brothers-in-law from place to place and generally encouraging them and providing comfort and reassurance. The duty of an initiation guardian was first and foremost a duty of ZH. It was rationalised in terms of repaying to his brother-in-law's family part of the debt incurred for the gift of his wife. When a ZH was not available to perform the duty, it fell to

a FZS, a FFZS or some classificatory surrogate.

When a close kuthn died (e.g. MMBDS, MBS or WB), a man played a leading role in the organisation of the funeral observances for the deceased because closer relatives were said to be too overcome by grief to do anything but mourn. When such an event occurred the man was called thaknham by the rest of the community. He wore special mourning beads and helped tie the body to its exposure poles. Later he would take a leading part in the conventional grievance-clearing sequence that followed a death by accusing others of not looking after the deceased or of acting in his best interests. On the other hand, when a closely related maarn died (e.g. FFZSC, FZC, ZHZ, ZH) a man's role was restrained and confined mostly to mourning.

The existence of offspring also conditioned the interactions of men who stood in the maarn-kuthn relationship. A girl contracted a "straight" marriage when she married the son of a man her father called maarn, whilst a young man contracted a "straight" marriage when he married the daughter of a man his father called kuthn. As Sharp (1937:100) noted, a man with children would be scrupulous in sending gifts of food and materials, in giving aid in tasks and disputes and in providing access to tracts to those related to him as MMBDS, MBS and WB, because such persons were expected to provide wives for his sons. Equally a man would be canvassed in the same way by those who were his FFZSS, FZS and ZH, because they hoped to obtain the man's daughters (born or unborn) as wives for their sons. When it seemed likely, for whatever reasons, that such kin could not supply children as spouses, a conscientious father would seek to cement any other relationship with classificatory maarn and kuthn whenever it seemed advantageous to the marriage prospects of his children.

The relationship between females who called one another by the terms rorko and maarn was relaxed and informal and not marked by any special obligations or duties, other than those involved in the observance of mourning ceremonies. When a close female relative of either set died, custom then called for a woman to play a relatively restrained or

passive role. The development of relationships between women in this reciprocal set was also influenced by the existence of children, since the maintenance of good relations among those who exercised control of the marriage destinies of children made the negotiation of bestowals much easier. Hence, a woman would maintain cordial relations with HZ, FZD, FFZSD and any other female maarn who seemed likely to provide sons as husbands for her daughters. Equally, a woman would cultivate her BW, MBD, MMBDD or any other rorko who might be a potential source of daughters who could make wives for her sons.

Concerning role succession, there were two kin-defined role clusters that required replacement when the primary role incumbent was missing. One replacement situation occurred with the death of a spouse, and the other centred on the role of ZH during initiation and mortuary ritual.

Men and women who were widowed, unless they were very old, needed to replace their deceased wives and husbands. The operation of the rules of the levirate and the sororate partly solved the problem of spouse replacement. Thus, when a man died, his widow, when her mourning duties were at an end, could insist that her husband's brother assume responsibility for her and her children. Not a few polygynous unions were formed in this way. When a brother was not available, or was unwilling to marry his dead brother's wife, a widow would then seek a marriage partner elsewhere among her set of possible "straight" (or even "wronghead") partners. In this fashion, young men occasionally acquired their first wives. The situation was similar for men whose wives had died. If there was no sister available to act as a substitute, they too were forced to seek partners elsewhere. In the selection of replacement partners outside the operational ambit of the levirate and the sororate, widows and widowers appear to have had more freedom to exercise personal choice than young people making their first marriages.

As I pointed out earlier, when a novice lacked a ZH to act as his guardian during his initiation, the role

was filled by a close kinsman of the same class or a classificatory surrogate. It should be mentioned that when someone other than ZH stepped into the role, there was no expectation that the surrogate should receive a sister of the neophyte as a wife in exchange for his services. I also noted that when a man died, his ZH played a leading role in the preparations surrounding the corpse and in grievance settling. Because of its social importance in the conduct of funerals, this too was a role that was required to be performed by a close kinsman or a classificatory surrogate when a ZH was not available.

The degree to which individuals seeking marriage partners for their children might intensify their relationships with others in this set was optional and depended on factors of demography, alliance and personal compatibilities, which in my mind at least, were too complex to attempt to codify. As might be expected, there was no individual or social necessity to replace those who filled relationships of avoidance.

3.3.3 The pinharr, nganhin and ngothon reciprocal set

The distribution of roles associated with particular kintypes comprising the pinharr, nganhin and ngothon set of reciprocal kin terms is presented in summary form in Tables 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13. Socially, the two most significant kin-defined role clusters were the relationship between a man and his son and the relationship between a man and his daughter. The behaviour of fathers towards their male and female children contrasted at many points. Before discussing these in detail I shall highlight the ways in which a father's duties towards children of either sex were essentially the same. These duties started prior to the birth of children. As I noted earlier (pp. 81-2), a woman publicly acknowledged her pregnancy when she or her husband received a sign that a baby spirit, a parr'r nengk, had taken up residence in the mother's womb. It is worth noting that the physiological role of the male was clearly acknowledged in this society. Sexual

could interact with ease and familiarity with
as a youth was educated in hunting technology, crafts-
manship and the economic resources of his estate by
learned of the mythic/ritual resources of his clan
estate from
learned sorcery techniques, love magic and curing
ritual from
before contracting a marriage required the consent of
expected support in quarrels from
supported in quarrels
in a father's absence could expect paternal support from
when among strangers could expect paternal support from
sent food to the camp of an aged
played a restrained role during the mourning
ceremonies on the death of
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of
could take part in an expedition to revenge the death of

<u>Nganhin</u> kintypes		
F	FB	" <u>nganhin</u> "
yes	yes	yes
yes		
yes	yes	
yes		
yes	yes	
yes	yes	
	yes	
		yes
yes	yes	
yes		
<u>thanakunm</u>		
yes		

could interact freely with
could share food with
could seek a "wronghead" marriage
partner among
played a restrained role during
the mourning observances for
adopted the following bereavement
term on the death of

<u>Pinharr</u>	kintypes
FZ	" <u>pinharr</u> "
yes	yes
yes	
	yes
yes	
<u>thanakunm</u>	

Table 3.11 A man's duties towards females he called pinharr and males he called nganhin (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

shared with his wife pre- and post-birth taboos to ensure the health of
interacted with ease and familiarity in the presence of
was indulgent towards
observed a restrained and distant relationship towards
provided instruction in hunting technology, material craftsmanship for
passed on specialised love magic, sorcery and curing techniques to
provided instruction in mythic and ritual resources of the clan estate to
decided when and which initiation ritual the following should attend
must agree to the marriage arrangements made on behalf of
could expect support in quarrels from his adult
could extend temporary surrogate paternal duties towards some
could expect major support in old age from
could seek "wronghead" marriage partners among
would undertake food taboos during mourning ceremonies for
acted as an accuser during the grievance clearing period for
adopted the following term on the death of

Ngothon kintypes					
S	BS	male "ngothon"	D	BD	female "ngothon"
yes			yes		
yes	yes	yes			
yes					
			yes	yes	
yes					
yes					
yes	yes				
yes					
yes					
		yes			
yes					
					yes
yes					
yes		yes			
<u>kaalmangk</u>			<u>kaalmangk</u>		

Table 3.12 A man's duties towards males he called ngothon (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A woman...

could interact freely with
could expect to marry the eligible sons of
contracted "straight" marriages with the sons of
sent food to an aged
played a restrained role in the mourning ceremonies for
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

A woman...

interacted freely and occasionally shared food with
could expect her sons to marry
enjoined her daughters to avoid
could seek a "wronghead" marriage partner among
played a restrained role in the mourning ceremonies for
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Pinharr kintypes		
FZ	IM	"pinharr"
yes	yes	yes
yes		
yes		yes
yes	yes	
yes		
thanakum		

Ngothon kintypes			
BS	male "ngothon"	BD, SW	female "ngothon"
yes	yes	yes	yes
		BD	
yes	yes		
	yes		
yes		yes	
kaalmangk		kaalmangk	

A woman...

acted with reserve and modesty
in the presence of
when menstruating, avoided
before contracting a marriage
required the consent of
in quarrels could rely on the
support of
could seek a "wronghead"
marriage partner among
occasionally sent food
to the camp of
played a restrained role in
the mourning ceremonies for
adopted the following bereave-
ment term on the death of

Nganhin kintypes		
F	FB	"nganhin"
yes	yes	
yes	yes	
yes		
yes		
yes		
		yes
yes	yes	
yes		
thanakum		

Table 3.13 A woman's duties towards those males and females she called nganhin, pinharr and ngothon (Kuuk Thaayore vocative terminology).

intercourse was held to be necessary for conception to take place and children were seen as inheriting their parents' physical characteristics. When the identity of a genitor was in doubt, people would refer to characteristics such as facial resemblance, head shape and other physical features in order to impute paternity.

During his wife's pregnancy a father would observe a set of pre-birth taboos which included abstaining from certain foods which might affect the foetus, or doing anything that might endanger the unborn child's health, such as making spears anywhere near his pregnant wife. When his child was born the father observed a post-partum taboo on sexual intercourse with his wife for approximately one month. A father also observed taboos during his offspring's childhood (see pp. 231, 261). It was a prerogative of a child's father to select and confer a personal totemic name on it in the course of a naming ceremony held a month or so after its birth. In later life no child could marry without a father's consent. In the event of the death of a son or daughter, a man undertook food taboos to symbolise his grief, and during the grievance settling proceedings was especially active in accusing others of not looking after his child's welfare.

With respect to his male children a father was indulgent, spoiling and generally non-disciplinary. He was largely responsible for teaching his sons most of their hunting techniques and their basic craftsmanship (although others shared this task with him from time to time). He instructed his sons in the economic, mythic and ritual resources of the clan estate and of the tracts that fell within the range of the family hearthgroup. A man would, in due course, pass on to his sons the specialised knowledge he had pertaining to curing techniques, love magic, sorcery and other secret knowledge. Only a father could decide when his sons were ready for initiation. It was his duty to select which of the initiation ceremonies each son should pass through (see pp. 216-20). While his sons were ritually secluded from the rest of society during their initiation, a father observed a speech taboo on their names as if they

were dead.

Because fathers and sons frequently married women from the same clans they were often to be found in the same bands exploiting the resources of the same tracts. Fathers and sons, along with brothers, formed one of the principal axes of alignment in disputes both within and outside the kindred. During a father's aging and decline as a hunter, his sons contributed more and more to the upkeep of their father's hearthgroup. In turn, father acted as an occasional caretaker and educator of his son's children. When a father died, his sons played little formal part during the mortuary activities because they were regarded as being too overcome with grief and worry. Later, however, the sons could make up part of a revenge expedition, if one was mounted, to hunt down the father's supposed murderer (see pp. 282-3).

In contrast to the easygoing and relaxed relationship between a man and his sons, the interaction between a man and his daughters was restrained and full of carefully maintained decorum. A father could not joke with or swear at his daughters as he did with his sons. And whereas a father might attend to the toileting of a young male child, he could not do the same for his young daughters. There were strong modesty conventions that inhibited a father from looking even inadvertently at his daughter's genitals. For example, young girls normally wore a pubic apron until such time as their pubic hair provided a natural screen. In hearthgroup seating arrangements, a daughter never sat opposite her father at the camp fire but always to one side. When she was menstruating she could neither give food to her father nor talk with him. Usually at such times she was sent to stay with her maternal relatives. The concern for propriety was reflected at the symbolic level as well. For instance, daughters could not share a meal of freshwater mussels with their fathers because of the bivalve's fancied resemblance to female pudenda. It was said that when a man saw the opened mussels and his daughters together he would be made to think of his daughters' genitals and this would cause him great shame since it was analogous to

committing incest in the mind.

A father contributed relatively little to the education of his daughters which was mainly in the hands of women. He tried, in conjunction with his wife and WB, to arrange a successful marriage for his female children and, together with WB, acted to defend any insults offered his daughters while they were members of his hearthgroup.

The relationship between a man and his brother's children was similar to that between the real father and the children but without many of the specific duties (see Tables 3.11 and 3.12). A man's attitude towards his brother's sons was warm and indulgent while that towards his brothers' daughters was constrained by the same distancing and modesty conventions. Unmarried men often spent much time with their brothers' sons and played an important secondary role in the education of those children. A man and his brothers' sons shared the same clan estate and hence were frequently to be found in the same bands. They also shared the same set of ritual responsibilities towards the estate.

When ritual affairs took a man among relative strangers he might choose an unrelated nganhin (rather than a waanhin) to act as his sponsor and as a social reference point from which he could orient himself among his hosts. An older man might perform similar temporary paternal duties for a visiting ngothon.

The relationship between a man and those non-related women he called ngothon was also characterised by reserve and emotional neutrality, but it should be noted that 26% of "wronghead" marriages occurred between members of this set.

A man regarded his father's sister (pinharr) in much the same light as his father, that is, as a person with whom interaction was relaxed and free of constraints. It was permissible to share food and conversation with father's sister, although in practical terms a man rarely visited a married FZ with female children because of the total avoidance that had to obtain between FZD and BS. During the mourning ceremonies for FZ a man played a relatively

restrained role. Very occasionally men contracted marriages with non-related pinharr. Some 8.7% of my sample of "wronghead" marriages occurred in this group.

From a woman's point of view, the major kintypes composing the pinharr category were FZ and HM. In the appropriate circumstances a woman could expect to marry a son of FZ, although she could contract a "straight" marriage with the son of anyone she called pinharr. Interaction between a woman and her FZ and HM was relaxed and informal and certainly not attended by the set of avoidance duties and compulsory presentations her brother had to make to his WM (see Subsection 3.3.5).

A special value was placed on the father-son relationship. As I noted earlier (p.127), it was inconceivable that a man should not have a so-called "blood" father. If a man died when his sons were young, the re-marriage of his widow (often to one of the dead man's brothers) provided the necessary replacement. But even when a man reached adulthood and was himself married and relatively independent, there was still a strong emotional requirement to have someone in the father role if not the real father. To have a father meant having someone who would provide loyal and uncritical support, advice and assistance. It was normal, therefore, for a man to have a succession of people play the role of father during his lifetime. The succession began with his genitor and might proceed from there to a MH on his genitor's death, or, to a FB. In old age, even though the necessity for a father might appear less, yet men still required fathers to grieve for them at their death. Hence it was not unusual for a man of advanced years to refer to a younger man as ngan-nganhin-ngathn, "family-father-mine". People constantly made provision for the possibility of "taking over" or succeeding to another's status, and the recruitment of younger and more distantly related men to the "father" role usually came about through personal negotiation.

No other role in this set required obligatory replacement.

3.3.4 The kaaln, mokr, kalin and thuuwun reciprocal set

Tables 3.14, 3.15 and 3.16 summarise the roles associated with the various kintypes that compose the kaaln, mokr, kalin and thuuwun set of reciprocal kin terms. In this set of terms there were three central role clusters. They were those pertaining to the relationship between a mother and her children, to a mother's brother and his sister's children and to a man and his wife's father. I shall deal with each in turn before going on to describe the role content of the remaining kin-defined statuses belonging to the set.

All women expected to bear children and going by informants' statements, the preferred family size seemed to have been 4 children spaced widely apart in birth order. Sharp (1940) found in the course of his surveys of 1933 and 1935 that no woman appeared to have had more than 6 children, while 20% of all women married for a year or longer had not borne any children at all (which seems to indicate a fairly high rate of infertility). Of the marriages which were fertile, the average number of children per marriage was 2.3. Infanticide was said to occur but well attested cases were hard to disentangle from malicious and derogatory gossip (see p. 277). Twins and malformed children were said to be killed at birth. Sharp (1940:490) suspected that an unconscious preference for female infanticide may have produced the oddly male-biased sex ratios of his early census which showed a ratio of 132 males to 100 females among those under 25 years.

Normally, however, a woman was fiercely protective of her own child. She carefully observed the pre-birth and post-birth taboos that were necessary to ensure her child's health. She was the chief nurturant figure in her child's life and its principal means of transport. A mother kept her infant close by her at all times so that she could feed it on demand. Weaning began when a child had acquired four to six teeth (i.e. somewhere between six and eight months), when soft foods such as fish and yam were introduced into the child's diet. Weaning appeared to have

A woman...

interacted freely with

shared with husband the observance of pre- and post-birth taboos to ensure the health of

taught domestic skills to

was the principal disciplinarian during the childhood of

gave assistance during the confinements of

negotiated the marriage arrangements of

offered occasional maternal support to

gave support during seclusion of a widowed

could expect support in old age from

would go into semi-seclusion and observe food taboos on the death of an adult

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

could seek "wronghead" marriage partners among

Thuuwun kintypes					
S	ZS	male "thuuwun"	D	ZD	female "thuuwun"
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
yes			yes		
			yes		
yes			yes		
			yes	yes	
yes			yes		yes
	yes			yes	
yes			yes		
yes			yes		
kuukum	kuukum		kuukum	kuukum	
		yes			

A woman...

interacted freely and with respect towards

learnt her basic repertoire of domestic skills primarily from

had her marriage arranged by

in mother's absence expected maternal support from

when among strangers expected maternal help from

on the death of her husband would be supported during period of seclusion by her

played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies for

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Kalin kintypes		
M	MZ	"kalin"
yes	yes	yes
yes		
yes		
	yes	
		yes
yes		
yes	yes	
ngamkaar	ngamkaar	

Table 3.14

A woman's duties towards those males and females she called thuuwun and kalin (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

would observe speech, spacing and touching taboos towards

could not accept food from

could expect to be admonished and disciplined when necessary by

could not marry until consent had been obtained from

could expect to marry an eligible daughter of

could depend for support in quarrels on

was expected to support in quarrels his

would send a steady stream of gifts to

during mourning ceremonies would help prepare the body of a deceased

would adopt the following bereavement term on the death of

Mokr kintypes	Kaaln kintypes		
	MB+	MB-	WF
		yes	yes
yes	yes	yes	yes
yes	yes		
yes	yes		
yes	yes		
yes	yes	yes	yes
yes	yes		yes
yes	yes		
ngamkaar	ngamkaar	ngamkaar	ngamkaar

A woman...

interacted freely and with respect towards

when necessary could expect to be admonished by

had to avoid the sons of

could not marry without the permission of

played a restrained role during the mourning ceremonies for

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Mokr and Kaaln kintypes	
MB+, MB-	"kaaln"
yes	yes
yes	
yes	yes
yes	
yes	
ngamkaar	

Table 3.15 The duties of men and women towards those males they called mokr and kaaln (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

observed speech, spacing and touching
taboos towards

interacted with relative ease with

could not give food to

had disciplinary responsibilities towards

had to consent to the marriage
arrangements of

might expect his daughter to marry
an eligible

enjoined his sons to avoid

expected regular gifts from

in quarrels expected support from

in quarrels would help

observed food taboos and took a leading
role in the mortuary ceremonies for

took a leading role in organising
revenge for the death of a

adopted the following bereavement term
on the death of

Thuuwun kintypes					
Z-S	Z+S	DH	male "thuuwun"	ZD	female "thuuwun"
	yes	yes	yes		
				yes	yes
yes	yes	yes	yes		
yes	yes			yes	
yes	yes			yes	
	yes			yes	
		yes			
yes	yes	yes			
yes	yes				
yes	yes				
yes	yes	yes			
yes	yes				
raprrm	raprrm	raprrm		raprrm	

A man...

interacted freely and with
respect towards

as a child was disciplined
primarily by

could expect maternal support
during mother's absence from

frequently sent food to

could expect support in old
age from

could seek "wronghead"
marriage partners among

played a passive role in the
mortuary ceremonies of

adopted the following
bereavement term on the
death of

Kalin kintypes			
M	MZ	SW	"kalin"
yes	yes	yes	yes
yes			
	yes		
yes			
		yes	
			yes
yes			
ngam- kaar	ngam- kaar		

Table 3.16 A man's duties towards
those females and males
he called kalin and
thuuwun (Kuuk Thaayorre
vocative terminology).

been a relatively trauma-free experience for infants. When a child began to walk and explore the world around it, its mother became a restraining and disciplinary figure constantly imposing strict parameters on the mobility of the child because of the risk of encountering natural and supernatural hazards.

Only a mother had the right to chastise her child physically. She had to be consulted on all matters concerning its welfare with the exception of arranging the details and timing of a son's initiation which was a responsibility of the father. A mother was the actual negotiator of her children's marriage arrangements. It was said that a mother sometimes withheld permission for a youngest child to marry because she wanted to retain the child to look after her and her husband in their old age. However, there is little evidence that this occurred often, if at all.

The death of an infant was an affair that passed with little ceremony or prolonged mourning. The death of a son or daughter that had survived the hazards of infancy and childhood was another matter. When that occurred, a mother went into semi-seclusion, undertook food taboos and wore special paraphernalia as a sign of her grief.

In addition to the broad range of duties a woman had to all her children, she had the additional responsibility of training her daughters in the skills necessary for the female contribution to the maintenance of the hearthgroup. When the time came, a mother tried to ease her daughters gently into married life. She often permitted them to have several trial cohabitations with their prospective partners before permanently setting up independent hearthgroups of their own. Even then a mother maintained a watchful eye over a newly married daughter since a couple normally spent many months of the first year of a marriage camping near the girl's parents.

During their married lives, a mother and her daughters were less likely to be in contact than a mother and her sons. Sons tended to marry women of their mother's clan and this ensured that they would often be in the same bands exploiting the same tracts. A daughter, on the other

hand, typically married a man from a clan different from that of her parents and there could be little overlap in the range of tracts that mother and daughter exploited in the course of the seasonal round. A mother tried to be near a pregnant daughter when the time came for her to be delivered. If a daughter's husband died, her mother would support the widowed woman through the trials of mourning. She helped preserve her daughter's seclusion and assisted her with child-minding and food foraging. She tried to ensure that the widow received regular supplies of whatever flesh foods she was permitted to eat.

The relationship between a son and his mother was often turbulent during late childhood when typically a boy chafed under maternal strictures. Such rebellious attitudes changed when the boy underwent his initiation. From then on a young man's attitude towards his mother was one of great warmth and respect. Men often said that they owed their primary allegiance to the women who bore them.

Siblings called their mother's elder brother mokr and their mother's younger brother kaaln. The terms were extended to include other non-related men. The difference in terminology signified little for the behaviour of females towards men defined by either term. They interacted with them freely albeit with respect. However, the distinction was important for males. The interaction between a male child and his mother's brothers was relatively informal during the child's early years, but when as a youth he had passed through his initiation, the informality was replaced by formal codes of behaviour towards his mother's younger brothers and all others classified with them. When interacting with such men, a male had to observe speech, spacing and touching taboos. Thus he could not initiate conversations with anyone he called kaaln. He could only speak when spoken to, and in response had to reply with face averted. People described the relationship as ngáanch, as a "longway" relationship. Such conventions did not apply to men called mokr. Towards them, a man behaved as his sisters did, that is, with respect but relative freedom. The mokr-thuuwun relationship

was described as murrkam. It should be noted, though, that a man could not receive food from men he called by either term.

As I pointed out earlier, the preferred form of marriage was with the daughter of a mother's younger brother and, in a sense, the avoidance behaviours surrounding the men called kaaln anticipated the respect behaviour a man owed to his wife's parents. In fact, few such ideal marriages occurred. Nonetheless, the expectation was that, other things being equal, a man with marriageable daughters would consider the needs of his older sister's sons and and perhaps influence marriage negotiations to take account of their needs. But mother's brothers had a further role to play in marriage negotiations. No sister's child, male or female, could be betrothed without their consent. In addition to being part of the group that determined the marriage destinies of sister's children, men also had the duty of overseeing the behaviour of their sister's children and of admonishing them when necessary. Despite these disciplinary responsibilities, the bond between men and their sister's sons was especially strong. They supported each other in disputes with others and few things could impel men to anger more quickly than to hear their mother's brothers or their sister's sons being sworn at and abused.

Mother's brothers also played a leading role during the mourning ceremonies for their sister's children. They assisted with the preparations of the body and were chief accusers during the grievance clearing. They often participated in the divination vigil that attempted to establish the deceased's magical killer when homicide by sorcery was suspected. They also helped set in motion the revenge for such a death (see pp. 281-4). Mother's brothers wore special mourning gear as a mark of sorrow and undertook food taboos for a limited period as well. On the other hand, when a man's mother's brother died his role was relatively passive and his duties were confined to assisting with the preparations of the body for exposure. A woman's role was equally restrained on the occasion of her mother's brother's death and limited to the expression

of grief.

When a young man had a woman bestowed on him he acquired a set of obligations towards his promised wife's father (and to her mother as well, see p. 168). He referred to his prospective father-in-law as kaaln if he was not in this category prior to the betrothal, as was likely to be the case in an arranged "wronghead" betrothal. His duties towards his wife's father were the same as those towards his mother's younger brother, and in addition he was required to send a steady stream of gifts of food and material items to his future parents-in-law. He would owe these duties for as long as the marriage lasted and his parents-in-law lived. When a man died, his father-in-law observed food taboos and helped in the preparation of his son-in-law's body. A man did much the same for a deceased father-in-law.

The same kind of warmth, deference and respect that men and women gave their mothers also diffused across to their mother's sisters who often acted as temporary mothers in the real mother's absence. Children were usually looked after by their mother's sister when a mother could not perform her regular domestic duties as, for example, during childbirth or sickness. Mother's sisters also had the right to rebuke verbally (although not to chastise) their sister's children when their behaviour called for it. When a woman's son or daughter died, the sisters of the bereaved mother joined her in wearing mourning paraphernalia.

A man also maintained a respectful demeanour towards his son's wife, whom he also referred to as kalin. During the years of his advanced age a man might rely heavily on his son's wife to help look after his personal comfort and physical needs in much the same way as his own mother looked after him during his childhood.

The kalin group of women were also a source of "wronghead" marriage partners for men. Some 21% of my sample of "wronghead" marriages was made up of females and males who, prior to marriage, called each other kalin and thuuwun.

Two of the statuses in this set required surrogates

if the primary kin who filled them died or were otherwise unable to perform their functions. These were the statuses normally filled by mother and mother's brother. Clearly, children who lost a mother prematurely required a replacement to provide the necessary nurturance and discipline, as well as to undertake the negotiation of the children's marriages if these had not already been arranged. The re-marriage of the children's father (perhaps to the deceased mother's younger sister) normally provided the necessary long term substitute. It usually fell to mother's sisters to discharge the temporary duties of mother while the children's father was still in mourning. The need for a mother continued into later life. A woman, for instance, required someone in the mother role to assist her in her confinements and support her during her widow's seclusion should her husband die. Convention also required that a deceased man or woman have a mother to perform the appropriate mourning routines and observe food taboos in their memory.

For the community at large, mother's brothers were important because of the rights of consent they exercised over the marriage arrangements of their sisters' children and also because of their well defined and important role in mortuary ceremonial and in the other events that proceeded in the wake of a death. Therefore, when a real mother's brother was missing, surrogates were recruited from the kaaln category to perform these important functions. My data suggest that the everyday relationships of most men with their surrogate "mother's brothers" was similar to that between men and their actual mother's brothers and included the recognition that the surrogate had disciplinary responsibilities towards his newly acquired "sister's son".

3.3.5 The mayath, thaaman and paangun reciprocal set

The primary kintypes distinguished within this set of reciprocal terms are laid out in Table 3.17 together with their associated duties. The focal relationship in

the set was that between a man and his wife's mother (mayath) or, conversely, between a woman and her son-in-law (paangun). This was a "longway" relationship. A man could not sit near his WM or touch any of her things, nor could he accept food and water from her. He could not initiate a conversation with her or address her directly to her face. When communication between the two was necessary, it was mediated by a third person. The relationship was not one of total avoidance as it was in the case of a man and his FZD. A man was required in the early years of his marriage to spend some time with his wife's people and thereafter he would return frequently to his in-laws' country with his wife and family both to exploit the tracts to which his wife had access and to let his wife's parents see their grandchildren. When he camped near them, a son-in-law sent gifts of food to his mother-in-law as well as to her husband. This gift-giving was called yuurthongkn. Normally it began with the bestowal of his wife-to-be. From the time of bestowal a young man could publicly court his promised wife at her camp. In the absence of a bestowal a young man who judged that he had reasonable prospects with a girl and with those in charge of her betrothal might commence visiting and gift-giving. If a girl's parents accepted such son-in-law demeanour, the young suitor felt encouraged to proceed in much the same fashion as if a bestowal had taken place. When a couple were not in the "straight" marriage category, a man's adoption of son-in-law behaviour was an important public signal that a "wronghead" marriage was in the offing. Informants rationalised these gift-giving and distancing conventions as being the proper way to show respect to a woman towards whom he had incurred a lifetime of obligation for the gift of a wife. Men often spoke highly of their mothers-in-law and women not infrequently extolled the virtues of a dutiful son-in-law. When a WM died, a man wore a mourning necklace in memory of her and was a principal accuser on her behalf during the grievance settling that occurred during the funeral ceremonies. When a DH died, a woman's role towards the deceased was relatively

A man...

observed speech, spacing, touching taboos towards

could expect to marry an eligible daughter of

sent regular gifts to

was an accuser during the grievance clearing period following the death of

adopted this bereavement term on the death of

A man...

observed speech, spacing, touching taboos towards

could not give food to

undertook short-term food taboos and played an important role in the mortuary ceremonies for

adopted this bereavement term on the death of

Mayath kintypes			Thaaman kintypes	
MBW	WM	"mayath"	MBWB	"thaaman"
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
yes				
	yes			
yes	yes			
<u>yangan-warra</u>	<u>yangan-warra</u>		<u>yangan-warra</u>	
Paangun kintypes				
ZHVS	male "paangun"	ZHVD	female "paangun"	
yes	yes	yes	yes	
yes	yes	yes	yes	
yes		yes		
<u>yenchil</u>		<u>yenchil</u>		

A woman...

could interact in relative freedom with

played a passive role in the mourning observances for

adopted this bereavement term on the death of

A woman...

observed speech, spacing, touching taboos towards

interacted in relative freedom with

expected a daughter to marry an eligible

enjoined her sons to avoid

could not give food to

could expect regular gifts from

undertook short-term food taboos on the death of

adopted this bereavement term on the death of

Mayath kintypes		Thaaman kintypes	
MBW	"mayath"	MBWB	"thaaman"
yes	yes	yes	yes
yes		yes	
<u>yangan-warra</u>		<u>yangan-warra</u>	
Paangun kintypes			
HVS	DH	male "paangun"	female "paangun"
yes	yes	yes	
yes			yes
yes			yes
yes	yes	yes	yes
	yes		
yes	yes		yes
<u>yenchil</u>	<u>yenchil</u>		<u>yenchil</u>

Table 3.17 The duties of men and women towards those males and females they called mayath, thaaman and paangun (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

restrained. She undertook short-term food taboos in memory of the deceased but directed most of her energies to caring for her bereaved daughter

Of the rest of the set of women called mayath, a man had duties to and expectations of his MBWs only. He might reasonably expect that one or other of them could provide him with a wife (of course, if one did, he would then behave as a son-in-law). When a MBW died, a man played the same role during her obsequies that he did for his WM. Similarly, women could expect that their eligible daughters might marry those paangun who were HZSs. A woman's role in the mortuary observances for a HZS was similar to that for a deceased DH.

Towards other less closely related women he called mayath, a man observed the same kinds of speech, spacing and touching taboos that he observed with his MBW or WM. Women similarly avoided all other male paangun as part of the normal behavioural etiquette, but no other duties were involved.

The elaborate respect behaviour that men exhibited towards their mayath was not required of their female siblings. Unlike their brothers, women had little to do with females they called mayath. No formal duties were prescribed between the female members of the paangun-mayath set except for funerary observances in which demonstrably related kin played relatively passive roles in the obsequies.

Males were deferential and formal in the presence of those men they called thaaman. They could speak to them only when addressed and could not accept food or water from them. During life there were no duties or obligations inhering in the relationship. In real terms thaaman were peripheral members of a man's kindred. The situation was altered when a man died. Those men he called thaaman then adopted the bereavement term yenchil and they played a leading role in the early mourning preparations. The yenchil were responsible for tying the deceased's body to its exposure pole. Most other close

kin were said to be too prostrate with grief to be able to do so themselves. Yenchil might also voluntarily undertake food taboos to show their regret for the deceased's passing.

The role a man played when some closely related male thaaman died was similar to the mortuary role he adopted when a WM died. This has been discussed above.

Interaction between thaaman and a female paangun was less restrained than that characterising the behaviour between male members of the thaaman-paangun set. There was some formality involved. For example, a woman was supposed to keep her face averted when speaking to thaaman. However, there were no other specific obligations during the lifetimes of people who found themselves in this reciprocal set. There were specific mortuary roles entailed in the death of a paangun or thaaman who was a kindred member. When a closely related thaaman died, a woman played a relatively passive role. When a male or female paangun died, a woman undertook short-term food taboos.

3.3.6 The ngethin and ngethe reciprocal set

Of those who were called ngethin, only those who were directly related as MFZ, FMB, MF and WFF were included in the kindred. Similarly, those who were ngethe and belonged to the kindred were also genealogically defined. For a man, only those of his ngethe who were DC and ZSC were kindred; a woman counted only her SC as ngethe belonging to the kindred.

A female ngethin often acted as midwife during the birth of a woman's child. The rights and duties inherent in this set were similar to the ones prescribed for those in the grandparent/grandchild relationship of the puumin, wiiln, waanhin, yapan reciprocal set. In general, the ngethin-ngethe relationship was a relaxed one (i.e. mukam). There were no avoidance overtones and people in this set could sit together, talk and joke informally and share food. When a ngethin from the kindred died, the grandchildren

were called thaa-ngethe-kaar. They played a passive mourning role. If a ngethe from the kindred died, the ngethin were called yuumanthaar. The males of this group shared with yenchil the duty of tying the deceased's body to the exposure poles.

Table 3.18 sets out in summary form the duties of men and women towards those people they called ngethin and ngethe.

3.3.7 The kaman and kemeth reciprocal set

The kaman-kemeth reciprocal set of terms lies at the periphery of the Kuuk Thaayorre system of kin nomenclature. There were many ways of incorporating people into this set through blood ties and marriage links. Moreover the term was applied to people in Ego's own generation as well as to people in the second ascending and second descending generations.

All relationships in this set were described as mukam except for that between a man and his MMB, towards whom he showed the same kind of respect he showed towards his MB. This particular relationship was described as ngaanch. A man could not approach his MMB closely, could not talk directly to him nor accept food from him.

My data suggest that blood ties (and not marriage links) defined kindred members. Table 3.19 sets out the role content for the statuses associated with the various kintypes that defined the members of this set.

3.4 The shaping of marriage decisions

In various ways and places I have already presented material relevant to the marriage system. Here I want to describe the marriage system more coherently as a process of spouse selection. I concentrate on those who were the culturally defined decision-makers in the marriage process and I attempt to indicate the kinds of things that shaped their decisions.

In view of the earlier discussion on the nature of

A man...

interacted freely with

occasionally sent food to an aged

played a passive role in the mourning ceremonies of

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Ngethin kintypes	
FM, MFZ MF, FMB	other "ngethin"
yes	yes
yes	yes
yes	
thaa- ngethe-kaar	

Ngethe kintypes	
DS, ZSS DD, ZSD	other "ngethe"
yes	yes
yes	
yes	
yes	
yuuman- thaar	

A man...

interacted freely with

could be a casual caretaker for the young

could expect some support in old age from

helped in the mortuary preparations of a deceased

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

A woman...

interacted freely with

occasionally sent food to an aged

played a passive role in the mourning ceremonies for

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Ngethin kintypes		
FM, MFZ MF, FMB	other "ngethin"	
yes	yes	
yes		
yes		
thaa- ngethe-kaar		

Ngethe kintypes		
SS, BDS	SD, BDD	other "ngethe"
yes	yes	yes
yes	yes	
	yes	
yes	yes	
yes	yes	
yuuman- thaar	yuuman- thaar	

Table 3.18 The duties of men and women towards those males and females they called ngethin and ngethe (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

A man...

observed speech, spacing and touching taboos towards
interacted freely with
sent gifts of food to
played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies of
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Kaman kintypes		
MMB	MM, MMZ	other "kaman"
yes		
	yes	yes
yes	yes	
yes	yes	
<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>	<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>	

A man...

observed speech, spacing and touching taboos towards
could not give food to
interacted freely with
played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies for
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Kemeth kintypes		
ZDS	ZDD	other "kemeth"
yes		
yes		
	yes	yes
yes	yes	
<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>	<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>	

A woman...

interacted freely with
sent occasional gifts of food to
played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies of
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Kaman kintypes	
MM MMB, MMZ	other "kaman"
yes	yes
yes	
yes	
<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>	

A woman...

interacted freely with
might receive food gifts from
helped during the confinement of
played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies for
adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Kemeth kintypes		
DS	DD	other "kemeth"
yes	yes	yes
yes	yes	
	yes	
yes	yes	
<u>thaa-</u> <u>keme-kaar</u>		

Table 3.19 The duties of men and women towards those males and females they called kaman and kemeth (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).

marriage systems on the western side of Cape York Peninsula, it is perhaps best to begin with those factors that did not shape marriage decisions. These were moieties and clans.

Needham (1962b) has argued that the patterns of marriage alliances between Wik Mungkan clans were entirely consistent with the operation of an exogamous moiety system even if the two moieties were not specifically recognised by the Wik Mungkan themselves. McKnight (1971), on the other hand, felt that there might be unnamed moieties among the Wik Mungkan but they certainly did not enter into marriage decisions. McKnight did not present any substantive evidence for the existence of moieties. Needham's prime evidence for their existence lay in the patterns of marriage alliances he derived from McConnel's data (see Needham 1962b: 249). The particular patterns he found, and which certainly are compatible with a moiety organisation, may have been a lucky chance. There is no way that the pre-settlement pattern of exchanges between clans at Edward River can be similarly fitted into a set of exogamous exchanges characteristic of a moiety system. I invite the reader to attempt such a reconciliation with data from Figure 2.11.

In point of fact, Sharp (1937:137-40) was quite clear on the subject of moieties. He found evidence of named patrilineal moieties among all the tribes he encountered on the Mitchell River and Edward River reserves. Among the Yir Yoront, the moieties were called Pam Bib and Pam Lul. Sharp asserted that they were not exogamous. He described them as having minor functions in ritual and ceremony but because of their "somewhat anomalous" character he concluded that they were recent introductions from the south and east and, as such, had not yet been fully integrated into the social fabric of the groups living on the reserve. My own attempts to verify the existence of moieties in the pre-settlement era failed to elicit any evidence that they existed at all. I can only assume that the moieties Sharp observed were something of so little consequence that they failed to survive even in people's memories.

Turning to the subject of clans, the reader will

recall that in Chapter 2, I presented a statistical analysis of marriage patterns between clans in an attempt to show the importance of marriage links and secondary rights of access to land when the size of clan estates and their physical bases were markedly uneven. It would be easy, but wrong, to proceed from this kind of analysis to the conclusion that clans, as patrilineal descent groups, were corporately involved in the exchange of women. This was not how the Edward River people viewed the situation. Nowhere in any of my data is there even the hint of a suggestion that the clan as some kind of patrilineal descent group had anything to do with marriage and marriage arrangements. The people of the Edward River reserve conceptualised marriage, not in terms of exchanges between units constituted as lineal groups, but as alliances formed as a result of the decisions made by particular genealogically defined decision-makers.

In general terms there were three sets of factors or values that conditioned all marriages. The first of these was the often-stated value postulate that men and women had to marry. "People could not stop single", informants frequently reiterated. Marriage was every normal person's destiny. It would be possible to advance a host of reasons for impelling people into marriage but two of the most fundamental ones were: it was the only legitimate context in which to have and rear children and, given the dichotomy of male and female roles in subsistence, the hearth-group formed by the permanent association of a man and a woman made the most comfortable and utilitarian survival unit in this hunter-gatherer economy.

A second factor that conditioned all marriages was the cross-cousin marriage rule that specified who appropriate marriage partners were. The marriage rule, as I have pointed out, was clearly cognised as asymmetric and strong avoidance taboos inhibited the interaction of the alternative cross-cousins and those classified with them who were forbidden as spouses. Marriages that were formed by pairs whose relationships put them outside the orthodox marriage sets were called by a special term, paanth warrth.

Finally there was a preference for seeking marriage

partners among people from neighbouring clans rather than from distant clans. This preference operated independently of the marriage rule and came into effect when there was a choice between marrying a "wronghead" partner close at hand or marrying a "straight" partner from some distance away. For many people "straight" partners were difficult to find within the ambit of those they normally associated with during the seasonal round. It was necessary at times to go beyond the range of regular associates before a "straight" partner could be found. While "straight" (and, as it turns out, only "straight") marriages occurred between people from distant clans, most people faced with the situation of lacking a "straight" partner close at hand preferred to marry "wronghead" among neighbours rather than "straight" among strangers. In talking about marriage decisions, men frequently said, "A man can't marry a long way away...what's he going to do?". There were three mutually reinforcing reasons underlying the rhetorical "...what's he going to do?". Firstly, successful hunter-gatherer subsistence depended on acquiring a sizeable compendium of local knowledge about habitats and their food and material resources. In the course of acquiring this knowledge people tended to become territorially specialised. To marry a long way away meant acquiring secondary rights of access to country which was unfamiliar and whose year-round resource potential was unknown. Thus it was preferable for a man to marry a "wronghead" partner from mother's country because it enabled him to continue the process of territorial specialisation that he began in his youth when he hunted over mother's country. The same kind of argument applies with equal force in the case of women.

Secondly, it was not only the physical resources of the countryside that were unknown but the supernatural resources as well. The "safe and dangerous" places, as Biernoff (1978) aptly labels them, were also unknown. As I shall show in the next chapter, the countryside was full of supernatural hazards, powers and dangerous potencies that had to be avoided or else approached with circumspection and ritual precaution. The most vulnerable to the effects

of these dangerous places were strangers to the country.

Finally, to marry at a distance meant moving among or near people who had traditionally been accused of sorcery and of killing one's own ancestors. It would certainly mean leaving from time to time the security of one's own close relatives to live with affines who were strangers, whose language was different and whose intentions were an unknown quantity at best.

Hence, when arranging marriages, people preferred to stay within the framework of what was accustomed, familiar, known and safe, even if that meant marrying "wronghead" and against the marriage rule.

In conversation with men it was easy to get the impression that men played a major role in marriage decisions. Thus men might, when talking of their "straight" women, add a phrase such as: "...but my uncle never promised her to me". Or in speaking of their wife's brother they might say: "He gave me his sister". Statements like these seem to imply that men had a great deal of influence in marriage decisions and that perhaps they formally promised their women to other men. However, such statements were more a reflection of informal processes rather than a description of the structural importance of men in marriage decisions. Indeed, how individual agreements were arrived at depended much on the complex interplay of personalities and on the patterns of prior antipathies and sympathies existing between the major participants to a marriage decision. It is useful to distinguish between two sets of participants in marriage decisions. One set was composed of the pair who wished to marry while the second set was composed of those in the generation above the prospective marriage pair whose consent to the marriage had to be obtained. The latter set I shall term the betrothal-makers.

The principal betrothal-makers for a prospective marriage pair were the father, the mother and the mother's brother (or the kindred surrogates) of each. Irrespective of what anyone else had to say concerning a marriage, the public consent of these two sets of relatives was absolutely essential. If there was any lack of agreement between them,

a marriage did not go forward. Parents might fail to negotiate a bestowal and leave the selection of a marriage partner to their children. When this occurred, as it not infrequently did, the betrothal-makers remained as ultimate ratifiers of the choices of their children, nephews and neices.

The actual negotiators of bestowal arrangements were the mothers of the two prospective marriage partners. They acted with the consent of their husbands and brothers. Informants said men were too "ashamed" or embarrassed to negotiate these matters. When a promise was contracted, it was the mothers who informed their children that a promise (koomach) had been made. From then on the betrothed man brought gifts of food (yurthongkn) to his betrothed to give to her mother.

In eliciting accounts of pre-settlement bestowal arrangements from informants it seemed to me that they tended to gloss over the activities that took place behind the scenes before the consents were obtained and the koomach entered into. An examination of post-settlement bestowals was necessary to appreciate fully just how many hopes were floated (and dashed), just how much lobbying and how many ingratiating manoeuvres took place before agreement to a match emerged. Case No. 15 in Chapter 10, (pp. 535-8) provides a good and typical illustration of the kind of interplay involved in arriving at a betrothal in post-settlement times. I have no reason to believe that the same interplay did not occur during the pre-settlement period as well. One of my informants told me that there were two ways to marriage -- the "easy" way and the "hard" way. The "easy" way was characterised by general consensus and agreement among the principal decision-makers. Either the prospective marriage pair agreed with the bestowal arrangements made on their behalf or the betrothal-makers agreed with the choices made independently by their children, nieces and nephews. The "hard" way was characterised by lack of agreement between the prospective marriage pair and the betrothal-makers.

Of the "easy" routes to marriage it is useful to distinguish between three kinds: the "ideal", the usual

"straight" marriage and the "wronghead"-by-agreement marriage. The "ideal" marriage occurred when a man married his MBD and a woman married her FZS. Structurally, the relationship of the betrothal-makers to the betrothed is diagrammed in Figure 3.6 below.

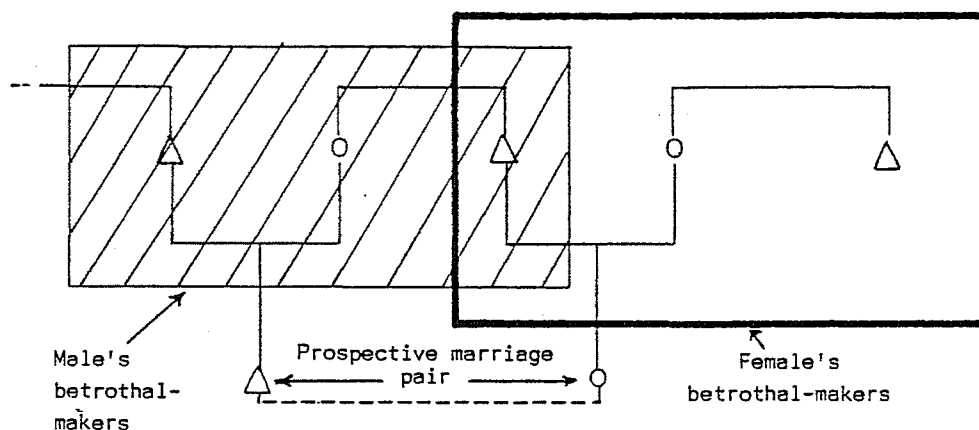


Figure 3.6 The principal decision-makers in an "ideal" marriage.

In the "ideal" marriage there was an overlap in the betrothal-making groups since a man's prospective father-in-law was also his mother's brother. In people's minds this was the most desirable form of marriage. Presumably it was the identity of kindred interests based on close association and the sharing of resources that made it so. Nonetheless, for the reasons advanced by Kunstadter *et al.* (1963), it was unlikely to be a frequent form of marriage. I found it difficult to calculate with any accuracy how many pre-settlement marriages conformed to the "ideal", but it was certainly less than 10% of all marriages.

The usual "straight" marriage was with a more distantly related or non-related member of the marriageable kin category. Membership of the marriageable kin category might have to be calculated by alternate routes in the fashion described earlier in the chapter. Structurally, such marriages seemed to contain more problems for negotiation since there was no over-lapping membership in the two sets of

betrothal-makers and there were six decision-makers rather than five. I have no satisfactory evidence to determine whether or not this occurred.

When it was impossible to find marriage partners of the right ages and right kin classes within the confines of the usual set of intermarrying clans, two alternative courses of action presented themselves. One solution was to look further afield for "straight" partners. The second solution was to permit "wronghead" marriages. The latter solution was the one most frequently chosen for the reasons advanced earlier. "Wronghead" marriages could be the result of betrothal arrangements made by betrothal-makers in the same way as "straight" marriages were. There was no preferred category of kin class in which to marry. Rather, in the case of "wronghead" marriages, people said, "You could not marry too close". This statement meant that the prospective "wronghead" partners should have no shared (i.e. remembered) ancestors. Oftentimes, "wronghead" marriages were ratified rather than arranged by the betrothal-makers. One of my informants described it this way:

When they can't find a "straight" man for a woman, and if the woman already has a sweetheart whom she keeps on meeting in spite of her mother's objections, then the marriage bosses say, "Let them go and marry 'wronghead' anyway".

Once "wronghead" marriages were contracted they carried no overt social penalties apart from the inconvenience caused by the ensuing rearrangement of kinship labels. It was the case in the post-settlement context that husbands and wives who were "wronghead" prior to marriage tended to evince a slight attitude of shame or depreciation when they referred to their marriages. Such "wronghead" marriage partners tended to justify their marriage in terms of the lack of suitable partners or in terms of the over-riding love that existed between the partners during their courtship. It is possible the same attitudes may have attended pre-settlement "wronghead" marriages.

The "hard" route to marriage came about when the

betrothal-makers and the prospective marriage partners disagreed. Edward River people recognised, however inconvenient it might have been, that young men and women could form strong emotional attachments outside the existing framework of betrothals and proper marriage classes. When it became apparent that the affections of one or other of a betrothed pair lay elsewhere than in the negotiated relationship, then a great deal of pressure was brought to bear on the recalcitrant young person to conform to the arrangements made. Thus, when a young man was reluctant to enter an arranged marriage, he would be lectured by his mother and mother's brother and the promised girl might be sent to his camp ahead of time to sleep with him in an attempt to wean him away from whomever he was infatuated with. When a young woman loved someone other than her promised spouse the situation seemed more difficult. Girls, it was said, were quite impervious to warnings and threats when they were acting under the compulsion of strong love (perhaps induced by powerful love magic). When they continually made trysts with their forbidden lovers their promised spouses might drop their claims, arguing that they did not want women who always had lovers lurking about in the bush. Jealousy was said to be a principal cause of sorcery.

The breaking of betrothal arrangements had great potential for prompting open disputes because the plans of so many people were upset. Equally, when young people selected their own marriage partners in the absence of betrothal arrangements, the betrothal-makers could fail to agree with choices and again dispute situations were invoked. The ways in which such disputes were resolved are discussed in Chapter 5.

All that I have said so far about the role of the betrothal-makers in bestowing, in arranging and in ratifying marriage applies to men and women making their first marriages and to men polygynously marrying women who had not been married before. The role of the betrothal-makers in the case of widowed partners was one of ratification of choice rather than active re-bestowal or arranging. The levirate and the sororate provided a set of expectations concerning

remarriage, but if an appropriate deceased's brother or sister was not available to step into the role left vacant by a dead spouse, then widowed marriage partners were free to seek fresh spouses unhindered by considerations of the betrothal-makers.

3.5 Conclusions

I will conclude this chapter by referring to the issues concerning the conceptualisation of the kinship systems of Cape York Peninsula which I mentioned at the conclusion of Subsection 3.1.5. I shall deal with them in the light of my analysis of the Kuuk Thaayorre kinship data which may be taken as an exemplar for most of the kinship systems of the Edward River reserve.

The first issue that seemed to require clarification had to do with the adequacy of the anthropological terms applied to the indigenous system. Throughout this chapter, I have tended to describe the marriage rule in one of two ways. Employing the concepts and terminology I inherited from the classification of kinship systems, I have labelled the marriage rule as:

an asymmetric marriage rule requiring a man to marry a matrilateral cross-cousin or someone classified with her and a woman to marry a patrilateral cross-cousin or someone classified with him.

An alternative way of rendering the marriage rule in terms that more closely fit Kuuk Thaayorre usage is to describe the rule as follows:

A man ought to marry into the class of women he called (or could call) rorko; a woman ought to marry into the class of men she called (or could call) maarn. For a man the ideal or preferred spouse was a MBD, and, other things being equal, he might expect to marry such a person; for a

woman the ideal or preferred spouse was a FZS and, other things being equal, she might expect to marry such a person. A man might also expect to marry his MMBDD, a woman her FFZSS.

Kuuk Thaayorre people described marriages that conformed to the marriage rule as thakaraw. In English they glossed this word as "straight", but the terms "right" or "orthodox" also seem to be suitable translations. Marriages that did not conform to the rule, they labelled paanth waarth. The literal translation of this term was "wronghead", but the terms "wrong" or "irregular" seem also to be suitable descriptions for marriages that did not obey the marriage rule.

So far there seems to be an adequate degree of fit between the etics of classificatory anthropology and the emics of the "native's point of view". Can the system also be described as "preferential" or "prescriptive"?

In anthropological conceptualisation, the terms "prescription" and "preference" take their meanings from a particular kind of theory about the nature of marriage systems. This theory has come to be called "alliance theory" (see Scheffler 1973:780-6 for an overview). The precise meanings to be applied to the terms are a matter of some debate among alliance theorists themselves (e.g. see Lévi-Strauss 1969:xxxi). Despite such differences of opinion, there is a central sense to the terms upon which all seem to agree. In essence, it is that marriage rules expressed in kin terms do more than specify the kinds of kin that may or must be married. They also stand for relations of formal marital alliance between corporate social groups, usually unilineal descent groups.

Turning to Figure 2.11 in Chapter 2, we noted that there were definite patterns of alliance between the clans of the Kuuk Thaayorre in pre-settlement times. In statistical terms the relationships of exchange between the clans would seem to be consistent with an asymmetric, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage rule whose major function was to link corporate descent groups in marriage alliances. In other

words, it appears that we have a situation of prescriptive alliance. But appearances can be deceptive as I pointed out in my discussion of the marriage exchange patterns in Chapter 2 (pp. 90-3).

Finer grained analysis shows that many of the marriages that contributed to this pattern were "wrong-head" and not according to the marriage rule at all. That is to say, a preference for marrying close to home was operating in addition to the marriage rule to generate the observed pattern. Of course this is not inconsistent with the notion of prescriptive alliance, but it suggests that if the object of the marriage rule was to link clans in patterned marriage exchanges, the rule itself was not sufficient to accomplish its purposes -- at least not given the other factors that also conditioned marriage choices as outlined in the previous section.

There is, however, a serious objection to describing this system as "prescriptive". If, as Needham (1962b:259) asserts, kin terms are really social categories defined by relations of descent and alliance, then we might expect this fact to be evidenced in the way in which individuals distributed their kin terms. There should be, therefore, some concordance between an individual's distribution of kin labels and membership in clans. If kin terms are social categories this concordance should reflect the wife-giving and wife-receiving status of clans. Under the assumption that kin terms are social categories defining relationships of descent and marital alliance between groups, we may envisage that the various terms of the kinship chart comprising Figure 3.7 can be divided into five patrilineal descent lines or clusters of clans. These descent lines we might designate as "own clan", "wife-giving clans", "wife givers to wife givers", "wife receivers" and "wife receivers of wife receivers". If one's own clan lies at the centre of such a set of clans allied to each other by a prescriptive marriage rule of asymmetrical, matrilateral alliance, then we would expect that kin term designation would be controlled in the manner illustrated in Figure 3.7.

Let me now turn to the examination of the way in

Members of clans who are wife receivers of wife receivers will be called	Members of wife receiving clans will be called	Members of one's own clan will be called	Members of wife giving clans will be called	Members of clans who are wife givers to wife givers will be called
<u>kemeth</u> <u>paangun</u>	<u>maarn</u> <u>thuuwun</u> <u>ngethe</u>	<u>wiiln</u> <u>puumin</u> <u>pinharr</u> <u>ngahin</u> <u>yapan</u> <u>waanhin</u> <u>ngothon</u>	<u>ngethin</u> <u>kalin</u> <u>mokr</u> <u>kaaln</u> <u>rorko</u> <u>kuthn</u>	<u>kaman</u> <u>mayath</u> <u>thaaman</u>
	←	←	←	←

Figure 3.7 Expected distribution of kin terms across clans under the assumption that kin terms are social categories defining relationships of descent and marital alliance between groups. Arrows indicate passage of women in marriage.

which a Kuuk Thaayorre speaker did distribute his kinship terms over clan members. The informant was a Wallaby/Lightning clansman born in 1921. Using genealogies that spanned both living and deceased members of the Kuuk Thaayorre, Wik Nganchera and Yir Yoront groups as well as married pairs from both pre-settlement and settlement eras, I gathered some 268 kin term designations in 1968. Despite differences in population and some slight shift in post-settlement marriage patterns (see Chapter 8, Figure 8.2 for 1939-75 Kuuk Thaayorre marriage patterns), there seemed no good reason to suspect that the man was applying kin terms to people in 1968 that differed in any way from how he might have applied them in 1935.

Beginning with the informant's own clan, we find that all the terms he applies to his own clan members are those appropriate to patrilineal descent (i.e. wiiln, puumin, pinharr, nganhin, yapan, waanhin and ngothon). The Wallaby/Lightning clan had "received" most of its wives from the

Spear/Duck clan. Here we find that all the terms the informant applied to members of that clan were consistent with their status as a wife-giving clan. That is, he referred to them as ngethin, kalin, mokr, rorko, kuthn, kaaln. Through demographic accident the Wallaby/Lightning clan had few women to "give" in marriage. Two of their clanswomen went to the nearly defunct Darter clan. The terms used towards the members of that clan also reflected wife-receiving status. The terms used were maarn and thuuwun. Wallaby/Lightning also "gave" a woman to and "received" a woman from Watersnake clan. The terms the informant used towards Watersnake clan members included those indicating the status of wife receivers (maarn and thuuwun), terms indicating wife-giving status (kaaln), terms indicating patrilineal descent (nganhin, puumin, pinharr and ngothon) as well as wife givers to wife givers (mayath, thaaman and kamin) and wife receivers of wife receivers (paangun). Similar terminological "confusions" existed in the kin term designations for the members of other neighbouring clans. An examination of kin term distribution by clan membership for other informants from whom I collected kin term designations showed the same pattern. The greater the density of one-way marriage links between neighbouring clans, the more likely it was that the distribution of labels would conform to the pattern of Figure 3.7. Where actual marriage links between clans were reciprocal or non-existent, kin term designation was greatly at variance with the kind of sociocentric interpretation of kin relations called for by alliance theory. Rather, the pattern of kin term designation was consistent with a genealogical orientation to the application of kin terms where people referred to others in terms of "egocentric relations of genealogical connection", to use Scheffler's (1978:1) phrase. The same patterns of kin term designation characterised the systems of kin nomenclature of other language groups. I therefore consider that the marriage systems of the Edward River reserve cannot be characterised as "prescriptive" -- at least not in the sense given to the term by the so-called alliance theorists.

Turning now to the units involved in marriage exchanges, I have demonstrated in several places that it seriously distorts the Edward River point of view to speak of clans "giving" or "receiving" women. Clanship was never cited as an element to be considered in marriage arrangements, nor was it a factor in disputes about marriage arrangements. In terms of decision-making power, the real units involved in marriage exchanges were the betrothal-makers. They comprised two small groups drawn from each of the kindreds of a prospective marriage pair. The composition of the betrothal-makers normally encompassed three or four clans. I know of no case where the betrothal-makers belonged to two clans only, although theoretically it could happen if there had been something like a sister-exchange marriage among the betrothal-makers themselves as in Figure 3.8.

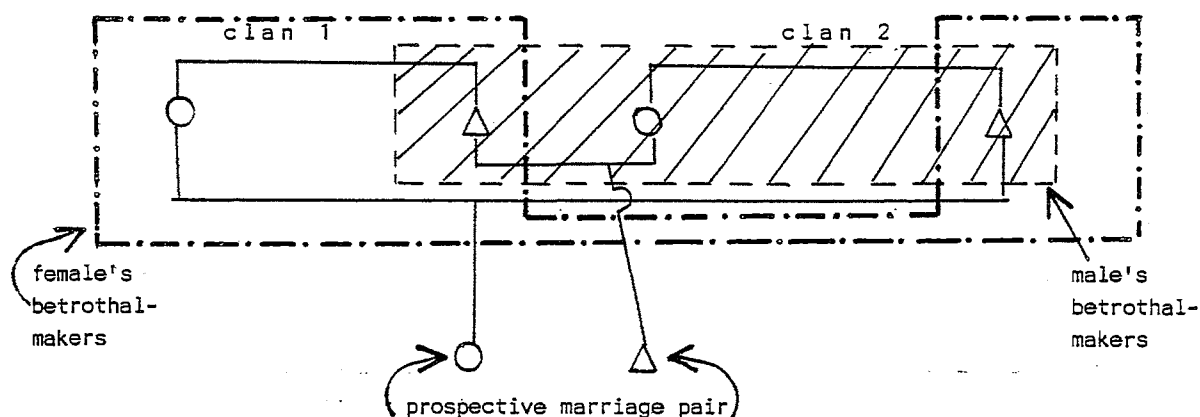


Figure 3.8 A situation where betrothal-makers were drawn from two clans only.

The third and fourth issues that I identified in the literature as requiring clarification had to do with the polysemic nature of Aboriginal kin terms, the distinctions between actual and classificatory kin and the distribution of jural statuses across kind of kin. The analysis of Kuuk Thaayorre data shows these things to be very much interrelated. From the Edward River point of

view, the most important distinction between people referred to by the same kin term was that between kindred and non-kindred. While a general code of etiquette regulated the interaction of Ego and members of all other kin categories, it was only towards the kindred that rights and obligations were incurred. The kindred was an ego-centred group composed of consanguineal and affinal kin of certain degrees of relationship who were augmented or replaced from time to time by other relatives or non-kin when surrogates were required to fill long-term support functions or important transitory roles. As a reflection of the polysemic nature of Aboriginal kin terms, the rights and duties distributed across members of the same kin class within the kindred varied. This variation could be seen as articulated primarily in terms of genealogical closeness, but other factors also appeared to be taken into account in order to elevate people to focal statuses within an individual's kindred. The rules by which actual and classificatory kin succeeded to such statuses seemed to be complex and could only be hinted at in this description.

The rules underlying the adjustment of kin terms received extensive discussion. Beginning with the vocative kin nomenclature for several Edward River languages and dialects, I showed how kin terms were applied over a range of kintypes (Table 3.1). Following upon that, I presented an anthropological model (Figure 3.1) that, in effect, provided rules for the allocation of kin terms over non-kin. Implicit in this model of kin term allocation was an asymmetrical marriage rule. I noted, however, that the marriage rule was often honoured in the breach, and as a consequence I described how individuals rearranged their patterns of kin terminology to take account of marriages between people that did not conform to the ideal. I suggested that kin term rearrangement, far from being an aberration, actually played an essential role in generating statistical excess of "straight" marriages over "wronghead" marriages.

The last issue in respect of western Cape York Peninsula systems was the existence of moieties and the role played by them in marriage arrangements. My attempts to

establish independently whether moieties existed in pre-settlement times failed. Therefore, in my opinion, they remain baffling and enigmatic entities for this region.

CHAPTER 4 MYTHS, PEOPLE AND SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

4.1 The supernatural world

In addition to the ordinary creatures inhabiting the bush, Edward River people also postulated the existence of another set of beings and entities living in their world whose presence could not be easily detected by a stranger to the culture. These other inhabitants included mythic beings, devils, spirits and a miscellany of extraordinary creatures whose potential for good or ill might or might not be controllable.

Nor was the landscape conceived as being merely a passive thing of trees, sand ridges and waterholes. Within it there were said to be centres of power. These places the Kuuk Thaayorre people called raak ngaanch, the Wik Nganchera; agu kanchi and the Yir Yoront, lar ngalt. The terms ngaanch, kanchi, ngalt embraced the following cluster of meanings: powerful, potentially harmful, to be approached with caution and respect until sufficient familiarity rendered such places less perilous.

It seems appropriate to term these non-ordinary beings and powers "supernatural", because they lay outside the conventional parameters of Western empirical perceptions of the environment, and because specific cultural knowledge was required to detect or recognise their presence. It should be noted though, that the people of the Edward River reserve had no word that could be glossed as "supernatural" in the Western sense of the term. A major purpose of this chapter is to describe the way the Edward River pre-settlement environment was invested with supernatural significance and meaning. A second aim of the chapter is to describe how relationships between humans and supernatural entities were defined and regulated.

The description which follows is based partly on actual observations of the behaviour of informants in situations that were similar to, although not identical with, pre-settlement conditions. Such opportunities for observation occurred in two ways. The first was when camping

out with various groups of people on their own home territories during holidays. The second and most fruitful source of observations occurred during the course of my mapping expeditions, during which I could plot the ways in which people and places were linked to myth, song and ritual. Whether camping out or participating in mapping exercises, the men and women who had had a bush upbringing were scrupulously careful to comport themselves appropriately towards the supernatural entities in particular places and to instruct others in the special precautions necessary to avoid harmful or negative consequences. My mapping expeditions also indicated to me that a reasonable understanding of a particular myth could not be obtained without visiting the sites associated with the myth in company with the appropriate steward/s.

I could not, however, witness anything that resembled pre-settlement ceremonial activity in the bush setting, apart from a few enactments of increase ritual. For descriptions of all but those few increase rituals, I have had to rely on the recollections of informants and accounts provided by Sharp.

4.2 Mythic beings

The Edward River ideology held that in an earlier epoch, a number of supernatural beings dwelt in or travelled through the lands that were held in pre-settlement times by the clans. The earlier epoch was seen as being not very far removed in the past, and the events that occurred then were treated with the same force as historical facts might have been. Some of these beings had human shapes, names and personalities. Yuuchup, whose name was part of the emblem of the Spear/Yuuchup clan, was an old man with a number of wives who was perennially getting things wrong. Others had human shapes and personalities, but lacked personal names and were simply referred to, for example, as "The Two Men", "The Two Sisters", "The Old Man" and so forth. Yet others had animal or quasi-animal forms such as Minh Pinch, the Saltwater Crocodile, or Yuk Ngat, the Rainbow

Serpent/Cyclone. Some were animals with human form as was Poonchr, the Water Rat. Some began their epochal adventures in human form only to become transformed ultimately into some other form, as did Minh Tharturmurk who became the fan-tailed cuckoo (Cuculus pyrrhophanus), or "The Wounded One" who became an ironwood tree. The places where major episodes in the lives of the mythic beings occurred were called raak woochorrm. The term woochorrm and the equivalent words in other languages (e.g. pulawaiya for Wik Nganchera speakers, waltelem for Yir Yoront speakers) require some discussion in order to realise their semantic ramifications.

It was always possible to ask a clansman: "What are your woochorrm?" (Woochorrm nhangkn ngana?"). The reply would usually be a list like the following one which a Wallaby/Lightning clansman might have made:

<u>Minh Kothon woochorrm</u>	--	Wallaby story
<u>Thaparr woochorrm</u>	--	Lightning story
<u>Puuy woochorrm</u>	--	Crab story
<u>Minh Pinch woochorrm</u>	--	Saltwater Crocodile story
<u>May Wanch woochorrm</u>	--	Yam story
<u>Pung woochorrm</u>	--	Sun story
<u>Minh Bingk woochorrm</u>	--	Bandicoot story
<u>Pam Thuump woochorrm</u>	--	Grey Hair story
<u>Rawun woochorrm</u>	--	Sandfly story
<u>May Riitham woochorrm</u>	--	Bulguru (i.e. Eleocharis) story
<u>Ngat Kiinath Mant woochorrm</u>	--	Small Shark story
<u>Ngat Pinpan woochorrm</u>	--	Mullet story
<u>Puk woochorrm</u>	--	Crayfish story
<u>Ngat Tharrkir woochorrm</u>	--	Sleepy Cod story
<u>Minh Punhthil woochorrm</u>	--	Brolga story
<u>Werngir woochorrm</u>	--	Boomerang story
<u>Ngat Pinworo Mant woochorrm</u>	--	Small Barramundi story
<u>Kunapat woochorrm</u>	--	Diarrhoea story

...and so on (the list could be extended).

It has been common practice in Australian Aboriginal ethnography to call items identified in such lists totems because the objects, plants, animals and other phenomena in some way are associated with specific groups of people. In the Edward River case the totems were identified with clans, and one or two of the items from a clan's list of totems were used as emblems to represent the clan. When the term woochorrm was applied to such a list of objects, plants, animals and other phenomena, it signified in essence "things of the period of the mythic beings". As such, the totems appeared on the basis of usage to be divided into two sorts.

A small set of woochorrm was composed of living creatures (mostly birds) who were helpers or guardians to clansmen in times of danger or stress. So far as I could determine, each clan had such a helper totem. Thus the diver or black cormorant was the helper for the members of the Wik Nganchera Diver clan. One member of this clan recalled how, in pre-settlement times, he had changed himself into the bird in order to escape from some pursuers who were intent on doing him a mischief (see Sharp 1937:193, for a similar story). Likewise, the men of the Watersnake clan had a special relationship with the pelican. They regarded it as a good friend and they would not allow it to be harmed in their presence. In general, people held their helper woochorrm in affection and respect. They publicly expressed sadness and regret when they saw members of the species killed by others as food. Clansmen themselves did not eat their helper woochorrm.

Used in the second and most common sense, woochorrm meant something that occurred at a particular place during the earlier epoch of the mythic beings. In effect, the totem was an identifying tag for a mythical event and its consequences, although the totem-as-label might or might not represent the main theme of the event. Hence Pam Thuump woorrm, spelled out in more detail, referred to a myth in which mythic beings, in this case The Two Men, buried an old grey-haired man at Ngokmeerngotan in the Wallaby/Lightning clan estate. Consequently, the mound that

marks the old man's grave could not be disturbed or dug into in case the men in the vicinity became prematurely grey-haired.

Places where these events occurred were often said to possess physical traces of the activities of the supernatural entities. Many holes, depressions, mounds, stone arrangements, watercourses, swamps and other distinctive features were described as their work. In the course of their exploits, the supernatural entities not merely created parts of the landscape, they often saw or did things for the first time, hence instituting patterns of behaviour that succeeding generations of human beings observed. Additionally, they left behind some of their creative power impressed in the earth itself. Human beings could tap these sources of power, using the appropriate ritual for their own benefit. Sometimes raak woochorrm were so potent (i.e. ngaanch) that special ritual precautions had to be observed in order to avoid harm. Most importantly, a small set of the mythic beings was responsible for the creation of the human conception centres (raak parr'r woochorrm) from which members of each clan received their spirits. In this sense we might follow Sharp (1934b, 1937) and refer to these inaugurating supernatural entities as "ancestors", although it should be understood that the people did not regard themselves as descended in any genealogical sense from such so-called "ancestors" (see Chapter 2, pp. 81-2).

In summary then, woochorrm, in the second sense of the word, was a totemic symbol representing a segment of a corpus of mythological happenings at particular places. The deeds themselves were recounted in myth (kuthip woochorrm, or, in Aboriginal English, "story"), in song (wuuch woochorrm) and celebrated in dance rituals (yangkar woochorrm).

Woochorrm were often regarded as linked together or were said to be "the same". This linking could occur in several ways. Sometimes the adventures of particular mythic beings occurred sequentially across a number of clan estates, thus creating a story trail along which would lie a number of raak woochorrm (Map 4.1 depicts some of these). Certain myths tended to repeat themselves at

intervals down the western side of Cape York Peninsula. Thus the myth of the brolga and the emu (see Sharp 1937:144 and McConnel 1957:91 for details) occurred on the Aurukun reserve, on the Edward River reserve and also on the Mitchell River reserve. In essence, the myths were the same. Only the places where the events occurred were different, since each of the myths was firmly embedded in its own geography. Other woochorrm were said to be the same because they involved the same songs. For this reason the Wallaby woochorrm from the Wallaby/Lightning estate was said to be the same as the Wallaby pulwaiya from the Holroyd region. Functionally, shared associations of these sorts provided major frames of reference for forming alliances between groups when other commonalities of interest were tenuous.

But while there were associations and links between woochorrm, it could not be assumed that because two clans referred to some of their woochorrm by the same totemic label that the woochorrm themselves were regarded as necessarily linked. For example the Minh Pinch woorrm concerning the saltwater crocodile shared by the Duck/Spear and Groper/Barramundi clans of the Edward River reserve (see McConnel 1957:99 for a Holroyd version of the same myth) is not the same as the Minh Pinch woorrm of the neighbouring Wallaby/Lightning clan, and both were unconnected with the saltwater crocodile myth, Min Kotor waltelem from the Coleman River (see Sharp 1937:157). The myths refer to three totally different sets of events from the period of the "ancestors". Nor did the Spear woochorrm of the Duck/Spear clan bear any relationship to the Spear woochorrm of the Spear/Yuuchup clan.

For each clan there was a unique set of raak woorrm which lay within the clan's estate. Following Barker (1976) this set of raak woorrm can be called the ritual estate. People symbolised their association with it primarily by deriving their personal names from incidents that occurred during the ancestral epoch within their ritual estates. Association with a ritual estate imposed duties and obligations upon clan members. Chief among these

duties were:

1. the transmission of the knowledge of the mythic beings and woochorrm through myth and song;
2. the performance of the rituals that celebrated the woochorrm and released the powers inherent in the raak woorchorm;
3. the initiation and introduction of young men into the secret knowledge necessary to carry out 2; and finally
4. the observance of the injunctions and taboos instituted by the mythic beings.

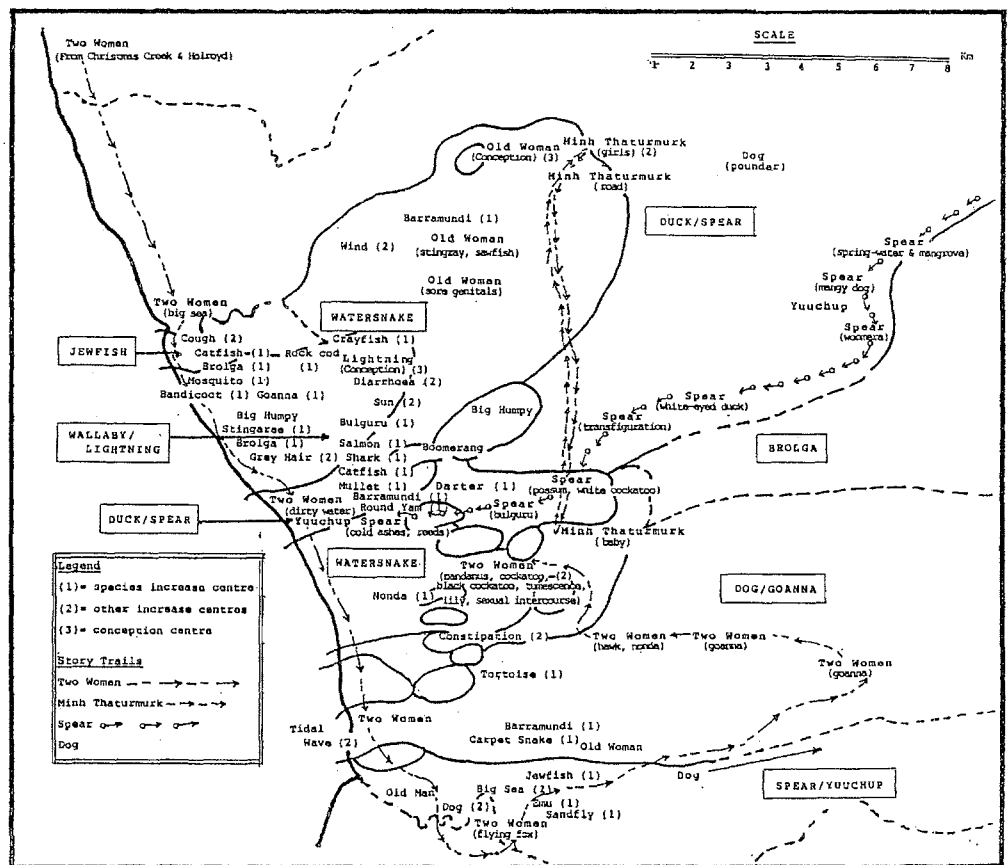
The performance of these duties towards the ritual estate provided an explicit charter for clan members' primary rights of access to their clan estates.

4.2.1 The mythic landscape and its contents

Map 4.1 attempts to provide a guide to a small section of the mythic landscape. It is not exhaustive, but it will serve as a convenient reference point for a description of the way the landscape was interpreted through a lattice of mythological events and marvellous happenings. I shall begin by describing in the barest detail, the contents of a number of these myths.

Central to the creative pantheon in this section of the Edward River reserve were The Two Men. They were brothers who came from the north and travelled as far south as the Coleman River before turning back to the Melaman River, whose course they ultimately followed eastwards into other parts of the land. Whenever The Two Men discovered something new (e.g. a natural feature, a new species, new languages) they composed songs to celebrate the fact. The songs were remembered and sung by the men in whose ritual

Map 4.1 A small section of the mythic landscape, Edward River.



estate they were composed. The Two Men also altered parts of the landscape. They possessed a large boomerang which, when it was thrown, knocked down trees and shrubs and created in its wake the saltpans that lay between the beach ridges and the inland ridges. They also left behind many places where certain kinds of things could, with the appropriate ritual, be increased or where still other kinds of phenomena could be manipulated in some way. On Map 4.1 such places are marked (1) and (2), respectively. As well as leaving behind places of great potency, The Two Men had a series of adventures with the people they met in the course of their wanderings. Some of these people appeared to be ordinary humans, while others were mythic beings in their own right.

All of the ritual estates in the area mapped, in one way or another, had associations with The Two Men. They had no names that I could discover. When people related their exploits in particular tracts, they referred to them simply as Pam Kuthir, "The Two Men", or even more simply as Pul, "Those Two". The term pul-nganchnam, which means literally "those-two-ours", referred to those adventures of The Two Men that were part of the narrator's store of woochorrm associated with them, and, by extension, was often used to designate the entire set of woochorrm belonging to a particular ritual estate.

The following myth concerning The Two Men belonged to the Wallaby/Lightning clan:

The Two Men were preparing to hold an initiation ceremony at Murka, but the people would not cooperate with them. They went instead to hold the ceremony in Wallaby/Lightning country. The Two Men were very angry to have been so openly ignored and they determined on revenge. They set out to go to the other initiation ceremony, but on the way they stopped at Pupurrkathman where they made a firestick. Each man produced some glowing ash from the firestick and encased it in a ball of dry grass and attempted to hold it in his hand. The older brother's ball of grass burst into flames and burnt his hand. His younger

brother's ash smouldered unnoticeably and without flame in his hand. With the glowing coal secreted in the younger brother's hand, the two went on from Pupurrkathman (whose name signifies this event) to the initiation ground where the Dog ceremony was being held. Feigning cooperation, The Two Men sang, danced and clapped with the others.

When the dances were finished for the night, everyone went inside an enormous humpy that had been built of grass in order to house the participants. When it seemed that all were asleep, the younger brother fanned his glowing coal into a flame, and set the humpy ablaze. The roaring of the fire aroused the sleepers and they all scrambled to get away from the flames. Those who escaped serious burning went from there to make their homes in other places. Some, however, were badly burnt and jumped into the water to ease the pain. There they sank down into the water and their ashes became the conception spirits of the present Wallaby/Lightning clan members.

(Taylor field notes)

Further adventures of The Two Men were contained in the Kirk woochorm, or Spear story, of the Duck/Spear clan. The events in this myth relate to the first spear fight that occurred in the region, and its aftermath. There were a number of songs that celebrated the principal events in this saga and the places where they occurred. They were said to be in the Bakanh language. The story begins 24 km inland from the coast at a place called Kirkyoongknakarr where The Two Men were camping at the time.

The Two Men decided to have a fight with the Bakanh people camping nearby, and they made many spears in preparation. They hung the spears in readiness for combat in the forks of trees and "sang" the spears. The first song in the sequence commemorated this. Taking their spears, The Two Men came up on the main group of people camping at Therngkr. They made arrangements to fight in the mid-afternoon. This is the theme of the second song.

During the fight, which involved large numbers of

people, The Two Men wounded one man badly and crippled him with many spears. In the early hours of the morning, The Wounded Man, with the spears still sticking from his body, crawled away and headed westwards towards the coast, hoping to get from there to his own country on the Coleman River. The Two Men decided to pursue him and finish him off.

Following the blood trail left by The Wounded Man, The Two Men arrived at Ngokminthin where they left behind a spring of freshwater (from which the place takes its name) and a song, the third in the sequence of songs associated with the myth. They also left a stand of mangrove trees, yuk penkeyer, which grew, miraculously, inland from the sea (a distance of 20 km). Still on the trail of their victim, they came to Ngokmeerath where they saw an old dingo in poor condition. They left behind a song (the fourth) about the dingo. At Tachkanh The Wounded Man pulled himself to his feet to see where his pursuers were and steadied himself on his woomera. The fifth song of the sequence called wuuch-thul-wuntin refers to this event, and Thul-wuntin became part of the corpus of personal names used by the men of the Spear/Duck clan. During his painful crawl to the west, The Wounded Man had been following a water-course, but when he reached Rirmkontuln at just about daybreak, he saw a white-eyed duck, minh punhtik, which he sang about (the sixth song). He then decided to cut across country to the swamp in the centre of the plains, Malriw, intending to go from there to the coastal ridges.

Always following his trail, The Two Men arrived at Kotetan. When they saw a possum there, they decided to make a rule binding on all generations of men to follow, that only old people could eat possum meat in the area between Kotetan and Thaakunurka. At Kotetan, The Two Men also saw some white cockatoos, and they left behind a song about them as well (the seventh song of this cycle). The Wounded Man too sang further songs. He sang one about the Eleocharis (bulguru) beds he wriggled through like a crocodile, hoping to elude his pursuers at Nhokunthirr (the eighth song). He sang his final songs (the ninth and tenth of the sequence) at Thaakunurka. One referred to the cold ashes of a camping place he came upon, while the other referred to the reeds

that grew in swamps, the stems of which were used in later times to make spears for small boys.

But The Two Men pursued The Wounded Man relentlessly. After several weeks, they finally caught up with him at Malriw. Following the sound of his groans they came upon him in the scrub. As they approached, The Wounded Man got to his feet. He appeared transfigured from what he was. Even with the spears still sticking out of his body, he began to dance in front of The Two Men. They said, "We cannot kill him now -- he has been transformed into a woochorrm." As The Wounded Man danced, The Two Men clapped for him, and he sank into the ground there and finally became an ironwood tree. When The Two Men returned, the others asked, "Where is The Wounded Man?". They replied that he had changed into a woochorrm, and from then on it was decided to make this a secret thing and to celebrate it in the Withirra initiation ceremony. Malriw became ngaanch and The Wounded Man was called Kaal-Malriw.
(Taylor field notes)

The Dog story, Kuta woorrm, details the final exploits of The Two Men before they passed out of the country of the Edward River reserve. In this myth, The Two Men were living in a cave under the water in the lagoon at Piithamin. At that time there lived in Melaman country, an Old Man who had an enormous dog. The dog was used for hunting men, women and children whom The Old Man used to kill, cook and bring back to his hearthgroup, which consisted of his old sister and his two young wives.

The Two Men came out of their underwater cave and crept up on The Old Man's camp at Murrka where his sister, with a toothless old hound for company, was smashing bones (human) for their marrow. From their hiding place they called out to The Old Man's sister, "Granny!" She could not see them until they came out from hiding. "Oh, what a fine pair of young grandsons," she said. "Where have you so suddenly come from?" The Two Men indicated that they came from Piithamin, and that they had been attracted to

Murrka by the campfire smoke. The old lady remarked that that was strange because her brother had often been hunting there (for humans) and he had never mentioned seeing The Two Men. But The Two Men did not say that they had been living under the water. The old lady warned The Two Men to be off before The Old Man returned with his giant dog.

No sooner had The Two Men left when The Old Man did come back. His sister told him of the visit, and The Old Man with his dog running on ahead set off after them. Hearing The Old Man urging the dog on their trail, one brother said to the other, "Let us test each other to see who is best fitted to fight the dog." They had a contest where each brother tried to hit the other. The younger brother won. The eldest brother climbed to the top of a nearby tree while the youngest brother climbed up half-way just as the dog came bounding up after them. The younger brother waved a leg at the dog to taunt it. It leapt for him and he speared it in the side, and then despatched it by hitting its windpipe. He then told his older brother to get down out of the tree and quickly cover himself with the dog's blood and pretend to be dead. When The Old Man arrived upon the scene calling for his animal, the younger brother explained that he had been forced to kill The Old Man's dog because it had killed his older brother. The Old Man agreed that this was a fair exchange, a death for a death, and he proceeded to bury the dog. A mound now marks the spot where the dog is buried at Koporr. The Old Man asked the youngest brother what he intended to do with his brother's body. "Oh, I think I'll take him home," said said the young man.

When The Old Man went back to his camp to tell his sister and wives what had happened, the older brother got to his feet. That evening they once more visited The Old Man's camp. On the way to the camp, they speared a big catfish. When they arrived The Old Man was attempting to poison some fish in the shallows. The brothers, unnoticed, slipped the catfish into the water The Old Man had poisoned and strolled into the camp. The Old Man expressed great surprise at seeing the older brother alive again. The older brother explained that his younger brother had applied some bush

medicine and bathed him to such good effect that he had not only revived, but the dog's teeth marks had also disappeared. The Old Man invited them to stay for the night and everyone settled down to sleep.

As they lay by their sleeping fires, the catfish that The Two Men had earlier slipped into the shallows began to revive and thrash about in the water and make grunting noises. The eldest brother said, "Grandfather, I hear a big fish down there." "Well, you go down and get it," said The Old Man. "That fish is yours grandfather. I can't touch it," replied the eldest brother. (The relationship between The Old Man and The Two Men was kamin-kemeth, a poison relationship.) The Two Men urged The Old Man to go down to the water and kill the catfish. So did his wives. Grumbling, The Old Man lit a paperbark torch and went to the water to investigate, but the torch went out. In the dark, The Old Man stood on the dorsal spike of the catfish, and it went into his foot. "Ake!", cried The Old Man in great pain. He tried to pull the barb out. The Old Man's sister told The Two Men to go down and help her brother. The Two Men went down, but not to help. The youngest brother was carrying a wooden sword, kathnbungk. "You grab The Old Man's wives," he said to his brother. "I'll deal with The Old Man. You take the eldest wife. The youngest one is mine." The youngest brother hit The Old Man in the throat and killed him. They took his two wives and travelled eastwards.

As they travelled, they came to a tree with sugarbag (i.e. one with a native bees' hive in it). They began to cut the tree down and while they were felling it, The Old Man reappeared, alive again. He demanded his two wives back. The Two Men denied any knowledge of the women and warned The Old Man several times that the tree was about to fall. (In fact, the two women were hidden nearby watching.) The Old Man ignored the warnings and persisted in his demands. The tree fell on him and killed him permanently.

The Two Men and their women buried The Old Man and continued on their journey. As they neared Maachangk, a poisonous snake blocked their way. It was a taipan, yak meerkole. Once more, the two brothers contested with each

other to see who should kill the snake. Again, the younger brother won the contest and succeeded with the help of his new wife in cutting off its head, which they buried.

(Taylor field notes)

These final events took place at the boundaries of Thaayorre and Bakanh country. From there The Two Men and their women travelled out of Edward River country. The Old Man's sister sank down into the waterhole at Murrka and remained there. The set of songs relating to the cutting down of the sugarbag tree were sung and danced as part of the Withirrma initiation ceremony by Dog/Goanna clansmen.

Thaparr woochorrm, or the Lightning story, served as part of the emblem of the Wallaby/Lightning clan.

The tale went like this:

There was an old white-haired man who used to live in Wallaby/Lightning country who made two wives for himself. He had a son by one of them. His two wives went out hunting for ducks one day, while he lay in the shade at his camp at Thaparrwarrangn looking after his young son. The old man told his son to climb a tree to see how the women were getting on. The child called out that he could see four people, his two mothers and two men at the swamp. The two men who were brothers had killed a lot of ducks, and they gave them to the women to carry home in their dilly bags. When the wives returned to camp, the old man asked them who had killed so many ducks. His wives replied that they had. Because the women lied to the old man, he suspected that the two men were their sweethearts. The women began to pluck and gut the ducks ready for cooking. The old man said that he knew there were two young men in the vicinity, and if his wives came across them the next day, then they should invite them back to the camp for a meal of yams (may waanch).

The women went out again the next morning and met their sweethearts. They invited them to come back to the camp that afternoon as the old man had said. Meanwhile, the old man went off by himself to Thaakunurka, where there

was a rain-making hole, and he buried some of the ducks' entrails deep inside the hole and performed the rain-making ritual. He then went back home. At the camp his two wives were rinsing the yams in preparation for the meal. "Where are those two grandsons?", asked the old man. "They'll be coming shortly," the women replied. "Here they come now." "Come in grandsons (kemeth)," said the old man. He invited them to eat. While they were eating, the storm that the old man had made began to appear. First it was a small cloud from which rain fell. The old man and his family went inside the humpy leaving the two men outside. The cloud grew bigger and blacker. In the distance, shafts of lightning began to strike the ground, coming closer and closer to the humpy. A lightning bolt struck the eldest of the two men and dismembered his body. Terrified by his brother's death, the younger man pleaded with the old man to let him come inside the humpy, but the old man feigned great fear and would not unseal the entrance. He said that there was not enough room for them all inside the humpy. Lightning bolts then struck the younger man and his limbs were sundered from his body too.

The storm went back to its hole at Thaakunurka. The old man looked outside and gloated over the carnage. He set about burying the limbs and bodies. His two wives, however, showed too much grief at the sight of their dead lovers' mangled remains for the old man's liking. He decided to do away with them as well.

They made a fire inside the humpy and prepared to sleep. When the women were asleep, the old man made the fire smoke and taking his son with him, went outside and sealed the entrance tightly. The women woke up and clamoured to get out, but the old man kept the entrance of the humpy shut tightly from the outside. They suffocated and the old man took his son to the hole where he had made the lightning, and there made his home.

(Taylor field notes)

In later times, it was said, the same old man would come out from his hole and lure dogs and children away to it. People would have to sing out to him in order to get them

returned. There were no songs associated with the Lightning story, but a highly theatrical dance sequence illustrating the two brothers being killed by the lightning bolts outside the humpy was performed by Wallaby/Lightning clan members during the Withirrma initiation ceremonies.

A myth of the Watersnake clan deals with Minh Tharturmurk, who once used to be a man but later became a bird. Only part of the story belongs to the Watersnake clan. The other part belongs to the Yir Yoront Floodwater clan, in whose country Minh Tharturmurk was changed into the fan-tailed cuckoo (Cuculus pyrophanus).

Minh Tharturmurk's camp used to be at Peena. He decided to go to Buth, where there was a large camp of people, to find a wife. Warned of his coming by Minh Kempul, the sulphur crested cockatoo, the people at Buth hid their young women under sheets of paperbark. Minh Tharturmurk camped at Buth for one night, but the only single women he could see were ill-favoured. Next day he announced he was setting out to go back to Peena. A woman with a crooked leg was told by her parents to follow him. She caught up with him, but Minh Tharturmurk told her that he wanted a comely young wife and advised her to return to her parents. The woman replied that they would not give him a young girl for a wife. Minh Tharturmurk angrily threw his hatchet at her, but missed. He went on his way with the woman following at some distance behind.

They passed through Kotetan, Kookomun and paused at Kumunkungkurn, which was flooded. Minh Tharturmurk looked around for a log upon which to float across. He found one and his "wife" looked about for one as well, but Minh Tharturmurk said that all the other logs lying on the ground were crocodiles, and he suggested that she float over with him on his log. After some hesitation she agreed to this, and he positioned her on the log so that she was lying down on her back with her legs wide apart, gripping the log. Minh Tharturmurk climbed on top of the log, saying that it would be easier for him to paddle in that fashion. But instead of paddling, and in spite of his "wife's" remonstrances,

he threw himself on top of her and he began copulating with her. The log rolled over and they ended up under the water. The woman conceived immediately, and the baby was born that night at Walintil. Moreover, it was able to speak and greeted its father with the words, "Oh father, father -- you are my father," The child was a little girl.

Minh Tharturmurk was dissatisfied with his wife, however, and he eventually went back to Buth to try to obtain a well-favoured young woman. Once more he was given someone with a crooked leg, while the good-looking girls were again hidden under sheets of paperbark. The same sequence of events occurred, even the miraculous underwater conception and subsequent immediate birth of the child. In fact, he did the same thing several times and ended up with many children.

In order to feed his large family, Minh Tharturmurk was driven to stealing corpse-flesh. He would locate dead bodies recently hung between forked sticks as he roamed about the countryside at night in spirit form. He would then, next day, take up a bundle of spears and announce to his family that he was going hunting. They were not deceived however. They knew he was going to get corpse-flesh.

Minh Tharturmurk would time his arrival at the mourning camp for daybreak when everyone was still asleep. He would begin crying for the deceased, pretending to be grieving. The others would wake up, welcome him and offer him food, which he used to refuse because he claimed he had to observe food abstinence taboos on account of his relationship to the deceased. Minh Tharturmurk would then suggest that everyone went hunting while he looked after the body on the corpse poles. When he had assured himself that the others were a long way off, Minh Tharturmurk would pull at the skin of the dead body and get down on his hands and knees to eat the grease as it dripped from the putrefying cadaver.

Having satisfied his own hunger for flesh, he would cut the corpse up as he would an animal, and then head back to his camp at Peena, stopping on the way to cover himself with mud to disguise the stench from the dead body. Leaving the cut-up corpse meat outside in a tree fork, he would enter his camp to the delighted cries of his children.

Telling his family that he had killed some animal or other, he would send one of his wives out to fetch it in and cook it. His family had no illusions about its source, and they invariably adopted various stratagems to avoid having to eat the stuff.

(Taylor field notes)

The rest of the myth belongs to Yir Yoront clans. Minh Tharturmurk's behaviour became more than anyone could bear, and it was decided to put an end to his despoiling of corpses. He was waylaid carrying his grisly booty back from a mourning site in country south of the Coleman River. He was speared from ambush and pierced with many spears. Instead of dying, however, he was transformed into the cuckoo, whose fan shaped tail gives the bird its common name and which represents the spears in his body. As the bird, he flew back to his family and perched on a tree near them, calling out "thetrr...thetrr..." His family knew then that he had been speared and transformed.

The mythic being Yuuchup seems to have been the eternal good-natured fool. He was always being forced to change his camping place by other people, which accounts for the many raak wochoorm in different ritual estates associated with him. The following myth relates to the time when Yuuchup was living at Tutchi in Spear/Yuuchup country.

Yuuchup had many wives and he kept them all in a single humpy. At that time Yuuchup and his women were eating mostly waterlilies (may ngulp). Yuuchup decided to spear some fish at the mouth of the Melaman River. He did not have a proper spear. All he had was a roughly shaped, sharpened stick. He left his campsite at Tutchi on the beach ridges to go to a place with the same name on the beach. As he followed the track down to the other Tutchi he found a turtle (minh bangar) on the track. Thinking it was a large stone (in an area where there were no large stones) Yuuchup poked it. The turtle moved off the track and Yuuchup, still thinking it to be a stone, went to the beach to spear fish. He saw a small barramundi and threw his sharpened stick at it. He

hit the fish and killed it, but the spear broke. "This must be a very big fish to break my spear so," he said, and made another sharpened stick and killed another fish with the same result. Yuuchup went back to Kunpthon and cooked his fish there. While the small fish roasted he lay down to recover from having struggled with such "large" fish. He cut paperbark to wrap his fish in for the journey back to the camp. He laid the fish in it and then covered them with wild figs (may kuparr) which made the parcel look bigger. He then went back to where his camp was at Tutchi on the beach ridge and hid his parcel in a tree.

When his women saw him coming they thought that he had no fish, and they put out some yam and lily for him. But Yuuchup said he would eat soon and sent two of his wives to go out and bring in the fish. At first they could not find it, but Yuuchup described the tree on which the parcel was hung. They saw it and took it down. They smelt the wild figs and thought that the old man was tricking them. They brought it back and shared it out. It was not very filling and there was nothing left over for the morning meal.

That night Yuuchup lay outside in the bright moonlight. It was a full moon. All his women lay inside the humpy. As he lay there, he began to think about his women. He began singing for one of them. She came out to him. When he had finished (having sex) with her and she had gone back inside the humpy, he looked at the moonlight again and sang for another of his women. She came out. After he had finished with her and sent her back he waited again and looked at the moon shining clear. He sang and another woman came out. And so it continued through the night...

When daylight came the women pushed open the door of the humpy and went off foraging for lilies and yams. Yuuchup went down to Tutchi to catch more "large" fish. Once more he found a turtle on the track. Again he thought it was a stone and not a turtle (which was edible) and pushed it off the track. A little further on he found a goanna on the track. Of course, goanna was good eating, but Yuuchup mistook it for a saltwater crocodile. And he turned aside so as to avoid it. When he got to the beach,

he once more broke his spears attempting to spear small barramundi. When he succeeded he cooked them and took them back to camp again...

(Taylor field notes)

To emphasize the old man's benign incompetence, people telling stories about Yuuchup repeat them over and over adding more and more ridiculous detail with each repetition. Notwithstanding the fact that he was a figure of fun and simplicity, he was not, as Sharp (1937:148) observes, crazy or queer as some of the mythic ancestors were said to be. His name served as the totemic emblem for one clan at least, and the personal names of clan members were derived from woochorrm concerning him.

The Two Holroyd Women were another pair of mythic beings whose story trail crossed many ritual estates. They were sisters and they travelled southwards from the Holroyd River searching for lovers. To signify their intent they had decorated themselves with paint and were wearing possum fur headbands, shell pendants and armlets made from Pandanus. They were handsome looking women, and they finally found the lover they were searching for at Peena, a crippled man as it turned out. They had many adventures in their travels which were mostly commemorated in song. Their trail is shown on Map 4.1, and the sites of some of their adventures are indicated, with the principal themes of the songs associated with the adventures denoted in brackets. One of their adventures, not marked on the map, describes how Waanchikan came to be regarded as a highly dangerous raak ngaanch.

The Two Holroyd Women dug yams (may waanch) at Kuun-tumun in what became the Wallaby/Lightning estate. They took the yams they had gathered to Waanchikan (whose name translates as "yam-up-there"), where they attempted to cook it and rinse it free of its toxins. They poured the processed yam into the sand to dry. The yam cake dried so hard that The Two Holroyd Women could not smash it. Eventually the treated yam took root in the soil and could not be pulled out.

From then on, The Two Holroyd Women decided to declare the place raak ngaanch.

(Taylor field notes)

Waanchikan became a place where only old people could go to poison the fish in the waterholes there and gather the sugarbag. Even then, such old people had to be ritually introduced to the place and always smoked themselves over a fire before entering the area, in case the power in the earth injured them.

We may view myths such as these from a variety of viewpoints: as history, as dream-stuff, as charter or as ontology (cf. Hiatt 1975:3). Of Yir Yoront mythology, Sharp (1937:153) said:

In cannibalism, wholesale murder, incest, genital mutilation and various other maleficent, antisocial practices of some of the ancestors the Freudians would discover the uncensored desires of the modern native coming in to the open in the realm of myth which serves, like the dream, as a means for free expression of otherwise suppressed psychic phenomena. Other investigators would simply point out the analogies between the ancestors who transgress what are present norms of conduct and the "crazy boy" culture-heroes of other primitive societies, who antithetically exemplify what should not be done and thus serve as moral examples for the modern community. Again, through the medium of mythology the actual transgressions against present culture and character patterns may be removed from the present society by being attributed to the ancestors and thus shifted from the actual community to a community of another time, thus accomplishing a psychological purification of the present. Still other aspects of eccentric ancestral behavior must be attributed simply to a fanciful exaggeration which finds expression only for the sake of amusing and entertaining the native. In still another role, the mythology undoubtedly serves the aboriginal as our history and natural science serve us in offering to our curiosity a plausible explanation of the origins of cultural and natural phenomena. In some

cases of material of (sic) the myths suggests that they actually are "dimly remembered history".

Those observations could be applied equally well to the sample of Kuuk Thaayorre myths presented here. However, it is not my intention to pursue the elusive many-layered meanings inherent in the Edward River mythology. My purpose, as I stated earlier, has been primarily to indicate the nature of the supernatural segment of the lived-in world and to describe the characteristics of the mythic landscape and its denizens and powers. This knowledge rendered that landscape predictable, if not always controllable, to the reserve's human inhabitants.

4.2.2 Mythic beings and ceremonial ritual

Relationships between living people and the ancestral and other supernatural beings were mediated by ritual. There were two sorts of ritual. One was observed by individuals and domestic groupings as they negotiated the supernatural dimensions of their landscape in the course of their everyday activities. I call these rituals "routine rituals". Their purpose was to preserve a measure of control over the potencies and powers of the raak nganch, to ensure the cooperation of supernatural beings or to ward off their unwelcome attentions. In contrast, the second kind of ritual consisted of complex and highly formalised ceremonial activity requiring the organisation of many people together with elaborate preparation. Such ceremonies generally had secret/sacred aspects that required the separation of the initiated from the uninitiated and the total exclusion of females. They related solely to the woochorrm. Among the Kuuk Thaayorre they went under the general name of wuuch yangkar. Individual ceremonies in this class also had their own names. I shall discuss these formal ceremonies here and provide an account of routine rituals elsewhere (see subsection 4.2.5).

In their general form, the ceremonies combined myth,

song and material representations in spectacular dance dramas in which the men of different clans would reproduce the activities and adventures of the ancestors contained in their store of clan woochorrm. Such ceremonies were more than celebrations of mythic events concerned with particular ritual estates. Re-enactment of the mythic events, in a fashion, brought the mythic period forward to the time of the celebrants and imbued the performers with some of the powers of the mythic beings themselves. During the ceremonies all participants were in a dangerously vulnerable state, hence taboos of various sorts were imposed for their protection. These taboos, mostly to do with food restrictions and sexual abstinence, were observed until the body paints had either worn off or had been washed off in ritual ablutions. Sometimes the site where a ceremony had been performed remained dangerously potent for many years after because of the powers unlocked at the place. Ceremonies could be small-scale local affairs involving neighbouring clans, or they could be the cooperative enterprises of many clans and speech groupings. The large scale ceremonies, Sharp (1952:75) likened to "fiestas". They attracted hundreds of people and were occasions for exchanging goods with trading partners, for settling outstanding disputes (see Chapter 5), for pursuing love affairs and for reunions with close relations. Kuuk Thaayorre men regularly took part in ceremonies conducted among the Wik speaking groups as far north as the Holroyd River and among the Yir Yoront groups as far south as the Mitchell River. Both Wik speakers and Yir Yoront groups reciprocally attended Kuuk Thaayorre ceremonies. So too did Olkol and Bakanh speakers.

It has been difficult to reconstruct the pre-settlement timetable for ceremonial performance. In any one year only a few of the ceremonies were performed. The establishment of the missions disrupted the traditional cycles of performance. Most of my pre-settlement informants had taken part personally in a limited range of rites before the foundation of the Edward River mission effectively disorganised the traditional sequences. Much of my informants' knowledge was derived from older relatives who had

since died, but who had taken part in the ceremonies and had passed on sketches of what occurred in them. From the limited information available I estimate that all ceremonies were performed at least twice in a person's lifetime. Many were performed more often than that.

Because it was necessary to support relatively large groups of people in a given area for a number of weeks, ceremonies were mostly performed during the months immediately following the cessation of the rains. This coincided with the peak of rootstock productivity in the beach and inland ridges and in the swamps. Fire drives before and after the ceremonies yielded substantial quantities of flesh foods with relatively little effort. The imposition of food taboos on men during the performance of rites meant that camps were largely nourished during that time through the efforts of women who gathered and processed large quantities of yams and Eleocharis.

The organisation of the actual ritual was in the hands of ceremonial leaders, at least one from each participating clan, who knew the requisite canons of performance. These men arranged for the selection of the dancers and drilled the performers in their various roles and presided over their clans' contributions to the total effort. Performances were critically appraised and not all men were performers. It seems clear that some men were specialist ritual performers who, perhaps by virtue of natural talent, had acquired an extensive repertoire and had become principal performers in their own clans' rites and assistants in the rites of others. Such men usually went on to become the ceremonial leaders in their own clans.

Sharp (1937:196-209) noted that each ceremony explicitly served one or more of the following functions:

1. initiation, in which the primary goal was to induct youths into the male cult life;
2. introduction, which served to acquaint initiated men with ceremonies they had not participated in before;

3. historical enactment, which sought to reproduce the activities and adventures of the mythic beings; and
4. increase, wherein the performance of some ceremonies were said to cause an increase of natural species or otherwise affect the distribution of phenomena.

4.2.3 Initiation ceremonies

The performance of initiation ceremonies was perhaps the most important of all the ritual obligations of clansmen. For young men it provided the passport to the male cult life and signalled their entry into the status of manhood. As one of my informants described it, "When you went in, people called you parr'r, kid. When you came out, people called you pam, man."

Preparations began when there were sufficient young men available. Going over the lists of neophytes in past ceremonies, seven to twelve candidates between the ages of 15 and 20 years normally justified the holding of the ceremony. The novices were typically drawn from a number of language groups. Thus, the initiation ceremony witnessed by Sharp had, according to my informants, three Kuuk Thaayorre and two Yir Yoront speakers, and one Bakanh-speaking lad. Permission to enter the initiation rites was the sole prerogative of the boys' fathers.

In the area between the Holroyd and Mitchell Rivers there were two separate initiation ceremonies. Both were equally valid entry points into the ritual life. One was called Withirrma in Kuuk Thaayorre (Wiinchin in the Wik dialects north of the Edward River, Welthan in Yir Yoront). The other was called the Dog ceremony and was often simply referred to as "Ngaanch". They differed from each other in details of organisation, content and location of performance. The Withirrma rite required the novices to go into seclusion for four or five months, while the Dog rite only required a period of seclusion lasting about a month.

The Dog ceremony was said to be harder and the seclusion more strictly enforced. It was held during the months of August and September, and the final ceremonies took place on the open saltpans. By contrast, the final ceremonies of Withirrma were held during May and June in the ridge scrubs. The ceremonies also differed in the basic paraphernalia used. For example, neophytes in the opening stages of the Dog ceremony were housed at one point in the rites in a humpy representing the Big Humpy of the myth described earlier (see pp. 199-200). In the parallel rite of Withirrma the neophytes were led into holes in the ground. Information from informants suggests that the ceremonies differed in the presentation of re-enactments from the woochorm, but the fine details are now difficult to assess.

The first stage of both rites consisted of the separation and seclusion of the candidates from their families. Each candidate was lured away from his family under some pretext or other and seized by "big men" (i.e. by pam thulum or ritual leaders) and conducted to the novices' camp. There they were instructed in the necessary ritual observances. These included seclusion from family members, restrictions on unnecessary speech and the avoidance of other people when hunting for food. There was a taboo on a range of animal foods, and the young men were given digging sticks to help them forage for food plants. There were minor taboos as well. The novices were forbidden to scratch themselves with their fingers. Instead they had to use special scratching sticks which were kept for this purpose in their hair. The older men used to follow the novices' tracks to ensure they were obeying the injunctions.

During their seclusion the candidates were regarded as ngaanch. The parents of each lad mourned for him as if he were dead and did not use any of his personal names until he emerged from the ceremony. Each youth had a mentor. Ideally this was an initiated sister's husband or promised sister's husband. Otherwise it would have been someone whom the novice normally addressed as maarn. The mentor's duties were to comfort and sustain his charge through the privations of the period of seclusion and to accompany him

through all the stages of the ceremonies proper, protecting him from supernatural and other imagined hazards. During the longer period of seclusion of the Withirrma rite, grandfathers (puumin and ngethin) could visit their grandsons and bring them small treats and news from their families. Fathers too were occasionally permitted to visit their sons, but they could not approach them closely and could only converse at a distance. Only the brothers-in-law (maarn) were permitted to tend the neophytes during the Dog ceremony's seclusion period.

While the youths were thus separated from normal camp life, the initiated men of the participating clans devoted themselves to making the final preparations for the ceremonies proper. They collected ochres, clays and feathers for decoration, made the material representations and equipment needed for the mythic re-enactments, and auditioned and drilled the performers in their roles.

The second stage of the initiation rites began when the novices, accompanied by their mentors, were brought to camp near the ceremonial grounds to witness the re-enacting of the myths for the first time. In both the Dog and Withirrma rites, the re-enactments were preceded by a vividly staged set piece, the overt aim of which was to startle and bewilder the novices. This was done in the Dog ceremony when the novices and their mentors were brought in to spend the night near the ceremonial ground in the large, specially constructed humpy that I mentioned earlier. During the night, the humpy was surrounded by a ring of men who, making frightful noises, hit and shook the humpy for several minutes threatening to smash it in completely. The terrified youths were then pacified by their mentors, who told them of the big day to come and rubbed them over with underarm sweat for their protection. In the Withirrma ceremony, the youths and their mentors were taken on the morning of the commencement of the ceremonies to specially prepared holes and told to get into them. As they crouched down, the men surrounding the holes broke into a realistic mock fight. The neophytes cowered in their holes, protected from flying sticks and stray blows by their brothers-in-law,

until the fight was halted by two ritual leaders who bound the participants over to keep the peace for the duration of the ceremonies.

After these panic-inspiring preliminaries, the novices then went on to witness the mythic re-enactments and have the significance of them explained. The scenes from the woochorrm were presented with great theatrical skill, and in later years the men who witnessed them emphasised the powerful effect the ceremonies purveyed when they were seen for the first time. To the novices, it seemed that the landscape had suddenly become filled with the legendary beings whose exploits had only been heard of in tales and songs. The re-enactment of a clan's woochorrm required three groups of performers: the dancers who usually belonged to the clan whose woochorrm was being performed, the singer or singers who might or might not belong to the clan (vocal ability and stamina were important desiderata here) and the clappers, a mixed group of clansmen who stood behind the singers and with stamps, claps, grunts and shouts, provided a vocal rhythmic accompaniment for the singers and dancers. The number of dancers varied from solo sequences to complicated ensemble affairs. The dancers, their appearance altered by paint and ornament, were unrecognisable to the novices, as they mimed their way through their roles. Each sequence typically ended with an energetically danced climax involving singers, clappers and dancers.

In the Dog ceremony, the performances took place on the open saltpan before the seated neophytes. Between re-enactments, the young men were told to look down at the ground. Brush screens were used to hide the waiting participants and their gear from view in order to heighten the degree of surprise. In the Withirrma ceremony, the novices were led, heads bowed and eyes downcast, from place to place by their mentors to witness a series of dance performances and dramatic tableaux. The tableaux were often highly elaborate representations. For instance, the Poison Snake woochorrm from Maachangk on the borders of Bakanh and Thaayorre lands involved making a replica of the giant mythical snake, a taipan, out of cane hoops and grass.

The replica was large, at least twelve metres in length, and its tail was suspended in a tree while its body was coiled in a snake-like fashion on the ground. In the tableau, two men representing the initiates whom the snake was said to have swallowed lay in its mouth while other men lay about on the ground. Fires sent a drift of smoke across the scene adding to its strangeness. One of my informants described his encounter with the scene thus:

When I saw it, I was frightened. I did not know what it was. I thought it was a real snake. I was too terrified to clap like the others.

An old man came forward. He said, "What is this one? We call this Maachangk, Kaal Maachangk."

The scene was then explained to the novices.

Depending on the number of clans represented, the re-enactments might continue for several days. During the Withirrma ceremony, the following woochorrm were re-enacted: Wallaby, Poison Snake, Duck, Geese, Lightning, Catfish, Goanna, Dog, Spear, Turtle, Sugarbag, Pelican, Flying Fox, Owl, Emu, Swordfish, Stingaree, Woomera, Possum, Shark, and Grey Hair. This list is not complete, and the titles of the presentations give little guide to their content.

At the conclusion of the initiation ceremonies, the novices were painted and prepared for their public re-entry into normal camp life. This was accomplished by first hiding the young men under a pile of leafy branches which were then removed by their personal mentors who led them back to their families. Their close kin gave them ceremonial gifts, usually spear throwers and men's string bags, to commemorate the successful completion of the rites. A feast was held in the initiates' honour marking their return to their kindreds, no longer children, but men entitled to participate in the cult life and to celebrate the rites of their clan heritage.

The Dog and Withirrma ceremonies focused primarily on initiation and historical re-enactment. Sharp (1934b:27) noted that the Yir Yoront performed a number of ceremonies that were historical in character and served to introduce clansmen to other ritual celebrations of the woochorrm. Men who were participating in a ceremony for the first time were considered to be especially vulnerable to the powers released and hence were required to undergo special rites of introduction to protect them. These included being rubbed over with the underarm sweat of the other participants during the ceremony. After the ceremony it was necessary to observe special food taboos until it was deemed safe by the ritual leaders.

I found it difficult to determine whether there were any purely historical ceremonies in the area covered by Map 4.1. There could have been, since my informants knew of a number of ceremonies by report, but because they had not been introduced to them their descriptions were insufficiently detailed for me to analyse them appropriately. It is clear that mission activity in the 1930s had disrupted the traditional progression my informants might otherwise have undergone.

4.2.4 Ceremonial increase

It was possible to reconstruct the ritual involved in a number of increase ceremonies. I shall discuss three of these. The first of them had to do with the increase of lovers or sweethearts, the second with techniques for controlling the heat of the sun and the third with the increase of yams.

The sweetheart increase ceremony was called Wuuch-panhthmeer. It was a ceremony that was notorious for its sexual licence and its explicit sexual themes. Its performance drew people from as far north as the Holroyd River and from as far south as the Mitchell River. The last performance of the ceremony seems to have been between 1925-1930. The ceremony centred around sets of "stones" that were said to have been left behind by The Two Holroyd Women who came looking for lovers. They lay hidden inside

the scrubs that clothed the inland ridges at Peena, Wuuchmeengirn and Meertul. Each set of "stones" belonged to one or other of the clans in the area (Watersnake, Brolga, Wallaby/Lightning and Dog/Goanna).

The ceremony was part secret and part secular. In the secret part, the young men who were going to "run the stones" gathered at Wuuchmeengirn and painted themselves up, while a group of older men sitting nearby in a circular depression began singing the songs associated with the travels of The Two Holroyd Women. While they were singing, another group of older men slipped away to locate their own clan's "stones" and withdraw them from their holes where they lay in secret. The "stones" were very powerful, and women, children and men not familiar with the ceremony were careful to keep to the well-defined paths when their subsistence activities took them into the "stones'" neighbourhood. The "stones" were said to require the strength of several men to pull them free of the ground. When they came out, they were painted white, and each group of clansmen would sit around their "stones" and wait for the young men.

After painting up, the young men then had to run through the scrub and, guided by the calls and singing of the men sitting around the "stones", find each set. As they came upon each group of men, the young men would dance holding the "stones" between their legs like the huge testicles they in fact represented.

When all the "stones" had been visited and then replaced in their hiding places, the men emerged from the scrub and the final secret dances were performed in the open at Wuuchmeengirn.

The secret part over, the men rejoined the camp at Meertul, where the women had been preparing round yams for a feast. The men and women performed a series of dances together. When the men had washed off their ritual paint they were offered the prepared yam. In addition, some of the younger women were permitted to offer their sexual favours to any men who cared to avail themselves of them.

The expressed function of the ceremony was to

increase sweethearts. Sweethearts could be increased by individual ritual at other places. Sharp (1937:345) recorded a sweetheart increase centre in the Yir Yoront Rain clan estate, while there was another in the Thaayorre Watersnake clan's estate at Puth (see Map 4.1).

The origins of the "stones" used in this and other rituals is something of a puzzle. Sharp (1934b:26) noted some 25 locations where stone arrangements occurred in Yir Yoront country. He argued that they must have been imported into the area at some time or another in the past because they were non-local. I have only been shown three stone arrangements. One was a barramundi increase centre on the banks of the Chapman River. The "stones" were laid out like the backbone of a fish. The arrangement was in fact composed of slabs of the naturally cemented shell that commonly occurs in the area where tidal arms cut through the bases of beach ridges. The other two arrangements consisted of the Watersnake clan's "stones" used in Wuuch-paanthmeer. One set consisted of soft conglomerate found locally in inland water-courses. The other was a sizeable lump of brain coral that certainly was foreign to the region.

The sun increase ceremony was much smaller in scale than Wuuchpaanthmeer. It was performed in Wallaby/Lighting country. People sought to control the heat of the sun whenever there were spells of unseasonable heat or cold. It was a secular ceremony requiring the cooperation of men and women from several clans and it took place at Kaamurngk where there was a pit in the ground which was called Pung woochorrm (Sun story). The words of the song associated with the pit told of The Two Men who tried to hold a piece of the sun in their hands there. It was too hot to hold, so they buried it in the pit. Since then, the people who came after have been able to control the sun's heat by performing the appropriate ritual there. The group would gather around the pit and sing. To make the weather warmer, a fire was lit in the bottom of the pit to add to the heat of the sun already down there and then covered over. To make the weather cooler, a fire was lit and then quenched with water. The dead coals were then covered over.

The third ceremony sought to influence the growth of round yams (Dioscorea sativa rotunda) at the onset of the growing season. It was performed by men and women in separate places. The women's ceremony was held at Thiimi-lingk and the men's at Pookingk. In both places there were large mounds, and the ritual consisted of making clay replicas of round yams and placing them round the base of two forked sticks representing trees fixed in each mound. Strings, in imitation of the yams' vines, were then twined about the forked sticks. In the women's ceremony, they called out the names of the places where they wanted the yams to grow large. The men's ceremony involved the singing of Wuuch Wanch, a song which had been left behind by The Two Holroyd Women, and miming in dance the theme of the song which focused on the preparation of the yams for eating. After the ceremony, the representations were left where they were and the sites declared to be ngaanch to children and those not introduced to the ceremony.

There appeared to be three other ceremonial ritual increase centres in the area circumscribed by Map 4.1. There was one for bandicoots, one for the darter and another for the carpet snake. Details were difficult to extract because of the time that had elapsed since their last performances.

4.2.5 Routine ritual

Routine ritual applied to encounters with mythic beings and their powers, with spirits of various sorts including baby spirits, wood spirits, spirits of the dead and of sorcerers with devils and other unusual creatures such as the familiars of native doctors and the malevolent creatures that were created by sorcerers. I shall deal briefly with each in turn.

As well as encountering and activating the powers of mythic beings in ceremonial contexts, there were a variety of other ways in which people could have more direct and intimate contact with them. People said the mythic beings could be encountered in an irregular and haphazard fashion

in dreams and actual meetings, but it was with the powers of the mythic beings that the people of the reserve believed they were most likely to come into contact. These were the forces impressed into the surroundings of raak woochorrm by the mythic beings. Some of the raak woochorrm were dangerously potent (i.e. raak ngaanch) and required the performance of the routine rituals in order to avoid harm. Other places, the increase centres, had the potential to be manipulated in order to affect the abundance and condition of certain natural species and to control some other aspects of the human and physical environment. Many of these increase centres were manipulated by the stewards of the tracts in which they occurred in an individual and rather casual way.

In Map 4.1, I have indicated the location of a number of increase centres. For the purposes of analysis I have divided them into two classes. One had to do with the increase of natural species, signified (1) on the map, while the other had to do with the increase of non-species phenomena, signified (2) on the map. The map shows there are 23 increase sites associated with 20 species of birds, land animals, fish, crustaceans, insects and plants whose condition or abundance could in some way be controlled. Four of these increase centres were activated in the course of group ceremonies described in the previous subsection, while the rest were activated by individuals.

The increase centres themselves were most often holes or depressions in the ground, although some, such as those concerning insects, were associated with trees. The stated function of the ritual was to make the particular species either plentiful or fat for the ensuing season. Most increase ritual was performed at the onset of, or during, the wet season. In the typical ritual, the depression was cleared of debris and growth, and sand or earth was thrown in various directions while the steward intoned a formula urging the particular species to grow plentifully for the the next season. In the case of trees that were increase centres, the bark was hit with a woomera and sometimes shredded in the hands before being thrown into the air to

be dispersed by the winds. There were variations in this general pattern. In a crab increase ritual (not indicated on Map 4.1), the ritual formula was whispered into an empty crab's claw to ensure that crabs had well filled claws in the coming season. Sex and age were not important in determining who performed a routine increase ritual. They were optional acts performed when stewards saw the need.

In the class of "other phenomena" subject to control and manipulation through increase ceremony, we find an apparently odd assortment of things: big winds, coughs (phlegm), diarrhoea, sun, grey hair, sweethearts, constipation, big seas, tidal waves and storms. Two of these, sweethearts (wuuchpaanthmeer) and the sun which were increased or controlled in group ceremonies, have already been discussed.

At first sight it seems paradoxical to discover that of the things that may be increased, one set are socially useful while the other set seems potentially harmful. Thus, of the 20 species increased, 18 (90%) of them could be regarded as socially useful, while 2 (5%) of them were potentially harmful or annoying (mosquitoes and sandflies). In the "other phenomena" category of the total of the 10 things in it, only one, the sun ceremony, seems devoted to improving human welfare. The increasing of sweethearts at the very best was equivocal, in that it embodied, on the one hand, a conflict between private hopes for indulging in extra-marital adventuring and on the other, a moral issue. In general, an explanation for the existence of potentially harmful increase centres can be sought in the actual rationalisations cited for their use. My informants have stated that people resorted to activating the potentially harmful increase centres when they were at odds with the rest of the community and could blame no particular person for their predicament (see also Sharp 1937:203). Equally, when people were plagued by such things as epidemics, high winds, storms and the like, it was assumed that someone, in seeking private redress, had activated the particular site known to be associated with the source of annoyance or discomfort, thus retrospectively assigning a cause.

There were no obvious associations between the occurrence of increase centres and the abundance of particular species in an area or their economic importance. In a more extensive survey of such sites in Yir Yoront tracts, Sharp (1937:202) observed that while some species that had increase centres were important for subsistence, there were many species that were equally important as food sources that were not increased. Moreover, they were not known to be increased by other Aboriginal groups in the region. In addition, some species that were increased had little social, economic or mythic value. Perhaps what is central to the explanation for the occurrence of increase centres lies in their role as part of an exclusive set of supernatural features in a ritual estate over which only clan members could assert control. I suggest that control over the increase centres in a clan's ritual estate functioned to reinforce and validate the rights stewards exercised over the exploitation of an estate's physical resources.

Apart from routine increase ritual there were two other rites that were observed as a matter of course when entering places connected with the mythic beings. Rites of introduction to particular parts of various clans' estates were performed by clansmen or those familiar with the places in order to vouch for the presence of the new-comers. A rite of introduction involved all or some of the following behaviours:

1. explaining to new-comers the particular nature of the danger likely to be encountered, the dangers ranging from a general non-specific malevolence as was the case at Waanchikan to mythic beings like The Old Man from the Lightning myth who abducted dogs and children (see pp.198-200);
2. shouting out to the mythic beings to let them know that new-comers were in the area;
3. rubbing the new-comers down with underarm sweat and/or blowing over them to identify

them with the people who normally frequented the place; and,

4. pouring water over the new-comers from a water source in the tract to identify them with the country.

Some places were more potent than others. The most hazardous of all potent places in the area described by Map 4.1 was Waanchikan, which was associated with an adventure in the saga of the Two Holroyd Women (see pp. 211-12). From aerial photographs and the reports of Europeans who had traversed the area, Waanchikan seemed a relatively productive tract with permanent lagoons and extensive riverine scrubs. Despite its attractions, there existed a catalogue of tales of disasters, of strange swellings and crippled limbs, that befell those who risked the malign powers of the place without the appropriate qualifications and introductory rites. As I pointed out earlier, only old people after performing the proper rites could enter Waanchikan's confines. Others skirted it warily and quickly, being careful not even to urinate near its boundaries lest the evil from the place infect their bladders. Foodstuffs gathered in or hunted at Waanchikan by those entitled to go there had to be stored and consumed elsewhere than in the main camp. Few tracts were as potent as Waanchikan. However, many areas in the Edward River reserve manifested their potency on those who travelled through them by causing unaccustomed drowsiness, minor mishaps and a general sense of uneasiness.

The other kind of routine ritual ordinarily observed by people were what I term "taboos of place". These taboos usually applied to some tracts only and took the form of prohibitions on particular kinds of foods found at the place. Such taboos were instituted by the mythic beings. The following is an example drawn from the tracts surveyed in Map 4.1.

Paantwiiyntin was a tract that was exploited during

the dry-wet time from Ngatkooyuumpun or Wootomen in the Watersnake clan estate. Fish were taken from the tidal arms with rods and lines using wooden shanked hooks with bone barbs baited with small fish. There was also a brush-barrier fish weir near the junction of two creeks where fish were trapped during the falling tide. While fishing was normally richly rewarding, there was however, a taboo on stingaree and sawfish taken in that tract, although such fish were commonly eaten when caught elsewhere. It was said that The Two Men initiated the taboo, but it was the Watersnake clan's ancestress, The Old Woman, who enforced the taboos and made defaulters sick. Only old people were exempted from the taboo and could eat with impunity stingaree and sawfish taken at Paantwiliyntin.

It is worth remarking that it was often the case that "old people", that is to say, those whose families had grown up, were exempt from the consequences of dangerous places. At the level of local rationalisation, it was argued that the old people were "used to it" and their long association with particular places and their powers had rendered them immune from these supernatural hazards. The distinction between the new-comer to a scene and the old hand who knew the place intimately and was used to it was a constant theme in discussing the powers of the countryside. The ability of the old people to move freely and harvest all things in their own domains gave them added authority and control, as well as a privileged share in the products of their tracts.

4.3 Baby spirits and conception

Edward River people did not employ the normal physical signs (cessation of menses, changes in the pigmentation of nipples, morning sickness etc.) that usually indicate pregnancy. The conventional sign that signalled that a married couple had conceived a child was a supernatural one in which one or another of the parents encountered a baby spirit (parr'r nerp). The baby spirit might

appear to the mother in the form of some small creature such as a snake, a fish or a turtle that disappeared suddenly and inexplicably. When the creature vanished in this way, the woman knew that it had entered her flesh and had become embodied within her as a foetus. Sometimes baby spirits appeared as a wind that followed the mother-to-be and then suddenly dropped. Baby spirits could jump from one person to another, as for instance, from the father to the mother, or from one woman to another. The encounter with a baby spirit was not always recognised for what it was at the time, as the following extract from my notes testifies.

V. M. related how he had found the baby spirit of his daughter. When he was out fishing, he noticed a large freshwater mussel crawling on the floor of the lagoon. He reached into the water and pulled it out and then threw it on the fire to cook. When the shell opened up, there was no flesh inside, although he had clearly seen the mussel's foot extended from the shell in the water. Some days later his wife told him that she was pregnant, and he told her of his experience with the mussel. Clearly, opined V. M., the baby spirit, disguised as a mussel, had entered his body and then had transferred to his wife's body. When the baby was born, it had a dark birth-mark on its back, which V. M. said was a result of throwing the mussel on the fire.

(Taylor field notes)

While the ideology recognised the necessity for sexual intercourse in the total process of conception, it stressed the primacy of spirit impregnation. When the encounter with the baby spirit went unnoticed or unrecognised until the more obvious signs of pregnancy appeared (such as the thickening girth and foetal movements), it was important to discover the location of the spirit impregnation in order to determine the forthcoming child's clan affiliation and some of its stewardship responsibilities. Hence, the appearance of the external physical signs of pregnancy initiated a retrospective search for the encounter,

as in the example cited above. An alternative and equally valid way to determine the place of the spirit impregnation was for one or other of the parents to have the location revealed in a dream.

It is worth noting that such an ideology, by laying so much stress on a supernatural encounter, had the potential to foster the notion in a woman that she was pregnant when she was not. Sharp (1940:492) noted one case of psuedo-pregnancy during his fieldwork (and for more recent instances see p. 473).

The acknowledgement of pregnancy, whether by supernatural encounter or by the belated recognition of physical signs, called for the imposition of taboos upon the prospective parents while the child was in utero. The prohibitions were legion. Among other things, mothers-to-be could not personally dig into scrub turkey mounds for their eggs. This was likened to digging into their own bellies and thereby harming their child. Pregnant women could not eat carpet snakes, lest when they came into labour the snake's spirit wound around their waists and impeded the birth. They were forbidden to dive in deep water for lily bulbs in case the Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone bit them and caused the child to be stillborn. Large male animals, especially kangaroos and wallabies, were banned for fear the child might be born with hands shaped like the animals' paws. Fathers-to-be came under similar dietary restrictions and were additionally forbidden to make spears anywhere near their pregnant wives in case the spears figuratively transfixed the unborn babies and killed them.

After the birth of a child, prohibitions of various kinds continued to be observed by the parents and the child as well. Thus, a young child was never given large wallaby to eat, otherwise it might become fretful and liable to fits and nightmares. Nor was a child permitted to eat crocodile flesh in case it developed scaley sores. Kangaroo and emu meat, both relatively rare in the Edward River dietary, were absolutely forbidden to parents and children alike. The taboos on parents and child appear to have been lifted progressively with the child's maturation.

4.4 After-life beliefs

The people of the Edward River reserve believed in a spiritual after-life. Compared with the doctrine of pre-existence embodied in their conception theory, these beliefs were variable and less specific concerning the ultimate destination of the spirits of the dead. However, deaths added to the population of supernatural beings in the environment and the attitude of Edward River people towards the ghosts of the dead was one of ambivalence, uneasiness and vague dread. Traditional mourning ritual functioned in part to separate the ghosts of the recently dead from their attachments to their living kindred, and to allow them to find their own appropriate after-life niche in the environment. Mourning ritual accomplished much more than simply this, and it is worth digressing for a moment to consider mourning ritual as a whole before discussing the nature of Edward River beliefs concerning the ghosts and spirits of the dead and their relationships with living humans.

4.4.1 Mourning ritual

When a person died, let us say an adult, the news of the death and its location was rapidly passed from group to group along the entire reserve. People who knew the deceased even distantly felt a strong social compulsion to go to the mourning camp and display their grief and pay their respects to the dead person. Indeed, those who knew the deceased and did not attend the observances at the mourning camp were not only being disrespectful but were also inviting suspicion of being implicated in the person's demise.

As they gathered at the mourning camp, the kindred of the deceased assumed the appropriate bereavement terms and began to carry out the duties and obligations prescribed for the mourning kindred. These duties included organising the practical details concerning the preparation of the corpse, the adoption of the appropriate mourning

demeanour and decoration and undertaking the necessary food taboos. These kin-specific roles have already been discussed in Chapter 3. As a mark of respect, no one referred to the deceased by any of her/his personal names. In Kuuk Thaayorre, the kindred referred to the deceased as pam nanir, while the non-kindred used the term pam watp. Similar circumlocutions existed in the other languages of the reserve. Since personal names often included things in everyday use, those things were also referred to by circumlocution within the hearing of the kindred because they would be offended or upset hearing the name of their close relative being uttered.

A mourning camp stayed in existence for several weeks. The dead body was slung on a pole between two forked sticks and allowed to swell and decompose to the point where the body fluids began to drip from it. Notwithstanding the stench, people camped close by periodically engaging in wailing and other grief displays.

When the body was judged to be in a suitable state of decay, it was taken down from the forked sticks by certain male members of the kindred and, out of sight of the rest of the mourners, was eviscerated and the entrails were buried in a hole. The fluids were then squeezed and kneaded from the rotting body reducing the cadaver to a thing of bone, hair, tendon and dessicated flesh. It was wrapped in a flexed position in many layers of bark and thereafter carried about the countryside by various close female kin, until its final disposal was organised.

Following these preparations, two other important events took place at the mourning camp. The first of these was the divination ceremony or inquest. Since most adult deaths were ascribed to sorcery, it was necessary to perform a ritual in order to discover the identity of the supposed killer. The divination took the form of a vigil over the the buried entrails of the corpse. It was conducted by two of the deceased's close kinsmen.

The identity of the sorcerer could be indicated by a variety of signs. Typically, the sorcerer's spirit (pam ngeengk) was said to be drawn to the mourning camp

after the evisceration had taken place. It often appeared, I was told, as an image of the sorcerer himself thus leaving no doubt about his identity. Sometimes the sorcerer appeared in the guise of one of his totemic emblems. When this happened, the diviners had to determine the killer's identity by a process of deduction that took account of the revealed clan membership, together with imputed motive and evidence of opportunity for procuring a magical death.

Revenge or payback killings were normally conducted in secret or from ambush. (I shall deal with revenge killing in the next chapter.) Hence the sorcerer's identity was not disclosed at the mourning camp, so that the sorcerer would not be put on his guard. When the diviners returned from their vigil, the other mourners were in a high state of tension. Typically, the members of the kindred chided and blamed each other for failing to look after the deceased properly. As recriminations and accusations began to fly, those with whom the deceased had had outstanding grievances or unresolved disputes, publicly confessed their derelictions and offered themselves to the bereaved kindred for punishment by spear or stick. So too did those who might have given the deceased some cause for dispute and thus might possibly be suspected of having secretly pre-empted public dispute-settling machinery by procuring the deceased's death.

At the conclusion of the grievance settling, the mourning camp broke up and people went their separate ways. The deceased's remains were carried around by the female kin for as many as two or three years before final disposal. The tracts of land owned by the deceased and the camping places with which the dead person was especially associated were put under mortuary bans. It was believed that the person's ghost would camp in familiar places after death, and it was necessary for the living to avoid them so as to allow the ghost to shake off attachments to kin and loved ones and join the other ghosts of those gone before.

The remains were finally disposed of by burial or cremation. Bodies were interred near camping places and their location often marked by a fallen tree whose trunk

was buried in the ground, roots uppermost. During the course of mapping I found that burial sites were relatively widespread and common. By contrast, I recorded the location of only two cremation sites, and both of these were for the disposal of males.

Both methods of final disposal involved a public ceremony in which the kindred provided a feast for those attending. The ceremonies included final grief displays and the lifting of the formal mortuary prohibitions on kin and places. If the deceased had died in a humpy during the wet season, people gathered at the abandoned hut and wailed for the last time there and made the place clear for further habitation. The deceased's belongings (spears, woomera, wax and gums, tools etc.) were either destroyed, left to rot on the grave, or occasionally given to "longway" relatives such as the maternal uncle. Those who had been observing dietary taboos connected with the deceased's totems were formally released from them and ceremonially presented with some of the forbidden foods. Some kin might voluntarily continue to observe the taboos as a mark of deep respect.

Cremations were said to draw large gatherings. They seem to have been reserved for men of high standing. The cremation of an important old man from the Holroyd region would bring people from as far away as the Kendall and Mitchell Rivers. During the evening before the funeral feast and cremation, dances were performed around a pole decorated with feathers. The dancers were male and female members of the deceased's kindred.

The funeral pyre was constructed in a shallow trench that was filled with small pieces of wood sufficient to consume the, by now, very dessicated remains. These remains, wrapped in many layers of paperbark, were placed on the fire by the dead man's close male ngothon. In order to open it to the flames they pulled the strings holding the bundle together. As the strings came away, each man acquired one of the dead man's names. While the body was being consumed by the flames, the assembled mourners displayed their grief once more. It was also said that cremations often broke up

in a spear fight, as those entrusted with the contract for revenge (see next chapter) seized the opportunity to dispatch the imputed sorcerer if he was among the mourners.

Not all deaths were accorded the full array of ceremonial and ritual. A number of factors conditioned their degree of elaboration and the time taken to perform them. If someone died at the onset of the wet season, the corpse would most likely be buried fairly quickly since the hot humid atmosphere would inhibit the drying process. Equally, the very young and the very old, because they were generally not considered to be sorcery victims, were usually interred immediately. The status of the deceased was also important. A male in the prime of life with many kin, tract and ritual responsibilities, left a serious gap in the organisation of interpersonal duties if he died. The duration of the obsequies reflected the degree of loss experienced by the kindred and the time taken to repair the hole in the social fabric caused by the death.

4.4.2 Ghosts of the dead

In his discussion of Yir Yoront beliefs, Sharp (1934b:33) noted some confusion concerning the nature of the spiritual after-life. Sharp distinguished between the spirits and the ghosts of the dead. The dead had two spirits, one of which went "...to the 'western country' which lies beyond the gulf, where it leads an elysian existence". The second spirit became a star, "...the transformation being accompanied by the fall of a meteorite". Sharp went on to note that when the first kind of spirit, which had human form was seen in conjunction with a falling star, it was a certain sign that a death had occurred somewhere. Sharp (1934b:34) also observed:

Distinct from these two "spirits" of a dead person is the malevolent "ghost", which retains its individuality and haunts the community for some time after death. Eventually the individuality of the ghost is lost, and it joins the numerous categories of generalized ghosts, the evil and

indestructible anthropomorphs with which so much of the life of the society is miserably hagridden.

When talking of spirits of the dead, my informants stressed the "ghost" aspect of the after-life existence primarily, I believe, because it directly bore on everyday activities and needed to be taken into account in routine rituals. In Kuuk Thaayorre, the category of generalised ghosts and anthropomorphs is called wang. More usually translated in English as "devil", the category included, besides the ghosts of the dead, local monsters and Europeans as well. All the beings in this class have white skin, even the ghosts of the dead.

The ghosts of the dead may be encountered in a variety of ways. They were most likely to be met with immediately after death when they were still continuing to perform their wonted activities of camping, hunting and gathering in the tracts they used during life. People feared to meet them, although some men said that if a person was daring enough and possessed sufficient strength of character, a ghost might be grabbed and held on to until it revealed some important knowledge or power to the human. I never met anyone who actually claimed to have done this.

Ghosts could be encountered in shapes other than human. It was believed that a dead man or woman could assume the shape of Minh Maal, a huge black flying fox. If the dead person could be encountered in this form, it was possible to find out who had performed the sorcery leading to the person's death. The proper procedure for doing this was for two brothers of the dead person to go into the scrub where colonies of black flying foxes were known to occur. Before approaching the colony they would smear mud all over their bodies. If the ghost was there, it would emerge as a flying fox with wings as large as a tent-fly-sheet. It would avoid the younger brother and make straight for the older brother and commence wrestling with him. The wrestling match was often so violent that the flying fox/ghost would defecate over the man. The ghost and the man would break apart from time to time,

each to regain their wind and during these intervals the younger brother would persistently badger the creature for the name of the sorcerer. Reluctant at first to answer, it would finally reveal the name of the sorcerer and the two brothers would return to their camp and cry for their deceased kinsman. The older brother usually took several days to recover from the effects of wrestling with the ghostly flying fox. People did not eat the black flying fox in case it was the ghost of a dead person.

It was said that the ghosts of the dead normally lived in a world of their own under the ground. Sometimes however, they congregated on the surface to hold dances of their own devising. If a living man came across them engaged in one of their corroborees, he would be discovered and brought into the ceremonial ground to watch the dance. The following translation from an informant's account describes what was supposed to happen.

When a man looks at the ghosts gathered on the dancing ground he might shake with fear. But the ghosts will tell him not to be frightened. "It's alright," they will say, "these old people are your uncles, your mothers and your brothers." When the man looks at them in their paint and feathers, he will recognise his dead kin even though those who died as elderly people will have been given back their lost youth.

The ghosts will show the man their dance. They dance on and on, never seeming to tire. When it is over they will beseech their human onlooker to take the dance back and teach it to the living in remembrance of them.

(Taylor field notes)

Dances acquired from ghosts were held to be different from those that celebrated woochorm. I was unable to discover, however, what conditioned their performance in pre-settlement times.

As well as their roles in the divination process and in creating new dances, ghosts could also impinge on

human affairs in commonplace and generally vexatious ways. They could lure people away and get them lost. The forest country of the Duck/Spear clan between Station Creek and Fish-hole Creek was notorious for occurrences of that sort. Ghosts could also hide places from travellers and prevent them from discerning the proper topographical clues indicating their whereabouts. They had the ability to control the supply of game and fish and could withhold it from hunters. They also appeared to people in their dreams and disturbed their rest.

All of these irritating and unsettling ghostly behaviours were accepted as ordinary adjuncts to everyday life. People tried to minimise the inconvenience they caused by singing out to the ghosts to notify them of human activity and to obtain their goodwill, or at least, non-interference. They introduced new-comers by performing rituals, similar to those for introducing new-comers to poison places, calling out the new-comers' names and vouching for their good intentions. When people arrived at a tract that had not been visited in some time, they wailed in remembrance for the dead and in greeting for the "old people" of the place. The "old people", as the ghosts of the dead were often called, were local in their inclinations and identified with particular tracts. If the ghosts of a particular area were being more than usually mischievous and seemed to be withholding game, their living descendants were not above abusing them angrily and leaving for other tracts where the dead were less annoying.

4.5 Other supernatural beings

Of the other supernaturals inhabiting the reserve's area, by far the most malevolent of them were a number of local demons. These named, misshapen monsters were of unknown origin and even the people who habitually frequented the territories of the demons never came to terms with them. They were said to abduct children and, at times, adults. They would kill either for the malicious pleasure of it or else to feed on the vital parts of humans. Adults used the

fear of demons to terrify children into good behaviour and to ensure that they never strayed beyond the eyes of their caretakers. Strange smells, the warning cries of birds and unusual noises all presaged the presence of a demon, and people fled from possible encounters with them. Only the most pressing of causes would induce an individual to depart from the known trails and by-ways of the bush to make excursions through the unfamiliar and possibly demon-infested tracts of distant clans.

Much less malevolent were the "wood spirits", the Yukngatungk, who dwelt in the inland forested country. They delighted in mischief-making, like that indulged in by the ghosts of the dead. These spirits were associated with the Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone. Their moods were unpredictable and control over them uncertain.

Of the remaining kinds of supernatural beings, the most important were the familiars of individual sorcerers and native healers. Sorcerers' familiars were employed as agents of death. The familiars of native healers were used in diagnosing the causes of serious illnesses. They are better discussed in the context of the humans that brought them into being and controlled their actions. Both sorcerers and native healers took greater than ordinary risks in order to bring some facets of the supernatural world under their personal control. As such, they are each worth a separate discussion.

4.6 The sorcerer

The procurement of death by supernatural or magical means was regarded as a legitimate and frequently employed method of providing private redress for wrongs inflicted by others. Sorcery was a secret business and the techniques were passed on from father to son. It was predominantly a male pursuit. Sorcery was advanced as the only possible explanation for untimely deaths. Even when the signs appeared obvious, as in seemingly accidental deaths, sorcery could still be involved since sorcerers could exert their powers to make spears go awry in flight or influence the

behaviour of animals like snakes and cause them to bite people.

The Thaayorre verb kenche, meaning "to practise sorcery against" is glossed in Aboriginal English as "to catch". There were many techniques for "catching" people. In pre-settlement times, sorcerers could cause fatal illnesses by working spells on their victims' faeces, on their food remains or on things personally associated with them. Some sorcerers were said to be able to project slivers of bone into their targets in such a way as eventually to cause death. Other sorcerers could create snakes and crocodiles that could be dispatched at their bidding to attack individuals whom the sorcerers wished to kill. The description from McConnel presented here describes what was involved.

The saltwater crocodile (Crocodilus porosus) is very much feared. One auwa is in a swamp near the mouth of the Archer River, and another on the Edward River. Some men profess to be able to "make" the crocodile and send it out after an enemy -- it is dangerous, therefore, to make a crocodile-man angry. The crocodile magic is as follows. The crocodile man takes a lizard or goanna, draws blood from his arm, puts it in the lizard's mouth, then ties the lizard up in grass, with its legs and tail protruding, lays it in the sea, calling it his "son", and bids it grow into a crocodile. When the man's mouth is sore he knows that his "son", the crocodile, has grown big enough to eat small fish; when his mouth gets sore again, the crocodile is big enough to eat big fish. The man then forgets about his "son" and tells no one what he has done. He goes back to his camp with a stick over his shoulder, which means he has done something, but no one asks what it is. Later he goes fishing and sees a ripple in the water. The crocodile sees him. When it does nothing, the man knows that it is his "son" that he has made. Putting sweat from under his arm on a stick he lays it in the water where the tide will carry it to the crocodile. The crocodile then follows him and he puts sweat on its face and in its mouth and cleans its teeth with a straw, taking care not to touch its back for this would make it angry.

The crocodile then recognizes him as its "father". The man sends his "son" into the lagoons and rivers to round up fish and send them towards him. When the man catches plenty of fish he knows that it is because his "son", the crocodile has sent them to his "father". If he has an enemy he sends it after him. The crocodile will go everywhere till he finds the enemy, and will bring him to his "father". A man cannot kill his own "son", the crocodile, and if anyone else should kill him, the man will become sick; he will cry and be sorry for his "son" which has been killed.

(McConnel 1957:10-11)

The term auwa used above by McConnel, is equivalent to the Kuuk Thaayorre term raak woochorrm.

By common agreement, the most usual form of sorcery entailed a special kind of operation on the victim. The Kuuk Thaayorre term for sorcerer, pam yuur workurr (or "the man with the noose", derives from this operation. I present it in outline here without comment:

The sorcerer waylaid his victim in his camp at night or during the day when he was out hunting. In order to separate the victim from his hearthgroup at night, the sorcerer used a special cord noose that he slipped over his intended prey and then drew him into the surrounding bush. Using his magical powers, the sorcerer placed his victim in a trance-like but conscious state and sat him cross-legged on the ground. He made his victim hold onto a sapling in such a way as to expose the rib cage. Using a sharp stone, the sorcerer made an incision along the bottom line of the ribs on the left side of the victim's chest. The sorcerer then inserted his hand inside his victim's thoracic cavity and withdrew those of the victim's organs that impeded access to the heart and laid them carefully on the victim's thigh. Reaching inside the chest the sorcerer squeezed the victim's heart's blood into a specially made bark container. The organs were then replaced inside the victim and the incision was sewn up in such a way that no scar showed.

The victim was then roused. Sorcery victims were said to know that they had been ensorcelled, but they were powerless to attack the sorcerer or to tell others what had occurred when they returned to their hearthgroups. After the sorcerer had commanded his victim to return to his camp, he himself returned to his own country with the parcel of blood and buried it in a secret place. In due time, the victim, now emptied of his heart's blood, fell ill. The victim's sickness was a sign to the sorcerer that his magic was working. He thereupon unearthed the parcel of blood and by manipulating it in a special way controlled the course of the sick man's illness causing his health to deteriorate irreversibly. When the victim finally died, the sorcerer, feigning grief, usually went to join the other mourners at the mourning camp. (Taylor field notes)

Sorcery, as I noted above, was employed in retribution for wrongs inflicted. I shall deal more fully with these causes and their contexts in Chapter 5. It should be noted here that no-one could feel themselves free from the threat of magical attack. Leading a blameless moral life was no guarantee against sorcerers' attentions. For one thing, the divination techniques used in the inquest process were not always precise, and it was said that the diviners' guesswork often pointed to the wrong person. (The Western scientific viewpoint would of course insist that the diviners always pointed to the wrong person, on the assumption that the operation was impossible in the first place.) Hence, men could be unfairly accused and be threatened by sorcery in return. It was also held that sorcerers were often ill-intentioned and performed sorcery simply for the malicious thrill it provided and for the reputations they acquired thereby. In any case, it was difficult to lead a blameless life because the demands the kindred made for support in quarrels and disputes necessitated strained relations with others.

All adults then felt themselves to be at risk from the threat of sorcerers and their supernatural powers. As a consequence, people were careful not to leave any of

their personal effects lying carelessly about for fear they might be used by others to work harm against them. Men burnt their broken spear hafts, when they were beyond repair, and were careful to burn all the shavings from their wood-crafting lest a sorcerer find them. Every morning someone would scan the immediate environs of a camping place looking for strange footprints that might indicate that a sorcerer had been near in the night. There were also specifics that people could employ to warn against or ward off the attentions of a sorcerer. The yellow bark stripped from the roots of a tree I have been unable to identify botanically was reputed to make a person invisible to the eye of an enemy. When the bark was placed in a person's footprint, a sorcerer would never see the person making the print no matter how long he followed the track. I was told of another tree whose sap was so deadly that if living creatures touched it, they would die instantly. If the dried sap was carried about on the point of a spear or placed on the downwind side of a camp, its presence would deter sorcerers. Small blocks of wood from another unidentified tree placed near the head of a sleeping person were credited with the ability to detect sorcerers skulking about at night and to announce their presence by knocking together loudly enough to warn the sleeper.

By definition, sorcery was a covert business and difficult to detect at work in the living. Ultimately, untimely death was interpreted as the unequivocal sign that it had been invoked. Divination uncovered the identity of the sorcerer. From the victim's point of view, this was belated knowledge. However, it was possible to determine if a sick person was a victim of sorcery by calling in a native doctor.

4.7 The native doctor

While any man could become a sorcerer by learning the appropriate techniques from his father, becoming what the Kuuk Thaayorre called a wangath, or native doctor, required direct contact with supernatural agencies before the appropriate powers were conferred. It also required a certain amount of fortitude, and most men were unwilling to hazard the personal

risks involved in confronting the supernatural powers in a procedure that was not foolproof and which could backfire seriously on the neophyte.

One way of acquiring the powers of a wangath was to lie on the grave of someone recently deceased. I never obtained a coherent account of what was supposed to happen, although some men were said to have acquired their powers in that fashion in the past. By far the most respected native doctors were those, and there were a number of them, who were said to have "gone through the rainbow" as described in the following account:

"Passing through the rainbow" meant being swallowed by the Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone. A would-be wangath went off to one of the lagoons that the mythic creature was known to haunt, and, after rubbing himself over with native honey and sweet fruit, began swimming in the water. Attracted by the smell of the honey and the fruit, the Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone would swim up and swallow the neophyte whole. It would then swim off to another place carrying the neophyte in its stomach. Ghosts of the neophyte's ancestors, especially the poison grandfathers, kaman, would sing out to the creature warning it not to keep their kinsman too long in its stomach. Later the man would be regurgitated on the bank of a lagoon. As he lay there recovering from the experience, red ants would come and clean the new doctor of the coating he had acquired in the belly of the creature.

When the new wangath had been cleaned up by the ants, he went off to gather his belongings. Uncertain as to whether or not he had the powers of a wangath, the man might try them out. If he found the bones of a dead animal, the powers of the wangath would enable him to piece the skeleton together, cover it with its hide and bring the animal back to life. If he did this successfully, he knew that he was endowed with the special powers, but as a new man, a pam puukam, he had to be careful in their exercise. He used them cautiously at first and on his own kindred before others. Besides bringing dead animals back to life, his conferred powers included the ability to send his spirit (pam ngeenk)

over long distances to visit sick people, as well as the ability to project his spirit into the body of a sick person to determine the cause of an illness. Some wangath used animal familiars, like frogs, to do the same thing.
(Taylor field notes)

In practice, consulting with a native doctor was usually a measure of last resort for the kindred of a sick person. It was done when other therapies had had little effect. I have published descriptions of indigenous medical treatments elsewhere (Taylor 1977a, 1977b), and the following brief account draws on those earlier articles.

Traditional therapies embraced a range of methods. The pre-settlement pharmacopoeia included a large range of plant products (derived from leaves, barks, fruits and tubers) and other items such as clay. Some of these bush medicines were symptom-specific remedies that were widely known and applied to frequently recurring complaints such as respiratory infections, inflamed eyes and diarrhoea. Other bush medicines were more in the nature of cure-all remedies that might or might not work in particular cases. They were owned by the men of particular lineages. There was also a set of commonly known techniques for treating spear wounds, broken bones, fevers, sprains, muscle soreness and toothaches.

Additionally, supernatural powers could be invoked to speed recovery. Those nursing a sick person would invariably croon woochorrm song cycles in order to abate distressing symptoms, relax the patient and induce sleep. Sufferers might also be taken to certain places asserted to have curative properties. And certain people, by a process of adventitious acquisition, manifested from time to time healing powers. Such healers (they could even be children) applied their powers by massaging or blowing over the sick person. These healing powers, however, tended to be fugitive, and they could desert a healer if s/he engaged in wrongdoing or in excesses.

When the condition of a sick person was critical, or when recovery was slow and therapy seemingly ineffective,

the patient's kindred would resort to a wangath. Using his special powers, the wangath would project his own spirit inside the sick person, or insert his spirit familiar, in order to discover the cause of the discomfort and to offer a prognosis. Sickneses diagnosed as resulting from an infringement of a taboo were not usually regarded as fatal, and the wangath might use his own medicines and healing powers to speed recovery. If the sickness was seen to be caused by sorcery (i.e. if the sick person had no blood inside his heart), the wangath might inform the kindred that the case was terminal. Such an announcement generally produced the effect it predicted, because all further nursing aid would be withdrawn from the patient as the kinfolk set up a death watch.

The native doctor might intervene in what was normally an irreversible process, if he judged the victim to have been unfairly attacked. He might attempt to remove the magical projectile, if that was seen to be the cause of the patient's condition, by putting his hand inside the patient's body and withdrawing the projectile without leaving any trace. If the wangath knew the sorcerer's identity, he might go to the sorcerer and try to persuade him to throw away the victim's blood, thus breaking the nexus between the parcel of blood and the victim's failing condition. It was said that some native doctors had the power to replace the victim's lost blood with some of their own and restore health in that way.

If the sick person died, the privileged position of the wangath placed him beyond the wrath of the kindred, irrespective of whether he had done anything for the person or not. While the sorcerer and the native doctor appear to have been opposed to each other, there was no felt contradiction in a man occupying either role at different times. Within the circle of his kindred and trusted associates, a man might apply his powers as a native doctor for benevolent ends. As a sorcerer, he could still work for the benefit of his kindred by directing his powers against those at a distance who threatened his own well-being and that of his kindred.

4.8 Summary

Like any magico-religious system, the Edward River beliefs and practices concerning the realm of the supernatural served many functions at both the individual and group levels. They set the individual within a well-ordered, if somewhat terrifying, cosmos and answered at least some of the existential questions that humankind invariably asks (e.g. Where did I come from? What is my place in the world? How can I control the world about me? Where will I go when I die?). They served as well, through increase and other manipulative rituals, to provide for and encourage confidence in the future and offered at least some restorative formulae to correct deviations from accustomed environmental rhythms.

At the social level, the belief system generated two major social groupings, viz. the clan and the ritual-ceremonial group. Clans came into being through the totemic identification of people with places and mythic beings. Figure 4.1 summarises much of my earlier description by outlining in bare form the logic of this conceptual linkage. As Berndt and Berndt (1977:295) observe on Aboriginal religion in general, totems were social-personal symbols that established an essential unity between humans and their environment. Their general comments on the nature of the Dreaming hold with equal force in the particular case of the Edward River reserve, if we equate the term "Dreaming" with "woochorrm", the principal term I have used throughout this chapter.

The Dreaming spells out a relationship between people and nature and between people and the natural species, in which people are regarded as part of nature, not opposed to other parts of it but bound to them by strong emotional ties. Such a belief implies a direct linkage with major mythic personages who were responsible for transmitting to human beings a life force which was sacred. The intervening 'totem' or symbol, in animal or some other form, provides a tangible, visible expression of man's relationship to his deities. The symbol, mediated through the 'totem', as agent,

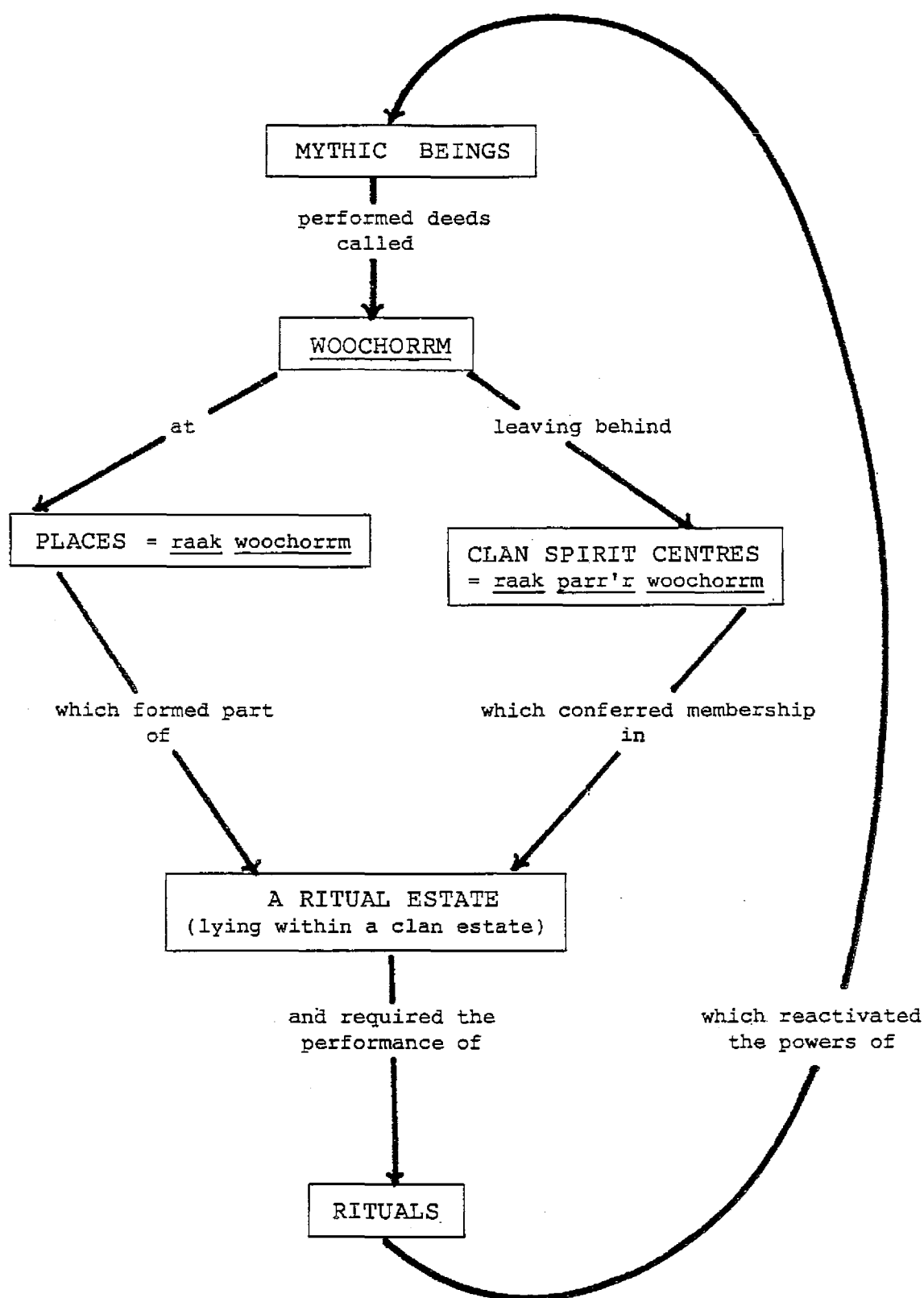


Figure 4.1 The structure of Edward River totemism

is not explicable in its own terms: it must be seen as part of the broader setting of the Dreaming.

(Berndt and Berndt 1977:294-295)

The links between mythic beings, the woochorrm, places and people validated the claims of clans to their ritual estates. In turn, these claims provided a charter for the ownership and control of the physical resources of the clan tracts in which the ritual estate was embedded.

More than this, the holding of a ritual estate entailed duties and obligations in respect of it and these provided the social imperative to perform ceremonial rituals. Ritual estates were not seen as isolated islands, but rather as segments of a wider landscape whose parts were bound together by ancestral activity. Hence, ritual was not performed in isolation. Rather, the proper celebration of major ritual required the efforts of clansmen from many ritual estates. The need for the proper celebration of ritual produced the largest kind of social grouping that convened for any purpose at all in that environment. This group I have called the ritual-ceremonial group. The composition of the ritual-ceremonial group varied up and down the length of the reserve, since each local set of clans had overlapping "ritual ranges" with each set participating in the rituals of their neighbours to their immediate north, south and east.

The magico-religious belief system also functioned powerfully as an agent of social control. This aspect I shall deal with in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5LAW AND ORDER AND SOCIAL CONTROL5.1 The rules of right conduct

When discussing codes of behaviour with my informants I found that they constantly used two English language phrases. The phrases were "old custom" and "murri law". "Old custom" seemed mostly to refer to the rules governing the behaviour between various classes of kin and to the rules relating to betrothal and marriage, while "murri law" referred most often to the rules surrounding initiation, ceremony and ritual, death and revenge, and behaviour relating humans to supernaturals. I would not insist that the above distinctions are watertight, but both expressions clearly entailed a body of conventions subscribed to by the entire pre-settlement population. A principal function of the rules was to provide guidelines and expectations for humans in relation to each other, to their environment and to the supernaturals that they postulated also shared their living space.

A casual selection of such rules might be expressed in the following way:

everyone should be married;
 promises entered into should be kept;
 obligations to kindred take precedence over
 obligations to others;
 mother should be respected above all kindred
 members;
 strangers are not to be trusted;
 seniority implies priority in decision making;
 invasion of personal jurisdiction in kindred,
 tract and ritual matters is not to be tolerated;
 group action cannot proceed without consensus;
 deaths should be avenged;
 personal integrity should be defended;
 manhood cannot be achieved without initiation;
 the mythic beings should be honoured;
 males have precedence in ceremonial matters;

ceremonial ritual secrecy should be preserved;
 ceremony and ritual take precedence over other
 matters;
 the performance of ceremonies and rituals must
 not be upset;
 owners must care for their tracts and their
 resources;
 increase ceremonies should be diligently
 performed; etc.

Implicit in the list are hierarchies of preference which, acting in concert with the indigenous beliefs about the nature of the world, enabled individuals and groups (i.e. hearthgroup, band, clan, ritual-ceremonial group) to respond appropriately to the events of that world, to direct their activities responsibly and to accomplish their recurring purposes in it (cf. Goodenough 1966:258). The rules of "murri law" or "old custom" also constituted the explicit value statements of a moral order felt to be binding on all Aborigines. As such, it provided the ground rules for the definition of right and wrong actions. Not only this, its often conflicting imperatives gave rise to dispute situations and, at the same time, the code itself specified the kinds of redressive measures to be applied when breaches of the code occurred.

It proved difficult to gather statistical information about the frequency of occurrence of various kinds of wrong actions and their ensuing mode of redress. There was, unfortunately, nothing like the charge book of the post-settlement court system to which a researcher could apply in attempting to locate the distribution of dispute in their appropriate social and temporal contexts.

In reconstructing pre-settlement processes of law and order and social control, I have drawn on statements of cases provided by my informants together with observation of examples of disputing behaviour which occurred during my fieldwork and which were said to be like those of the pre-settlement period. These data, based on remembered events and similarities to the past, have been augmented

Sharp's case studies and generalisations which were grounded much more securely in the real events of the time.

5.1.1 Socialisation

People were deemed to be competent in the code, and therefore responsible and accountable for their actions, by early adulthood. The educational process leading to the acquisition of cultural competence in children was largely, to borrow Fortes' (1938) expression, a "by-product" of cultural routine in which parents, kindred, peer group and non-kindred members all had roles to play at various stages in a child's development. Apart from initiation ceremonies for young males, there was little formalised instruction given in any aspects of the code. As Harris (1980) notes, the teaching strategies of traditional Aboriginal education were based on learning by observation and doing in situation-specific and immediately meaningful contexts. Much of Aboriginal camp-life was conducted in public and hence accessible as precedent and model for the behaviour of children. Other parts however, in particular those dealing with aspects of the supernatural world and with childbirth, were hidden and not available for observation by children. Curiosity in those areas was discouraged.

The basic orientating patterns or "schemas" (Fortes 1938) towards the physical, social and supernatural environments were built up and elaborated with due respect for the child's physical and cognitive development and its ability to participate in the routines of everyday behaviour.

Involvement and identification with the kindred, the group of prime importance in an individual's life, began soon after birth. Although the child's mother had the major responsibility for its care and feeding, the mother's attentions were supplemented by the child's older siblings, by its mother's and father's parents, by mother's sisters and co-wives, and in the case of boys by father and his siblings. These relatives played with the child and looked after it during its mother's absences. An infant was never left unattended so that infancy was a period of

intense physical and social contact with a set of significant others. Even so, during this relatively passive dependence, kinship structures governed the interaction between individual kindred members and fashioned the child's responses. Thus fathers were indulgent, spoiling, even doting, with their sons, but restrained and distant with their daughters, being hardly willing to touch them let alone interact with them familiarly.

Toddlers were constantly attended by others. They were discouraged from exploring the physical world and as soon as their speech development and comprehension permitted it, they were warned of the supernatural hazards waiting to ensnare anyone who ventured beyond the known and the safe. The threat of ghosts, mythic beings and potent places effectively hedged the activities of children and focused their attention on the social rather than the physical environment. It also instilled a pattern of fear of, and uneasiness in strange places that would persist throughout life.

Between the ages of 3 and 6, children began to be drilled in the interactional codes of kinship. Girls were taught to comport themselves modestly by the campfire hearth in the presence of their fathers. Children acted as go-betweens carrying gifts and messages between kindred who were ngaanch, as for example between father and his mother-in-law, and so participated in the patterns of reciprocity and gift-exchange within the kindred. As children's social horizons expanded beyond the kindred, they found that non-kindred members also insisted on demeanours appropriate to their kin classification and were careful to maintain them.

The playgroup was an important socialising influence in which the child's individuality was allowed to assert itself in an atmosphere relatively free of adult restraints. Yet even in their peer group Sharp noted children were rehearsing their adult roles. In their games they reproduced the domestic scenes and the motivations of the real world. They played at house and marriage, they stalked imaginary game and prepared make-believe food, and they participated in mock combats and chases (Sharp 1937:22). It was the playgroup that inculcated the hyper-modest

attitude people held towards defecation, and it was also within the playgroup that children attempted the sexual exploration of their bodies and occasionally engaged in mock coitus. By the age of 5, the child was beginning to acquire the attributes appropriate to its sex role. At this age, according to Sharp (1937:102), children were able to differentiate "...between the obscenities proper to masculine swearing and those used only by women".

From the age of 6 onwards, children began to be given instruction and practice in the techniques and skills they would need as adults. Such instruction was sex-specific and was generally imparted by particular kin. Most of my elderly male informants remember their father as the principal teacher of their basic hunting and wood-crafting knowledge. Between father and son, the prescriptions of kinship etiquette imposed no conversational modesty apart from matters of the sacred/secret kind, and virtually any topic could be discussed without embarrassment. Thus, fathers typically taught sons about the physical and supernatural resources of the clan estate, showed them how to perform increase ritual, passed on to them whatever expertise they had acquired in the use of the native pharmacopoea, as well as their own proprietary love magic and sorcery techniques.

The female complement of subsistence skills was imparted to girls by their mothers and mothers' co-wives and the other adult women who from time to time shared the daily round. Typically, girls began to exercise their domestic talents much earlier than boys, and by the time they left their natal hearthgroup they had contributed materially to its welfare by way of helping with child-minding, fetching wood and water, foraging for and preparing food for some family members, and carrying utensils and possessions between campsites.

Instruction took place in other ways. Rites of introduction performed publicly for the benefit and safety of new-comers to particular tracts were also among the first intimations children received of the mythic resources of the countryside. In the large camps of the dry season,

formal story-telling sessions in which older men recited "...their past experiences in successfully combatting human or supernatural powers" were common (Sharp 1937:22). Story-telling was a skilled performance. Of the story-tellers, McConnel (1957:xvii) says:

... it is not easy to do justice to their style in the verbose of a written English, nor to convey the telling pauses, the pregnant silences, the impressive reiteration, and the innuendoes of the speaker's voice, who, as he relates his story, experiences and visualizes the acts and scenes embodied in his short dramatic sentences.

Many of these capsules of experience outlived their tellers and were still standard story-telling fare in post-settlement times. Tamrintil's story of his meeting with Poonchr (see Chapter 9) is one such story. For the children who listened, the stories were not merely entertainment, they were also recent history and served as possible precedents for future action, as well as allowing them to share vicariously in some of the more unusual realms of adult experience.

As I noted earlier, initiation was a major formal learning experience of the older boys. In present day Edward River society, ceremonies such as Withirrma and Dog (described in the previous chapter, see pp. 216-21) were referred to in English as "schools". The term is apt because the ceremonies were the closest approximation to Western formal education in pre-settlement society. The boys were isolated from the everyday world in which their previous learning had taken place and they were required to master detailed bodies of information. This learning task was considered so important by the society of the reserve as a whole that it was seen as the responsibility of the ceremonial-ritual group rather than single land/linguistic units. Considerable time and effort was invested to ensure that the ceremonies achieved their stated purpose of changing boys into men by giving them special ritual and mythological knowledge.

In comparison with the sudden and ceremonial change of status experienced by males, girls made the transition to womanhood and its attendant responsibilities gradually and with little ceremony. A girl became a woman when she was firmly established in her own hearthgroup with a husband. In the early stages of the formation of a marital union a girl often alternated between living with her husband and living with her parents in the "...less arduous role of a young girl economically dependent on her family and quite free to play with the younger children and pursue temporary love affairs" (Sharp 1934a:427). The permanent union was publicly established when the girl's female relatives built a hut for the pair and moved the girl's belongings into it. This occurred as soon as the girl was pregnant or after several years of switching between the role of wife and that of dependent child.

With the social recognition of their status as adults, young people became, as it were, legal entities in their own right. Until this time the responsibility for behaviour and discipline of children was vested primarily in the children's mothers and, to a lesser extent, in their mother's brothers. No other persons had the right to chastise children for behavioural breaches (except perhaps for breaches of the sacred/secret conventions where punishment was normally administered in the community's name by non-kindred members). To be an adult meant having sufficient competence in "murri law" to be able to make decisions independently and to be held personally accountable for the consequences. In adulthood conformity to the code was induced partly by the rewards inherent in pursuing right actions and partly by the consequences invoked when breaches in the code (i.e. wrong actions) became apparent. These sanctions are discussed in the next section.

5.2 Sanctions

Some of the rules of right conduct were self-enforcing or self-regulating in the sense discussed by Nadel (1953). That is to say, conformity to a rule

governing a focal activity carried with it rewards that went far beyond the satisfactions inherent in its immediate enactment. Alternatively, failure to follow the rule was attended by conspicuous ill-success in the business of life.

Thus the rule enjoining people to marry needed no inducements for its observance or penalties to guard against its non-observance. A man who did not marry was condemning himself to sexual continence, or else irregular and/or illegitimate and risky sexual liaisons. He would be dependent for a part of his diet on female relatives who would have priorities to feed others before him, and his hunting rights would be restricted to his own and his parents' tracts. He would have a smaller circle of kindred upon whom he could call for support; he would have no daughters whom he could attempt to bestow with advantage; he would have no sons to whom he could pass on his esoteric knowledge, to take pride in or depend upon for support in fights, and he would have no children to care for him in old age. In other words, the disparity between the consequences of not marrying and the social rewards of marrying was so great that no single person would contemplate permanent single status with equanimity.

Another means of inducing conformity was to reward exemplary moral behaviour. Such rewards were not so much a matter of public commendation, since the praising of individuals to their faces did not accord well with the Edward River notions of egalitarianism and personal worth. Rather, respect was indirectly accorded to adults in their middle years. Sharp (1934a:430, 1934b:39) noted that men and women, both living and dead, who epitomised the society's standards of social conduct and belief were generally admired. The rewards were more tangible than the self-satisfaction that derives from virtuous living. As Sharp pointed out, such "big" men and women not merely served as examples for others to follow, their counsel was also sought. In other words, a good reputation enhanced a person's ability to influence the conduct of public affairs. The exercise of personal influence brought with it its own special satisfactions.

One of the consequences of deviating from socially prescribed behaviour was to invite gossip. In the hands of women it was a powerful stimulus to overt conformity. Sharp (1934a:430) noted the strongly conservative influence women exercised "...with their gossip, power over public opinion and studied ability to shame or excite their men into following conventional lines of behaviour".

Besides gossip two other kinds of negative sanctions could be invoked. These were supernatural retribution and human retaliation. Whereas gossip, as a penalty, affected people's sense of worth through shaming and perhaps their dealings with others, supernatural retribution and human retaliation both entailed physical penalties.

5.2.1 Negative sanctions -- supernatural

Many rules associated with supernatural and social relations were couched in the form of taboos. That is to say, they were prohibitions that incurred supernatural retribution automatically whenever they were breached. The sanctions invoked took the form of some physical affliction that fell upon the transgressor or the transgressor's close kin. Depending on the nature of the offence, afflictions could range from mild sicknesses and minor physical disabilities through to permanent and crippling injury, stillbirths, blindness, madness and even death. In previous papers (Taylor 1977a, 1977b) I have shown that few sicknesses were seen as having what Western bio-medicine would term natural or environmental causes. Thus, while people were aware of the discomforts caused by insects, poisonous plants and animals, by the quality of food, and environmental factors such as winds and glare, most illnesses were ascribed to two sources. These were the breach of taboos by individuals or the malevolent actions of others using sorcery or manipulating noxious increase centres. Most sickness then was not interpreted as a misfortune falling randomly or accidentally upon its victims. If it was not the result of avoidable natural causes, then it was either the sign of a moral dereliction on the part of an

individual, or else it was the result of a person taking private redressive action in retribution for a past wrong.

Sicknesses caused by breaches of taboo were generally non-fatal. In Figure 5.1, I have attempted to lay out the major areas of behaviour affected by supernatural sanctions and the range of punishments inflicted. There was often a kind of correspondence between the affliction and the rule breach which could serve, in cases of sickness or injury, retrospectively to identify the cause. Some of these correspondences can be seen in Figure 5.1, for example, the relationships between the eating of carpet snake and birth problems, in stillbirths and opening turkey mounds, in eating crocodile flesh and skin sores. In the absence of clear indicators to the breach of rule, the native doctor was employed to search out the source of a person's prolonged illness.

As Figure 5.1 suggests, the taboos revolved around respect for the supernatural dimensions of the landscape, the proper observance of ritual, the maintenance of the kindred, mortuary ritual and the observance of the formal behaviours of kinship. Their non-observance threatened central values. Their observance buttressed the social order and maintained existing patterns. Thus the taboos of place supported not merely the ideology concerning the supernaturals. Those taboos of place that denied foods to all except old people also directly supported the authority and powers of the aged and conferred on them a privileged position in access to food resources. The temporary taboos men underwent during ritual activity underscored their special ritual status and drew attention to the powerful forces of the ancestral epoch that were being released via their rites. Mourning taboos not only stressed respect for the dead, but also emphasised the nexus between the deceased, the kindred and clan-totemic affiliations. As I have written elsewhere (Taylor 1977a:431):

That even secret violations could be punished provided a powerful stimulus to conformity. In the same way, the conventions of kinship behaviour were preserved lest hidden

Broad & specific fields of behaviour in which supernatural sanctions are invoked		Examples of consequences of rule breaches	Underlying values protected by sanctions
SUPER-NATURAL	Place	violation of place taboos produce swellings, sores, vomiting, diarrhoea, madness, death depending on potency; walking too close to cremation sites will cause sore feet in women & children	respect the country & its safe and dangerous places
	Ritual & Mythic Beings	neophytes breaking food taboos while in ritual seclusion suffer nausea, lethargy, & vomiting men being introduced to rituals will get sick if they violate food taboos; a child who inadvertently falls into an initiation "hole" will choke to death with a swollen throat; a native doctor who uses his powers too early risks madness;	observe without fault the prescriptions of ritual
KINDRED	Pregnancy	if a pregnant woman: eats carpet snake, the birth will be hard; rifles scrub turkey mounds for eggs, her foetus will be injured; dives for lily bulbs, she may be bitten by the rainbow serpent causing a stillbirth; eats kangaroo, the child will have a deformed hand;	avoid all actions that might endanger the health of family members, born and unborn
	Childhood	a child who eats: large wallaby will be fretful; crocodile will get scaly sores; emu flesh will be extremely ill;	
	Parenthood	a parent who: binds spear barbs near his newborn child will blind it; eats kangaroo will induce fits in his/her child;	
	Menstruation	foods prepared by a menstruating woman will cause other family members to vomit;	
	Mortuary	eating the deceased's totems while under mortuary taboos causes vomiting or sickness;	respect & honour the dead
NON-KINDRED	Incest	people who engage in illicit sex outside the range of permitted partners will get skin sores;	observe the formalities of kinship
	Avoidance	accepting food from a "longway relation" will cause vomiting;	

Figure 5.1 Rule breaches punishable by supernatural sanctions, Edward River.

sins suddenly become manifest in illness. As Cawte (1974) has observed, the native doctor was not so much a healer as an agent of the social order who operated in the context of sickness. His search for the human agencies in an individual's sickness led him to take account of the consequences of that individual's social derelictions. Thus the apprehensions and anxieties surrounding disease and death were converted to serve social ends.

5.2.2 Negative sanctions -- human

Set against the class of rule breach that drew a supernatural retribution, there was another class of wrong actions that required redressive measures to be taken by humans rather than supernaturals. Typically these were situations where an individual perceived her/himself to have been wronged by some other individual.

In pre-settlement Edward River society there was no impartial legal intermediary or independent tribal authority before whom a complaint could be laid in the hope of obtaining remedy, recompense or redress. When a person was wronged, it was that individual's responsibility to identify the wrong action and then to organise redressive measures out of his or her own resources.

There were three possible outcomes when individuals felt that they had been wronged by others. They could:

- (a) signal that a dispute situation existed and seek to have the matter resolved publicly, or
- (b) undertake private redressive measures in secret, or
- (c) do nothing, i.e. elect to suffer the wrong in silence.

Each of these courses of action will receive extended discussion in a later section (see pp. 285-98). It is

appropriate here to consider the degree to which violence and the threat of violence was an integral part of the redressive system.

Both alternatives (a) and (b) above presupposed that the ultimate sanction was some form of physical punishment inflicted either by magical means through sorcery or the manipulation of noxious places or by direct physical force involving weapons. In inflicting physical punishment, women almost invariably used their yamsticks. Men, on the other hand, had besides their hunting weapons a surprisingly large inventory of offensive weapons. These latter included boomerangs, clubs and fighting sticks, shields, many kinds of non-hunting spears, wooden swords and flat wooden laths set with sharks' teeth which were used like knives. The only purpose for these weapons was to employ them in disputing and they were made with the firm expectation that they would be used in physical combat either to inflict punishment on an offender or to defend the maker when, rightly or wrongly, he was accused of some misdeed. Thus, whenever someone sought amends for some wrong, it was done in the knowledge that the outcome could result in a violent physical confrontation in which the results might be just as damaging to the plaintiff as to the defendant irrespective of which mode of redress was selected. And it was a characteristic of both plaintiff and defendant that they were prepared to pursue the matter to the end regardless of the injury received or inflicted, and regardless of the relationship between the disputants. As Sharp (1958:7) noted, even with close kin, between whom the greatest benevolence ought to obtain, there existed a reverse or malevolent aspect which generally involved the use, or the threat, of force whenever delinquent behaviour required checking. The application of force was not the only sanction available, but it was certainly the dominant one.

Sharp (1934b:41) provided a list classifying the modes in which moral indignation could be vented and punishment inflicted when wrong action occurred in pre-settlement Edward River society. The list, slightly modified, is

presented as follows:

- (a) the conventionalised complaint of a woman;
- (b) the camp "growl", a denunciation or argument which often served as a warning to a wrong-doer not to repeat her/his ways;
- (c) a duel with digging sticks or clubs, generally occurring in domestic settings;
- (d) an open duel with knives, clubs, boomerangs or spears between men, or between one man and a series of men, the most common means of inflicting punishment;
- (e) a secret ambush or "sneaking" by an individual involving malevolent magic;
- (f) a ceremonial settlement in which an accused gives himself up and is speared through the thigh by his accusers, if they are willing to terminate the affair;
- (g) a raid by an avenging party composed of specific kin of the injured;
- (h) a pitched battle, usually unpremeditated;
- (i) ostracism of an individual from one or more camps by clan headmen;
- (j) a woman found by ritual leaders to have violated the secrecy of totemic ceremonies was punished by beating and some men were then given the opportunity to copulate with her.

Apart from (a), (b) and (i), physical punishment is the

characteristic feature in each mode. Sharp (1940:491) noted that pitched battles, raids, ambushes and duels occurred frequently during the two years he spent among the Yir Yoront and Thaayore peoples. As a result, three people died, including a woman who was speared by mistake during an open fight in a camp. These deaths represented 21.4% of all deaths (14) among the bush-dwelling Yir Yoront and Thaayorre people between June 1933 and June 1935. There is no suggestion that this level of homicide was unusual. Doubtless, Edward River people had such a high level of violence in mind when they chose to call the pre-settlement era the "wild-time".

5.3 Disputes and their causes

In order to understand what brought such modes of disputing into play, it is necessary to consider the causes for disputes and their social contexts. From my own and Sharp's data, I have singled out the following breaches of right conduct that seemed most commonly to call for redressive action. These were:

1. omission of kinship duties,
2. mistreatment,
3. infidelity,
4. breaches of bestowal expectations and arrangements,
5. insult,
6. threatening or causing injury,
7. trespass,
8. failure to consult or to acknowledge rightful decision-making authority,

9. homicide, and

10. breaches of ceremonial/ritual codes.

I shall discuss each in the following subsections.

5.3.1 Omission of kinship duties

Disputes arising from the evasion of kinship duties occurred primarily within the kindred. They revolved around such things as the distribution of food and gifts. Sharp (1943a:424) tells us that they were a frequent source of camp "growls". Elsewhere (1937:31) he noted that recriminations about the distribution of gifts often led to complaints of other signs of disrespect, and seldom did a night pass in a camp without taunts and sometimes boomerangs and clubs being hurled back and forth between groups. People who were not concerned in such affairs never complained of the disturbances.

While conventional complaints and camp "growls" provided a sufficient means of ventilation and redress for those who saw themselves wronged, things could get out of hand, even between kindred members linked by the strongest ties of self-interest and sentiment. The following two examples recorded by Sharp illustrate that, even in relatively small matters, the application of physical violence could be resorted to.

Case No. 2

Lar Polp speared a large stingray and brought the valued liver back to camp. As this was big game he was expected to give a large portion of it to his old father. However, he delayed some time in making the gift, and the father grew impatient, finally asking for the fish and chiding his son for with-holding the gift.

At this Lar Polp, who said he had plenty of fish and intended to give his father some eventually, lost his temper and proceeded to cudgel his father, who secured his fighting

clubs and gave blow for blow during the ensuing duel.
(Sharp 1937:109)

Case No. 3

Pam Lunan asked his old father Min Kererl, who was setting out on a visit to the south, to deliver some vegetable food to a common kinsman. An argument followed, in which Pam Lunan speared his father in the hand.
(Sharp 1937:109)

5.3.2 Mistreatment

Cases of mistreatment are not common in my data or Sharp's. The instances I have recorded suggest that mistreatment occurred mainly in the domestic context and revolved around undue or unfair physical violence. Wives were invariably the recipients, either being punished too severely by their husbands for relatively minor delinquencies or else being punished for something beyond their control. Thus a man might abuse and thrash his wife if his male kin had failed to support him in a dispute.

Unless she returned to her parents, a mistreated wife seems to have had few options for redress, except in cases of polygynous unions where Sharp (1934a:429) observed:

The solidarity between wives of a polygynous family gives them considerable influence over the husband. In cases of extreme mistreatment of one of them by a husband, they may institute a *Lysistrata* régime, an economic and sexual boycott in which they may enlist other sisters in the community.

5.3.3 Infidelity

Infidelity is here defined as a sexual liaison of one spouse with another person without the consent of the other spouse. Wife lending falls outside this definition. Conventional attitudes towards extra-marital

adventuring displayed some inconsistency. On the one hand, women were exhorted, especially by their brothers and mothers' brothers to be faithful to their husbands and neither to query nor to be jealous of their husbands' absences from domestic hearths. On the other hand, sweethearts and extra-marital liaisons were celebrated in myth, ceremonies and increase rites. Men laid claim to extensive repertoires of love spells and other aids that were supposed to make them irresistible to the women they desired to seduce. A woman subjected to the power of a love charm was compelled to seek out and find the man who had employed it. Conventionally it was always the female who initiated the actual overtures in love affairs.

Arguments involving jealousy were common among newly married couples during which an angry spouse might destroy a partner's property. Most of these arguments, it appears, were generated from suspicions concerning pre-marital sexual partners. In marriages of some years, reactions to the evidence of infidelity varied. Many short-term infatuations seem to have been excused in women because it was thought that love magic had affected their better judgement. Equally, a certain amount of extra-marital philandering was expected of males. However, long-running involvements threatened stable relationships and attempts to control such situations could take several forms. Sharp (1934a:419) notes that an old man, for instance, might turn a blind eye to his young wife's affair with another man if he could hope thereby to avoid losing her economic and child-rearing services. A wife could bring her husband's clandestine affair out into the open by challenging her rival publicly and thus bringing it to the attention of her rival's husband and the other male kin for their disciplinary intervention. A husband, on the other hand, might turn his attention to his wife's lover as the following cases illustrate.

Case No. 4

J. C. had many times lured J. H.'s youngest wife away and J. H. had become very angry about their

trysts. Not long after the mission was established at Edward River, J. H. and his wives were camping near the home-
stead on Strathgordon station when J. C. arrived unexpectedly
from the mission carrying geese eggs for the station manager.
J. C. announced that he was going out into the scrubs to
cut ironwood for a woomera for himself. J. H. was suspicious
and decided to follow him. Instead of looking for ironwood,
J. H. found that J. C. was following the tracks of J. H.'s
wives who had earlier gone out foraging. J. H. sang out to
him, "So that's what you're looking for -- women's tracks!"
As J. C. tried to run away, J. H. speared him in the upper
back. J. C. subsequently died and J. H. fled to his own
country on the Holroyd River. He was ultimately arrested
for the killing and sent to Palm Island to serve a sentence
after his conviction in a European court.
(Taylor field notes)

Case No. 5

Min Mon Mun had a long and ardent love affair with a distant
wife, who was married to Min Tolor. Min Tolor finally
became aware of this, but was afraid to spear Min Mon Mun
who has the reputation as a powerful worker of malevolent
magic. So Min Tolor ambushed Min Mon Mun's father, Min Yaur,
spearing him to death, the father serving as the substitute
for the son...
(Sharp 1937:108)

A woman who was flagrantly unfaithful to her husband
was usually sent back to her parents (i.e. divorced), but
not before she had been beaten or speared by her husband
prior to being returned. Sometimes lovers fractured an
existing marriage by eloping. When such cases occurred,
I was told by my informant that the aggrieved husband,
together with his erstwhile wife's male kin pursued and
waylaid the fleeing pair. The husband then speared
his former wife and renounced any further claims on her.

5.3.4 Breaches of bestowal expectations and arrangements

Disputes over marriage arrangements occurred in two ways. Firstly, betrothal-makers might fall out over the direction of a bestowal. Such disputes chiefly arose between brothers and sisters. Thus, a woman who expected her son to marry according to the ideal bestowal rule, her brother's daughter, might feel aggrieved if her brother acquiesced in a decision to bestow the girl elsewhere. When these disputes occurred they generally took the form of a public venting of displeasure in a camp "growl". The second kind of dispute was potentially much more serious. These came about when young people decided to defy the betrothal-makers and seek partners disapproved of by the betrothal-makers. It mattered little whether the young couples were previously betrothed or not. It was the authority of the betrothal-makers that was being challenged and disputes arising from this cause were decidedly difficult things to resolve because the interests and plans of so many people were threatened. Typically, their resolution involved a series of disputes that tended to entangle more and more people, until finally a formal duel was arranged to clear the air.

There was no set pattern to the course of such disputes since so much depended on situational contingencies and the personalities of the main actors involved. Perhaps the least complicated kind of dispute arose when an unbetrothed girl wanted to marry an unbetrothed young man. In this case, the young people had only the disapproval of their respective betrothal-makers to overcome. The presence of marriage promises complicated the situation and had the potential to involve many more people. The most common form of betrothal breaking, according to my informants, occurred when a young man who had no promised wife gained the love of a girl who was promised to someone else. The first round of disputes usually began as camp "growls" in which the betrothal-makers tried to persuade the defiant pair to give up their suit and fall in with the plans that had already been made. If the young couple persisted in

their relationship, then others were drawn in. The girl's promised husband might directly challenge the new suitor in an attempt to warn him off. Such a tactic might rapidly escalate into a duel. Alternatively, the promised husband could demand that the parents of his betrothed wife honour the betrothal arrangements under which he had been supplying his future parents-in-law with gifts (see p. 145). The betrothed husband would be supported in his demands by his own betrothal-makers.

Running away from the indignation and frustration they caused was no solution for the rebellious couple, since they were likely to be pursued by an avenging force of mother's brothers and mother's brothers' sons. When they were caught, the young man was usually speared in the thigh and the girl thrashed and returned to her parents. If the young couple still persevered in their relationship in spite of the admonishments and disputes, then people began to regard the old situation as hopeless and urge a resolution to the affair and a recognition of the new relationship. This was achieved by arranging a duel in which the girl's lover had to stand and face having spears thrown at him by the most aggrieved principals who were usually the girl's father or her brothers. They then dropped their complaints against the young man and paved the way for legitimising the new relationship.

The following example of the course of a marriage dispute illustrates many of the generalities I have been discussing. The events occurred not long after the mission had been established on the reserve.

Case No. 6

T. B. of the Diver clan, Christmas Creek, and P. H. of the Holroyd Shark clan, fell in love. Both were in their late teens and neither was betrothed. P. H. entreated her parents to let them live together. "You can't keep me single," she argued. P. H.'s father would not agree to the match. On the other hand, T. B.'s betrothal-makers were agreeable. The matter came to a head when a large group of people had

gathered on the flat country north of Munkan Creek to burn grass and spear wallabies. P. H.'s father had thrown a spear at T. B. but missed. T. B. sent off a spear in return and hit P. H.'s father in the leg and broke a bone in it. The old man crawled away and T. B. and P. H. fled together to relatives who were working on Ebagoola station on the headwaters of the Holroyd River. Allowing an interval for things to settle down, the pair headed back to the reserve carrying gifts of tobacco and other articles for their kin. They stopped on the way at Strathgordon station where many Wik Mungkan, Wik Nganchera and Yir Yoront people were camped. There they learnt that P. H.'s father had died. They cried for the dead man at Strathgordon and then returned to the mission. At the mission, P. H.'s brother D. H., challenged T. B. to a duel. When D. H. judged he had thrown enough spears at T. B., he agreed for the two of them to marry.

Unfortunately, the death of P. H.'s father brought intervention in the shape of the European police from Coen and Normanton, and their black trackers. Apparently, the white authorities at that time were determined to put down what they regarded as indiscriminate spearings. T. B. had always maintained that P. H.'s father had not died from the spear wound but from sorcery performed by Brolga clansmen who had waylaid the old man when he was alone one day cutting sugarbag. Apparently P. H.'s kin, too, accepted this explanation but the police did not. T. B. fled with a brother to their clan estate where they were arrested, neck-chained and walked to Coen. After a trial in Cairns, T. B. was sent to Palm Island. P. H. later joined him there, and two of their children were born there, before they returned to Edward River.

(Taylor field notes)

5.3.5. Insult

There were two main forms of insult. The first kind involved the use of the personal name of a recently deceased person within the hearing of the mourning relatives. Such an action was treated as an insult to the memory of the

deceased and a source of grief to the kindred. When it occurred, my informants stated that it would precipitate an immediate fight. In fact, I never came across a single instance, in either pre-settlement times or later, when an Aboriginal person breached the convention concerning the use of the names of the recently dead. On the other hand, I have recorded many instances where Europeans breached this rule and unwittingly caused outraged feelings and anguish.

The second kind of insult involved swearing with intent to provoke. As I shall show in more detail later in this chapter, swearing at and taunting opponents in the course of a dispute was the prelude to physical violence. Hearing verbal abuse directed towards a close kinsman, especially a sister, a mother, or a mother's brother, was likely to make a man both shamed and angry. A man might, therefore, join in an ongoing dispute because of the insult offered by the swearing. When quarrels were about to erupt into violence, the level of swearing was often a major factor in the mobilisation of support for the disputants.

5.3.6 Threatening or causing injury

When disputes reached the point of violent confrontation, those who were neutral and unconcerned in the dispute, ran a real risk of being injured, albeit inadvertently. Injuries received in this way could themselves become matters for dispute and require redress. Equally, near misses could also be interpreted as not simply carelessness but as provocation. My informants often recounted instances where errant spears hit the wrong target. Possibly the most notorious event of this kind took place in the mid-thirties when a pair of disgruntled brothers belonging to the Thaayorre Brolga clan threw some spears, at random and at night, among hearthgroups camped at Chillago Pocket. An enormous mêlée resulted. Sharp witnessed the fight, and my informants believe to this day that it was because of that fight that Sharp decided to leave the area. What follows is Sharp's description:

Case No. 7

Mat Pater and Min Tamil Tolp thought their distant father, Kauan Tilp Ladlin, had some tobacco, and were angry when he refused to give them any. Although it was night time they threw spears in the general direction of his camp, missing it widely but coming close to others who threw spears back in return, thus precipitating a general fight which was continued most of the next day, in which some twenty principals were involved, while fifteen or twenty other men were actively interested, and in which five men were wounded.
(Sharp 1937:109)

5.3.7 Trespass

Trespass occurred in two ways. It could mean venturing into country to which access had been denied, as happened, for example, when mortuary taboos were imposed on certain tracts following a death. In a second sense, trespass meant an unreasonable use and intrusion upon the resources of a tract from the point of view of the tract's stewards. Sharp (1937:255) discovered that what constituted "unreasonable" use was very clearly defined. Thus, it was unreasonable:

- (a) to burn grass on a tract without the stewards' permission, because grass burning was a major exploitative technique that could only be performed once a year;
- (b) to gather the rare resources of a tract such as pandanus fruit, gooseberries, honey and material resources (a restriction which held even when the non-steward had obtained consent to gather other foodstuffs on the tract);
- (c) to gather fish at fish traps without the permission of the stewards; and

- (d) to camp in and use tracts simply because no-one else was using them.

In fact, only the hot pursuit of wounded game over-rode the need to seek approval to enter another's tract in order to obtain foodstuffs and materials. Certainly shortage of resources on one's own tract did not justify using the resources of another's tract without permission.

Sharp (1937:257-8) provides many examples of the way in which non-stewards acknowledged the proprietary rights of stewards. Entry into a tract where the owner was camping was marked by a fire ceremony. A non-steward would refrain from even gathering firewood or drawing water until the owner had sent a firebrand from his own hearth to light the new-comers' fire. Non-stewards were punctilious in ascertaining where they could hunt and forage. If stewards complained of resource depletion, then others would immediately move out of the tract even if the reason given was spurious. It sometimes happened that for reasons to do mostly with dispute situations, or suspicion of sorcery, stewards might declare some people persona-non-grata. The continued use of a tract depended on the maintenance of solidarity with the owner. Even fellow clan members and close family were not absolved from due deference to stewards' rights of control. Sharp (1937:257-8) cites instances where a father would not burn grass on his son's tracts until he had obtained express permission from him. In another case, a man camping on his absent son-in-law's tracts was careful to consume only the poorest quality yams while sending the best of them to his son-in-law. The son-in-law, being mindful of his duties towards his father-in-law, returned the yams.

It was relatively easy for a landowner to detect trespass and raids on his resources by an examination of footprints and from deductions concerning her/his neighbours' movements. When trespass was determined, three kinds of sanctions could be employed:

- (a) the offender could be totally excluded from the use of the steward's tracts

(this had the effect of rupturing the relationship between the steward and the offender and usually caused the complaining steward to be declared persona-non-grata on the offender's tracts);

(b) the steward could seek public redress by challenging the trespasser to a duel; or

(c) the steward could seek private redress by employing magical means to harm the offender.

5.3.8 Failure to consult or to acknowledge rightful decision-making authority

In pre-settlement life there were a number of situations in which action towards some particular goal could not take place until there had been consultation among all the relevant decision-makers and a general consensus reached. Betrothals, for example, required the consents of all betrothal-makers before there could be public recognition of the proposed match. Mourning and ceremonial ritual needed the agreement of a good number of people as to the where, the when and the personnel who would take part before they could be held. While the ideal was to achieve consensus among all the relevant decision-makers, it seems to have happened more than occasionally that some people's advice and consents were neglected or not taken into account. Absence from the scene or perhaps imputed infirmity, incompetence or immaturity, might be reasons why a particular person was not consulted or a particular contrary view not recognised. Since people were as jealous of their decision-making rights in those areas as they were in their capacities as stewards, anyone whose views were ignored or not sought felt aggrieved. In situations of that sort, the aggrieved person was more or less at odds with the whole community when something went ahead without her/his permission. There was no satisfactory way of obtaining redress publicly. The only way a person could retaliate was to seek redress by increasing

a noxious totem in the person's estate. Unseasonable plagues of insects and epidemics were usually attributed to people venting their frustration in that way.

5.3.9 Homicide

In the Edward River view certain classes of homicide required redress. They were deaths that came about in trials-at-arms, deaths due to ambushes or raids, and deaths said to be due to sorcery. Infanticide was one form of homicide that did not call for redress. Infanticide certainly occurred. For example, it was usual to kill one or both of a set of twins at birth and to kill babies that were deformed. Public rumour also attributed infanticide to parents for other reasons, although Sharp (1940:492) found it difficult to disentangle the actual incidence of infanticide from slander and malicious gossip. He was reasonably certain from his genealogical data that infanticide was practised at least six times. All six instances were cases of female infanticide.

During a public trial-at-arms it occasionally happened that if things were not well controlled one of the disputants, or even a non-disputant, might be killed outright or mortally wounded. When this occurred one of several things could happen. The disputant responsible for causing the injury or death might offer his thigh to the spears of his opponents as immediate recompense. The supporters of the dead or dying person might flee with the body and, perhaps, decide on later retribution in the form of a duel, or an ambush, or even sorcery (but see pp. 292-3). If the disputants were closely related, a mortal injury would cause the combat to cease forthwith while all those involved wailed for the dead or injured person. In such cases, the cause of the death could be attributed to sorcery, rather than accident or real intent to kill on the part of the disputants.

The following example is a description of a fight that took place somewhere between 1925 and 1930. Many of the details are tantalisingly missing, but it nevertheless

provides a clear illustration of what could happen when people were mortally wounded or killed during disputes.

Case No. 8

The fight took place at Murrka in the Dog/Goanna clan estate some time near the end of the hot season (probably during October-November). Two Thaayorre-speaking women had stayed behind in the camp to pound and process the tubers of a swamp reed called may rulin while the rest of the camp went out hunting and foraging. A Dog/Goanna clansman stayed behind because one of the women was his sweetheart. This man was P. M.'s oldest brother.

When the people arrived back at the camp, an argument started up about the two lovers. In this argument, P. M. supported his brother. When the accused lover threw a boomerang, J. N., a Watersnake clansman, threw a spear at him in return. J. N. was supported by R., his sister's son. R. threw a three-pronged duelling spear that hit P. M.'s brother in the throat and then broke off. Everyone in the camp rushed in to separate the combatants, but J. N. managed to put a stingaree barb spear into the injured man's arm and also wounded P. M. in the temple with a wallaby spear. A number of Yir Yoront men rallied to the aid of the two Dog/Goanna men.

R., meantime, ran away to Ngatrr and returned with L., his "brother-in-law" (Jewfish clan) and C., a young Wallaby/Lightning man, to help support him in the fight. To stop the fight from getting out of hand and to appease the supporters of P. M. and his brother, R. offered his thigh to the opposing side and it was speared many times. R. was then carried away from Murrka by his allies, mostly Thaayorre speakers, who headed for Boko in the Darter clan estate some 5 km. to the north.

However, the Yir Yoront group were still not satisfied with the amount of punishment they had meted out. They pursued the Thaayorre clansmen, and P. M. speared R. in the lower

part of the back as he lay on the ground. The Yir Yoront group then ran away. They were hotly pursued in turn and a Watersnake clansman speared P. M. in the back as compensation for the spearing of R.. The Yir Yoront group went to Mer Yuuko (Chillago Lagoon) while the Thaayorre group, carrying the badly wounded R., went to the northern outskirts of Duck/Spear country and camped at Kunkurru for two nights. Still fearing pursuit, the group went to Ngachin, a tract in the Groper/ Barramundi estate, and camped among Wik Nganchera speakers. While they were camped at Ngachin, a Spear/Yuuchup man brought the news that, although P. M. had survived his wound, his older brother had died from the wound in his neck. The camp wailed and mourned for the dead man. (It was my informant's opinion that it was really sorcery that had made the spear fly into the dead man's neck.)

The Thaayorre group remained in Groper/Barramundi country until the rains began. Just at this time, one of the group's men, a member of the Watersnake clan, fell seriously ill. He died at Manrupa. Just as this occurred, they were visited once more by the same Spear/Yuuchup man who had brought them the news of P. M.'s older brother's death. The visitor mourned for the dead Watersnake man and took back south the news of the man's death. The body of the dead man was taken to Palungkan, near the Chapman River, and was there slung between the forked sticks in readiness for the mortuary treatments and procedures. While the mourners were lying about the body exhausted by their grief displays, they were surprised by a party of Yir Yoront men now seeking satisfaction for the death of P. M.'s brother. Some of them began throwing spears. R. was hurried off into the scrub out of harm's way by a fellow clansman while some of the Thaayorre men threw spears in return. The interchange of spears was in the nature of a duel, for not all of the Yir Yoront men were throwing spears. Some of them were said to be friendly and were acting as "blockers". Some of the Thaayorre group acted in the same mediating fashion. Finally, one of R.'s fellow clansmen,

W. D., was speared, and while his wife dragged him away from the scene of the battle, the Yir Yoront men, satisfied at last, went home.

(Taylor field notes)

Whereas deaths in public trials-at-arms were an unintended by-product of a public disputing process, spearings by ambush had revenge as their motive. Ambushings were generally carried out in retaliation for deaths said to have been caused by the victims or their close kin. Jealousy, either in a husband or a woman's lover, was also said to inspire ambushes. My informants commonly cited three standard patterns for ambushing. One method simply involved spearing the victim when s/he was out hunting or foraging alone. Another involved spearing the victim at the conclusion of a ceremony suddenly and without warning. This kind of ambush tended to precipitate a general melée, and it was said that funeral ceremonies and large-scale ceremonial ritual often broke up in great fights sparked off by a premeditated ambush. The final method involved a small party of men locating their victim's wet season camp site and then waylaying him and his family as they emerged from their humpy.

The appropriate redress for an ambush was an attack in like kind upon the victim's killers, and hence ambushes tended to set in motion feuds that continued over successive generations. Such feuds took place between clans at some distance from each other. Typically, Thaayorre people said they feuded with people from the Holroyd region and they were supported in their feuds by Christmas Creek Wik Nganchera clansmen.

Many deaths were interpreted as the end-product of sorcery. Young and middle-aged adults were said to be the chief victims. The deaths of the very elderly were attributed to their frailty and the wearing out of their bodies. Children's deaths were usually seen as stemming from their intrinsic vulnerability and/or their parents' failure to observe with due care the taboos surrounding childrearing. Only rarely were the deaths of children imputed to sorcery,

and then usually it was said that the sorcerers had missed their real victims. In general, however, most deaths of adults, especially those that followed illnesses, and some involving snakebite and seizure by crocodile, were held to stem from the actions of sorcerers.

My informants imputed a range of motivations for the practice of sorcery: sorcerers killed out of jealousy; they killed in retaliation for deaths among their own kindred; they killed in their quest for parts of the human body that would increase their powers; and they killed, sometimes, out of mere spite or simply to enhance their reputations. Sorcerers were primarily males although several of my informants claimed that women, acting out of jealousy, had practised "rag sorcery". "Rag sorcery" was a technique introduced to the bush-dwelling natives of the reserve by Aborigines on missions. Sharp (1934b:34-5) noted that experimentation with new sorcery methods was taking place among the older men when he was in the field. However, the more traditional techniques that I have described elsewhere (pp. 241-3) were typically performed by men.

There was a variety of ways by which redress could be obtained for the death of a kinsman said to have been caused by sorcery. Redress could be carried out in public or in secret, and it could be done through direct physical confrontation or by indirect supernatural means. The choice of method appears to have depended on whether the sorcerer was divined (see pp.296-7) as coming from a clan close to the deceased's home or from a distant one. For although my informants generally asserted that sorcerers in the "wildtime" chose victims living at some distance away from them, nonetheless, an examination of case material shows that the sorcerer was sometimes identified as a person in fairly regular association with the deceased. When the sorcerer was said to be a local man, redress was aimed at extracting a penalty that stopped short of death and in a way that permitted the affair to be settled without too much social disruption. On the other hand, when the

sorcerer was held to be someone from far away, revenge concentrated on killing him.

There were two ways of obtaining the death of a sorcerer by supernatural means. One way was to employ the techniques of conventional sorcery. Most of my informants asserted that this was the most common form of redress used by "other people" (i.e. people other than their own kindred). The conduct of counter sorcery was, of course, a secret affair. The second way of magically attacking a sorcerer was also conducted secretly. The attack was carried out in the course of the divination vigil by those who were keeping watch over the entrails of the deceased. If the spirit of the sorcerer appeared and came close enough to the watchers, they attempted to spear it. If they managed to do this, they then told the mourning kindred what they had done and would counsel the mourners to "stop quiet", but for the sake of appearances to make some conventional, but non-specific, threats of revenge. Meanwhile, the mourning kin would wait until, as one Thaayorre informant expressed it, they received news that someone from, say the Holroyd area, was very sick. They would then know that that person was the sorcerer whose image had been speared, and the bereaved family would be pleased and would wait expectantly for the man's death.

A more direct way of securing the death of a sorcerer was to ambush him in any of the ways outlined earlier (p. 280). The method required a good deal of dissembling and duplicity, as the avengers disguised their true intentions while waiting for a suitable opportunity for spearing their victim. The avengers were often formally commissioned to carry out a killing. Sharp (1937:114) describes how a father and his classificatory brothers would have ceremonially contracted with an avenger. The father

...makes a special ornament from the firestick of his dead son, a portion of which, about a foot long is enclosed in wax which is studded with red berries. This is known as the yor pu. It is wrapped in a large bundle of spears. All the interested fathers of the dead

hold the bundle of spears horizontally on their out-stretched arms, letting the spears slide gradually from the upper arm towards the hand, where they are received by the avenger.

When the avenger had carried out his commission, usually within two or three years, he reported back in a formal fashion to the deceased's kin.

If the sorcerer was divined as being someone close to home, then there were two ways of settling the matter without resorting to killing. One way was to accuse the suspected sorcerer in public and precipitate a duel. All my case materials suggest that public accusations of this sort were vigorously denied. Nonetheless, whatever views people held about the accused's complicity in procuring a magical death, the duel put an end to the blaming and relationships seem to have been repaired after a decent cooling-off period.

The second way of securing redress for the death of a kinsman suspected of being caused by a local sorcerer was to arrange what I can only describe as a secret duel. This is the way an informant explained it to me.

Suppose someone suspects me of having killed someone with sorcery. A man might come after me, say, when I am on my own fishing. He might throw a spear at me. I confront the man and ask him, "Why did you throw that spear?" He might reply, "You and I have to fight because of my uncle's death." I might say, "We can't fight. I never laid a hand on your uncle. I had nothing to do with his death. I'm just an old man. You don't want to catch me just for nothing." He might answer back, "That may be so, but we'll fight anyway." Then I say, "Alright, we'll fight, but not seriously. We can't kill each other. Afterwards, we'll go and make friends."

As it was described to me, such duels had supernatural overtones. If a man inflicted a wound on the other in one of these duels, he automatically became sick himself. It was

said if one man killed the other, the killer himself would also die irrespective of whether he was the accuser or the accused.

5.3.10 Breaches of ceremonial/ritual codes

Men were unlikely to breach any of the ceremonial/ritual codes. They had too much invested in the male monopoly over cult life. For them ceremonies had been ordained from ancestral times as men's business. A ceremony was a highly charged emotional event. For the sake of its successful completion and the welfare of the community as a whole, men submerged the loyalties they owed to locality and kin and temporarily put aside grievances and animosities in order to foster a spirit of harmony and cooperation. Ritual taboos and their attendant supernatural sanctions highlighted their special status and helped guarantee adherence to prescribed ritual formulae.

Women on the other hand were forbidden all but the most peripheral access to the secret male cult life. It appears that occasionally women succumbed to the temptation to spy on the prohibited male preserve and attempted to witness what went on. Although my informants could give me no cases where it had happened to their knowledge, they stated that penalties would have been harsh for women who violated the secrecy conventions of the ceremonies. Penalties would have been imposed with community consensus and without regard for the offender's status or affiliations. As the following example from Sharp (1934a:429) shows, it did little good for a woman's kindred to remonstrate.

When a married woman is judged by older men to be guilty of infringing rules connected with totemic ceremonials, in punishment for which some of the adult men are allowed to copulate with her, her husband and other relatives stoutly defend her innocence, even though they incur stern public disapprobation for doing so.

It is worth commenting that breaches of ceremonial/ritual codes appear to be the only area in which something akin to a judicial council could be seen to be acting on the community's behalf.

5.4 The dynamics of redressive action

Despite the fact that everyone subscribed to a common moral code, this did not imply that persons who witnessed breaches of the code felt obliged to intervene in a disinterested fashion in order to uphold it. On the contrary, the onus lay directly and only upon those who were the objects of a wrong action to identify it and then, if necessary, seek to organise redressive measures. As I have pointed out above, it was only in breaches of the ceremonial/ritual code that the community as a whole acted in a concerted fashion to impose an appropriate penalty.

As I noted earlier (p. 262) when a person perceived himself or herself to have been wronged by another, the person could choose one of three courses:

- (a) signal that a dispute situation existed and seek public redress, or
- (b) undertake private redressive measures in secret, or
- (c) do nothing and forgo redress.

Each course had its own particular set of dynamics and consequences. I shall discuss them separately in the following subsections.

5.4.1 Public redress

The object of seeking redress in public was not merely to obtain satisfaction for a wrong inflicted but also to resolve the matter with some degree of finality. Public disputes most commonly eventuated in the omission of kinship

duties, in breaches of bestowal expectations and arrangements, in instances of insult and real or threatened injury, and occasionally in cases of infidelity, trespass and homicide. Whatever the nature of the breach and its social context, the public disputing process had a generalised format that, for descriptive purposes, I have divided into a sequence of six stages. Each dispute situation, once declared, had the potential to run the whole course with each stage following in turn. I have labelled the stages (1) declaration, (2) rejoinder, (3) argument, (4) insult and physical combat, (5) separation and (6) reconciliation. I should stress, however, that all disputes did not inevitably follow the whole sequence. In the following discussion, I shall point out the factors conditioning the progress of a dispute from one stage to another.

A dispute was set in motion when an individual, in the hearing of the whole camp, publicly announced that s/he had been wronged by some other person, or persons, present. Such a declaration served notice on all present, as well as the presumed transgressor, that there existed a breach in the customary network of understandings and made plain the nature of the breach.

The dispute might go no further if the accused accepted the charge and made compensation promptly, as might occur in the case of certain omitted kinship duties. This dispute might also go no further in the public arena if no-one answered the charge. This might happen when the plaintiff was not certain who should be blamed or otherwise was unwilling to accuse another directly. By far the most common sequel to a public accusation was for the accused to deny the charge and/or make counter charges in return. This rejoinder, or reply, signalled to others that the accusation was about to be disputed.

The rejoinder was followed by a phase of argument in which the disputants set forth their own perceptions of the facts of the matter. At this stage of the proceedings, both disputants would normally have weapons in their hands, not necessarily to use at that time, but rather as a sign of their determination to press the matter to the end, if

need be. Informants refer to this stage in a picturesque but quite appropriate manner as "fighting with tongues". Both disputants would stride up and down gesticulating, arguing loudly and waving their weapons in a threatening manner. While this was happening, the camp would sift itself out into three groups from which would be drawn the other principal actors in the dispute. There would be those who felt they had to support either the aggrieved or the accused. Such people would physically align themselves with either disputant and show their support materially by contributing to the argument in a minor way. The second group was made up of those who felt that the dispute had nothing to do with them, and they usually sat quietly in their places determined neither to interfere nor be interfered with. The third group was composed largely of those who, although they had an interest in the dispute also had conflicting obligations to both aggrieved and accused and therefore could not, with propriety, side with either. Added to this third group might be an influential elder or two who, during the early stages of the argument, would attempt to urge conciliation or separation in the name of camp harmony. The chief purpose of the third group was not so much to stop the dispute but rather to permit it to be played out and to allow outraged feelings to be expressed. At the same time, they attempted to limit the scope of any conflict that might eventuate by dissuading, either verbally or physically, their own close kin from supporting either of the disputants.

Closeness of relationship together with the nature of the wrong action provided the major axes for determining who would belong in which of the three groups. As Sharp (1937:108) noted though, predicting the distribution of allegiances in any particular dispute was not an easy matter and the patterns that resulted were often "...the result of complex psychological processes" that would momentarily cut across the obligations for help and support prescribed by the kinship norms.

When the argument of the accused failed to satisfy the aggrieved, and when the efforts and counsel of those

in the third group had failed to moderate between the disputants or to separate them (as often happened), then the scene was set to move into the fourth stage of insult and physical combat.

Physical conflict was nearly always preceded by a period during which each disputant and their supporters by means of studied insult and intense swearing sought to goad and taunt the other side into making the first move or rush. The insults that flew between individuals or groups were generally scurrilous and very personal. They were accompanied by hoots, jeers and violent displays of spear clashing or pounding of fighting sticks upon shields and earth by the men. Women too would contribute by singing insult songs and with exhibitions designed to shame their opponents. Typically, the exhibitions consisted of a kind of dance in which they slapped their sides with their elbows and drummed their feet on the ground, often concluding with the women turning their backs to their adversaries, bending over forwards and exposing their posteriors. As provocation followed provocation, so the level of outrage and pandemonium increased.

If the dispute lay outside the domestic context of close kin then when this point was reached, the situation was volatile and unpredictable. Those who were formerly uninvolved began to prepare themselves for more active participation. Since swearing at a close relation was itself a wrong action, so the exchange of insults also helped to crystallise further support for the disputants. Intolerable insult could also help resolve for those with divided loyalties to whom they should lend support. During this stage the propensity for a dispute to enlarge its scope was markedly increased.

By the time the dispute had reached this stage, the disputants and their supporters had surrendered themselves to their rage and seemed intent on killing, or at least inflicting some major injury, upon their opponents. It was the responsibility of others to control the expression of aggression and violence. In the Aboriginal English of Edward River, these "others" are termed "blockers", a term

which adequately reflects their regulatory role. In a dispute between close kin, enough blockers could usually be found among kindred members. In a large camp setting, where a dispute was between people who were not closely related, the blockers would be drawn from intermediate kin whose loyalties were still divided and from others in the camp as well, since even the uninvolved had a vested interest in preventing things from getting out of hand and turning into an undisciplined melee.

The blockers tried at first to prevent any violence at all. They would snatch boomerangs before they could be hurled and seize and break the spears of those about to throw them. They would physically hold back those disputants or supporters who, goaded beyond endurance, attempted to rush against their opponents. When the blockers went into action the tumult and activity had reached its peak intensity. There could be many struggles and scuffles between blockers and disputants before the main protagonists finally broke away from those trying to restrain them and ultimately came to exchange blows or spears with their adversaries. My data suggest that blocking rarely prevented combat. The blockers themselves, in trying to preserve an active neutrality had to endure recriminations and appeals for support as well as receive without resentment, blows meant for others. Once spears began to fly or combatants began to fight with stick and shield, the blockers were more concerned to prevent foul play, to protect the wounded and to try to confine the injuries to the main disputants. It was a triumph for the blockers when a dispute resolved itself into a clearly defined duel. It indicated that they had successfully negotiated the stormy seas of high indignation and raging tempers to restrict the business at hand to the original disputants without allowing confusing side issues to interfere.

The scope of a trial-at-arms varied in terms of the weapons used, the number of people involved, the length of time it took to run its course and the injuries received by the combatants and others. Some broad factors governed the

scope of combat. The nature of the wrong action tended to define those who might be involved. Disputes concerned with the neglect of kinship duties were virtually, by definition, confined to kindred members. Marriage and betrothal disputes, some cases of infidelity and public disputes over homicides tended to occur between members of neighbouring clans. The closer the disputants were related, the more likely it was that other close kin of the disputants would be motivated to contain the level of injury in order to preserve the integrity of existing alliances among the people concerned. Conversely, the more distant the relationship between the disputants, the less likelihood there was of finding intermediate kin with links to both sides who could act in a regulatory capacity, and the more likely it was that each disputant could recruit a contingent of supporters from their own close kin. Some weapons were more lethal than others. The only weapons women ever used in fights were their yamsticks. Men on the other hand, could draw on a wider range of arms but seemed, on the whole, to use only spear-throwers and clubs when fighting with close kin. Spears tended to be employed when disputing with people outside the disputant's kindred, and they were, of course, potentially more damaging. It was difficult to say how camp size affected the scope of a trial-at-arms. Clearly, disputants in a large camp setting were more likely to find kin who would support their cause. But equally, they would also be likely to encounter kin with divided loyalties who might act to reduce the scope of the dispute. The presence of many people in a camp materially increased the chances of unintended injuries to the non-involved. Unintended or threatened injuries constituted good reason for enlarging the scope of the fight by giving rise to secondary disputes that might eventually result in a general melee.

The aim of the separation stage was to put space between the disputants and to allow tempers to cool, thus making the disputants more amenable to reconciling their differences. With luck and diplomatic negotiation on the part of those who had conflicting obligations to both disputants, separation could be achieved immediately following

upon the argument stage. Otherwise, it terminated in the insult and physical combat stage.

During actual combat, separation emerged out of the confluence of a number of factors. Physical exhaustion helped bring it about. In the course of a regulated duel, combat broke off when everyone felt that there had been a sufficient display of aggression or when both disputants had sustained comparable levels of injury. The Edward River notion of fair play stressed that those who initiated trials-at-arms should come away bearing equal injuries irrespective of the nature of the wrong action that triggered the combat in the first place. If a disputant was seriously injured and could not continue, his supporters could (and usually did) demand immediate compensation from whomever had inflicted the injury. The compensation most often took the form of the injurer offering his thigh to the spears of the supporters of the injured (see also Case No. 8, p. 278). If the injurer and his party of supporters violated this norm and fled, the dispute was left unresolved until redress for that injury had been achieved. Redress, or "making level" as the Edward River phrase has it, could be obtained at a later date by the injurer offering his thigh, or else it could be sought by the injured and the injured's supporters by other means, e.g. ambush or counter-sorcery.

It is worth making the point here that in the public settlement of disputes, punishment was not accorded on the basis of the attribution of guilt as it is in Western based legal systems. Rather, the level of punishment inflicted correlated with the nature of the dispute and the closeness of the relationship between the disputants. The closer this relationship, the more likely it was that "softer" weapons would be used in the trials-at-arms, and the more likely it was that other concerned close kin would intervene and mediate between the disputants. Further, in the Edward River ideology, "justice" seemed best served when both disputants shared equally in the physical punishment meted out.

Depending on the kind of dispute, separation might involve nothing more spectacular than two close kin sitting moodily apart for half an hour or so. A domestic fight

might end with one spouse leaving the home hearth and ostentatiously camping elsewhere. After a large-scale fight, a whole section of a camp might flee the scene taking their injured with them.

In the reconciliation stage, the disputants put an end to their quarrel and re-established normal relationships by replacing their former publicly displayed malevolence with the benevolence that normal relationships demanded. Either the old status quo was restored, or, as was often the case with betrothal disputes, a new status quo involving a formal recognition of previous arrangements was effected.

The degree of public formality involved in reconciling disputants varied. Within close kin groups the resumption of normal tasks was enough to signify to others that reconciliation was effected. When members of a hearth-group camped apart, a kinsman with obligations to both parties might intercede to bring about a resumption of normal relationships. If a new status quo was to be recognised, as for example after a duel over a broken betrothal, or when a large number of people had been drawn into a trial-at-arms, the peacemaking was a more formal affair with all parties coming together to put the dispute behind them publicly. Ceremonial handshaking usually concluded such meetings, and the former disputants settled once more into normal daily routines.

5.4.2 Private redress

When a person chose to air a dispute in public, the object was to resolve the matter and ultimately to restore normal relationships. From the previous discussion it is clear that in pursuing public redress an accuser ran as much risk of physical injury as the accused. Alternatively, a person who had been wronged might eschew a public settlement in favour of seeking redress privately. Private redress focused on retaliation and punishment and not public resolution. It was characterised by stealth and secrecy and often aimed at inflicting the maximum injury on the transgressor. The principal methods of private redress were the

ambush spearing, sorcery and the manipulation of potent places. The kinds of wrong action that were said to provoke private redressive action were failure to consult or acknowledge decision-making rights, trespass, infidelity or jealousy and homicide.

There was a variety of reasons why people might choose private redressive measures. I pointed out earlier (p. 276) that when a person's decision-making rights had been overlooked, neglected or set aside by the community, then that person was essentially at odds with a whole group. In such a case, the only recourse possible was to punish the group by attempting to inflict some pestilence on it through activating a potent place. Those homicides that occurred in the context of feuds between groups of clans were generally not regarded as resolvable. They required "payback" killings which minimised the risk of injury to the avengers. Infidelity and jealousy were said to be a main cause of secret retaliation. A jealous husband might prefer to kill his wife's lover rather than attack his wife. In that way he could put an end to the threat the outsider posed to his marriage as well as the threat he posed to his safety, since it was commonly held that men who coveted the wives of others often employed sorcery against their lovers' husbands.

Private redressive action was only risk-free in the sense that the victim or the victim's kin had no chance to retaliate immediately. In the case of ambush spearings, the identity of the attacker was usually quickly discovered from tracks and other physical signs if the victim failed to survive the attack. In the case of a death imputed to sorcery, divination procedures were supposed to provide the clues to the killer's identity.

My informants believed that sorcery was the principal vehicle for carrying out private redressive action and that it caused most adult deaths that were not attributable to overt violence. Data on pre-settlement deaths indicate that ambush spearings were a relatively infrequent cause of death compared with those imputed to sorcery. But the techniques of sorcery so graphically and minutely described by my informants (see pp. 241-43) could not have worked in

the ways claimed for them. A Western empirical stand would have to argue that magical operations, the introjection of mystical projectiles, attack by man-made and man-controlled crocodiles were, all of them, products of the imagination rather than products of human actions. This in turn would lead to the conclusion that the real level of private repressive action, of the lethal variety at least, was a good deal less common than Edward River people supposed.

Marwick (1970:15) aptly referred to sorcery beliefs as the "standardised delusions" of a society. A Western viewpoint would assert that Edward River people were mistaken in thinking that the techniques worked, that they were actually carried out and that the divination process could disclose the identity of sorcerers. Additionally, those people who claimed to be sorcerers were either deluding themselves or others. It is worth considering briefly how such a set of false beliefs could be adhered to so strongly.

In the first place, sorcery provided the reason for the untimely death of adults. In the Edward River view, sickness was not a sufficient cause of death. As a matter of simple observation, most cases of sickness were followed sooner or later by recovery. If death interrupted the normal alternation between sickness and health, then something else was involved besides sickness. That "something else" was sorcery, and in the absence of any other explanation deducible from Edward River beliefs such as the breaking of an especially powerful taboo, the untimely death of an adult was the certain sign that sorcery had been practised on the deceased.

Secondly, a man did not have to practise sorcery himself in order to believe in its efficacy. No-one doubted that it worked and men boasted of their powers as sorcerers in public. My elderly informants could remember hearing their fathers and grandfathers speak of their prowess in magical killing. Significantly, however, each of my informants ruefully admitted to me in private that their fathers had never passed on their sorcery knowledge. For despite the wealth of vivid detail in the lay versions of sorcery techniques, there were important lacunae in their descriptions

that prevented the untutored from putting them into effect. Since, by convention, sorcery techniques were passed on secretly from father to son, the only sorcery knowledge a man was certain of was his own and perhaps that of his brothers. Because of its secret mode of acquisition, a man could never know whether other men truly possessed the techniques or not. Each man assumed that other men did know and practise the techniques (even if he was ignorant of them) simply because untimely deaths occurred.

From a scientific standpoint, it is easy to conclude that the people of Edward River were in a state of pluralistic ignorance concerning sorcery. This was certainly the case during my own period in the field. While my informants denied having knowledge of sorcery practice (and I have no reason to doubt their protestations), public rumour, on the other hand, credited them with being competent sorcerers and blamed them for past deaths (which my informants indignantly denied). For reasons that I will discuss in a later chapter (see pp. 513-19) Edward River men in these days do not boast of their powers as sorcerers. In pre-settlement times it seems reasonable to infer that boasting about sorcery accomplishments was probably a screen to disguise an individual's awareness of his own ignorance. Sharp (1934b:37) certainly thought so. Concerning sorcery, he said:

A vicious circle is created in which every older man, not quite sure of the powers of others, lays claim to powers for himself and makes sure that the public knows he can be dangerous if he will.

Similarly sorcerers could never be caught at their work. They operated in secret. Their victims, even though they knew they had been ensorcelled, were prevented by the sorcerer's powers from revealing their condition to others. Native doctors, using their acquired powers might come to the conclusion that a person was in a terminal state due to sorcery. I noted earlier, this could result in the withdrawal of nursing care from the "victim", so that the death that followed indeed confirmed the native doctor's diagnosis.

Unless someone boasted about it, the identity of a person responsible for causing a particular death could only be learned through divination procedures. Divination was not an infallible guide according to my informants. The signs could be wrong or misinterpreted. For example, one of my informants, with great humour, recounted how he had taken part in a pre-settlement revenge expedition acting on signs obtained during a divination. After many misadventures along the way, the small group of avengers reached their intended victim's camp. Just as a killing spear was launched at him, the man bent down and it passed harmlessly over his stooped body. "And a good thing too," chortled my informant, "because that sign pointed to the wrong man."

There is no doubt that diviners occasionally did see something during a divination ceremony, but it can scarcely have been the spirit of a sorcerer returning to the scene of a magical killing that never was carried out in the first place. With respect to divination, Elkin (1977:51) has suggested that diviners make their decisions in a logical manner based upon presumed motive and opportunity, and then they manipulate the accepted methods of divination or else produce a vision in order to validate their deductions. If something of this sort happened among Edward River people, none of my informants ever alluded to it. There were no hints of manipulation or convenient "visions". Whatever the signs really consisted of, kinsmen could only avenge a death when signs were produced. If we assume that no-one could in fact put into effect the techniques of magical killing, then the application of counter-sorcery as a redressive measure was out of the question for any particular set of avenging kinsmen. If my informants' present preferences reflect those of the pre-settlement era, then when a sorcerer was divined, he would have been confronted in public or in secret and challenged to a duel if he lived close at hand, or he would have been speared from ambush if he lived at some distance from the deceased's kindred. Genealogical evidence suggests that few deaths were in fact revenged by ambush spearing. I suspect that most divination ceremonies

revealed no clear signs and this inhibited direct redressive action. However, the lack of overt action by the deceased's kinsmen could easily be interpreted by the rest of the society as an indication that counter-sorcery was being applied in retribution against the unknown sorcerer. Because of the secrecy conventions surrounding the divination process it was difficult for an outsider to discover whether a determinate outcome had eventuated. I had the opportunity only once of being privy to divination procedures. In this instance the diviners produced no result and they were in a quandary to know where to place the blame for the death. In fact the matter was left unresolved by the diviners. On the other hand, it was rumoured among the community residents not privy to the divination that the sorcerer's identity had been discovered and the deceased's kin were preparing to deal with the matter via counter-sorcery. The close kin of the deceased took no steps to correct the rumour.

I would be inclined to argue that the above example, although out of temporal context, probably typifies the majority of pre-settlement divination ceremonies. It raises the question, however, of how people absolved themselves of the obligation to revenge when divination revealed no clear sign. It appears to have been accomplished by subsequently blaming someone whom it could be reasoned, was likely to be culpable and who had died as a result of others' revenge activities. This at least is the conclusion I draw from the statements of informants made at the bush graves of men who died in pre-settlement times. They were invariably said to have been great sorcerers who had killed a lot of people and who had themselves been killed finally in retribution.

The threat of sorcery functioned powerfully as an agent of social control. Only within the kindred did a person feel safe from the possibility of retaliatory sorcery. Interpersonal relations beyond the kindred were marked by an undercurrent of suspicion and fear. An informant, speaking of the post-settlement period, described the consequences of sorcery in the following way:

We still carry on with the old custom (i.e. sorcery). You

see all these people here (at the settlement)? They all laugh with you. They all want to be your friend. But they all gammon (lie). When you go out by yourself in the bush, they'll catch you there and kill you. You can't sleep at night or someone will creep up on you. When you hear that people are sick then you know someone is using puri-puri.

(Taylor field notes)

I have little doubt that this description is equally valid for pre-settlement times as well.

5.4.3 ^C Forgoing redress _A

People sometimes chose not to seek redress for a wrong action. In the case of a homicide imputed to sorcery, redress was not possible if the divination produced equivocal results or none at all. As I pointed out above, outsiders probably assumed that some kind of revenge was being plotted in any case. I suspect there were other situations where people could not or would not seek redress. Informants often complained of situations in which they felt themselves to be helpless or powerless to take redressive measures in the face of perceived wrong actions. In situations such as those, the offended person usually moved out of the ambit of the wrongdoer in order to avoid future repetitions. I have little reliable data concerning the factors operating in such situations and how often they occurred, if only because people tend to remember the things they did rather than the things they did not do.

5.5 Summary and comment

In pre-settlement Edward River society, wrong actions were defined with reference to the behavioural codes which guided the actions of individuals. Sanctions against breaches of the codes were said to have been imposed in either of two ways. Retribution could be brought about by supernatural agencies in an automatic fashion when certain

classes of wrong action or breaches of taboo occurred. Illnesses, especially, were interpreted as supernatural punishment. Alternatively, breaches of the conventions that prescribed proper conduct between humans required the wronged individuals to seek redressive action on their own behalf if they wanted to obtain satisfaction.

There was little in Edward River society that resembled the dispute-settling apparatus of the modern state. There was no over-arching legal entity like the "state" before which cases could be brought and whose functionaries (lawyers, judges, juries, police etc.) had the power to argue cases, to make decisions concerning guilt, to determine and apply appropriate punishments, all in the name of an independent and universal justice. Instead, the Edward River system was one which maximised the individual's contribution in the pursuit of a plaint or in defence against an accusation.

While a wronged person might opt to take no action other than avoiding the offender, satisfaction for a wrong action could be sought by disputing the matter publicly or by seeking redress privately. Public dispute settling procedures led to a resolution of the dispute and a resumption of normal relationships. Private redressive action aimed at punishing the offender with least risk to the plaintiff. The disadvantage of private redressive action was that it invited retaliation of the same sort and could (and did) lead to bitter feuding. More often, my data suggest, people chose to settle disputes in public. While disputes did not always end in a violent confrontation, all public disputing had the potential to do so. When a dispute involved a trial-at-arms, the basic notion underlying the control of aggression was that the aggrieved and the accused should share equally in the physical injury meted out. Hence, in the combat stage of a dispute, non-disputants attempted to arrange things so that this principle was honoured. Unlike a modern state legal system, punishment was not accorded on the basis of the attribution of the level of guilt. Instead, the level of punishment to both plaintiff and defendant correlated with the nature of the

wrong action and the closeness of the relationship between the disputants. In general, the more closely related the disputants were, the less likely it was that much or any violence would be exhibited.

In arranging their lives according to the broad goals defined by their society's value system, Edward River people recognised that the pursuit of intelligent self-interest could give cause for dispute. There would be many occasions when the moral values underlying the codes of right conduct would themselves be in conflict and require a person to choose to honour one set of obligations at the expense of another. Thus, it would not always be possible to fulfill obligations to close kin punctiliously. There would always be room for complaint whenever a person had limited resources with which to meet many demands. Human personalities being what they were, some husbands would inevitably mistreat their wives. The operation of demographic fluctuations among the relatively small numbers of the reserve's population acting in combination with the prescriptive marriage rule would ensure imbalances in the supply of potential spouses in the appropriate marriage categories and thus promote a degree of competition and betrothal breaking. It was acknowledged too, that sentiment and romantic love could inconveniently intrude upon the arrangements made by the betrothal-makers and lead youngsters to flout the wishes of their elders. The existence of an extensive battery of love magic techniques would ensure that some marriage partners would be unfaithful. Variations in the level of resources in different tracts would lead to incursions in ways that amounted to trespass. Death was an everpresent reality whose untimely occurrence could never be prevented, despite the best efforts of the living to kill the sorcerers responsible for cutting short the lives of humans.

No set of cultural codes in any human society has ever been able to dovetail people's wants, desires and expectations into a smoothly orchestrated set of activities free of discord. Edward River society acknowledged that disputes were inevitable and their cultural recipes provided

a set of procedures for dealing with most of them. The The procedures were not perfect. Private redress caused feuds. Public dispute settling, while it allowed an issue to be put to trial in such a way that conflicting interests were tested against a backdrop of community feeling and involvement, could also get out of hand, as when a trial-at-arms erupted into a wild melee and injuries piled up, each demanding compensation. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the processes of Edward River law and order suited the egalitarian and highly individualistic personal ethos of the pre-settlement population. Aberrations in the system were not sufficient reason to cause changes in dispute settling procedures, any more than an occasional miscarriage of justice within our own Western legal system causes any drastic overhaul of the fundamental nature of our method of resolving disputes.

CHAPTER 6CONCERNING ACTS AND AXES6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to describe a socio-cultural system and its parts as it might have operated had no Europeans been present. Analytically, the purpose of encapsulating the people of the Edward River reserve in an "ethnographic past" is to provide a baseline description against which subsequent socio-cultural change may then be assessed. The "ethnographic past" is, of course, a fiction. It is reconstructed from the memories and recollections of informants who were living in the bush as young adults during the 1930s and supplemented by the anthropological observations made by Sharp, McConnel and Thomson during their fieldwork in the same period. But in part, the traditional way of life itself was an artefact of European intervention. It persisted in its relatively undisturbed state only because legislation enacted in Queensland in 1897 created the reserves of Cape York Peninsula and made it illegal for non-Aboriginal people to enter them without proper authority. The legislation not only secured for the Aborigines of those reserves sanctuaries against the corrosive and devastating contact suffered by less fortunate Aboriginal people elsewhere in the colony, as Queensland then was, it also controlled and prescribed the nature and intensity of contact between Aborigines and other Australians. Because the various Acts and associated Regulations formed a basic framework for regulating the interaction between Aborigines and white Australians, it is pertinent to consider the various pieces of legislation enacted between 1897 and 1975 by the Parliaments of Queensland and the Commonwealth (after 1967). I discuss them in the next section.

Of course, the Aborigines of the Edward River reserve had no awareness of the legislation enacted for their protection and preservation in the 1930s. But they were aware that Europeans and their goods were a permanent fact of life. The reserve inhabitants regularly visited missions

and cattle stations near them in search of tobacco and trade goods. Occasionally they were offered work on cattle stations and sometimes they surreptitiously speared cattle belonging to pastoral properties. The mission settlements within the reserves were offering something even more important than the opportunity to work or to spear cattle. They were offering an alternative way of life. When Sharp commenced his fieldwork, 41% of the Yir Yoront had already given up their bush life and had opted for a sedentary life style under the tutelage of the missionaries at Kowanyama on the Mitchell River reserve. In Section 6.3, I present an account of early missionary activity on the western side of Cape York Peninsula from the turn of the century to 1935. The presence of missionary settlements on the reserves entailed changes even for the bush-dwelling Aborigines living at a distance from such settlements. In Section 6.4, I summarise Sharp's account and analysis of these changes. The concluding section deals broadly with the founding and development of the Edward River settlement.

6.2 A brief history of legislation for Aborigines in Queensland

The history of the development of Queensland's policy towards its Aborigines and its legislation in respect of them is well documented (e.g. see Docker 1964, Rowley 1970a, 1970b, Nettheim 1973, 1979, 1982, Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, Malezer 1979, Wearne 1980, Lippman 1981, and Loos 1982). In the colony of Queensland between the years 1859 and 1897, relations between Aborigines and white settlers were mediated largely by the Native Police. This force was set up at the request of settlers in order to keep the peace in the newly occupied pastoral districts. During the period 1840-60 losses in stock and human life at the hands of Aborigines were heavy and the settlers demanded protection. The Native Police consisted of Aboriginal mounted troopers recruited from districts that had already been settled. They were commanded by white officers. In the view of the settlers, the Native Police met

the settlers' needs for a "pacifying" force admirably. Operating on the frontiers of settlement the troopers used brutal tactics to "disperse" (a euphemism for massacre) and subdue local Aboriginal groups. Thus harassed, such groups were driven into situations of dependence and near servitude on pastoral properties or else forced to the outskirts of white settlements. There they obtained casual employment but for the most part lived the lives of mendicants and outcasts.

The activities of the Native Police gave concern in some quarters, and in 1861, following the discovery of the bodies of several natives shot by the Native Police near Ipswich, a Select Committee was set up to inquire into the force . The outcome of this enquiry was to exonerate the Native Police and approve the methods they employed, because nothing else seemed to work, at least in the minds of the members of the Select Committee. Their report noted that:

The evidence....shews beyond doubt that all attempts to Christianize or educate the aborigines of Australia have hitherto proved abortive. Except in one or two isolated cases, after being brought up and educated for a certain period, the Natives of both sexes invariably return to their savage habits. Credible witnesses shew that they are addicted to cannibalism; that they have no idea of a future state; and are sunk in the lowest depths of barbarism. Missions have been established amongst them at different times with but partial success; and the same may be said of the schools established in the different colonies..
(Quoted in Rowley 1970a:163.)

Attitudes like those implicit in the above quotation only began to disappear when Aborigines no longer presented a threat to the white settlers and their property. The Aboriginal population of Queensland began to decline sharply under the combined impact of dispossession by settlers, persecution by the Native Police, disease and poverty-stricken living conditions. It is one of the greatest ironies of Australian history that Aboriginal police

troopers should have been the unwitting instruments for the destruction of so many Aboriginal societies. Most Queenslanders of the late 19th century believed that Aborigines were doomed to extinction. As the Aboriginal "threat" disappeared in the southern and more populous parts of Queensland, so attitudes towards them softened. Some people began to urge their cause more vigorously. Once more the activities of the Native Police came to public attention when a series of articles published in the Queenslander in 1880 gave details of atrocities alleged to have been committed upon the natives in Cape York Peninsula.

One of the more prominent advocates for conciliation with, rather than the persecution of the Aborigines, was Archibald Meston, a journalist. Meston had travelled extensively in Queensland and in 1896 was sent on a tour of Cape York Peninsula by the Queensland Government. His brief was to present a report to the Home Secretary on the conditions of the Aborigines in Queensland. His report to Home Secretary Tozer detailed outrages committed against Aborigines by the Native Police and by the crews of beche-de-mer and pearling luggers. Alcoholism and opium addiction were widespread among the natives of the north. He graphically described the state of Aborigines on Cape York Peninsula in a letter he wrote to Tozer from Moreton Telegraph Station in 1896.

Their treatment in this peninsula is a shame to our common humanity and would be incredible were there not so many dismal and conclusive proofs...They came in here (to Moreton Telegraph Station) like hunted wild beasts, having lived for years in a state of absolute terrorism. They have too good reason to doubt the white man even when he comes with gifts. Their manifest joy at assurances of safety and protection is pathetic beyond expression. God knows they were in need of it.

(Quoted in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975:86)

Meston argued that the Native Police should be disbanded in favour of using the civil constabulary aided

by unarmed black trackers to keep law and order. He noted that Aborigines posed little threat to the white settlers, and that they had committed relatively few outrages against the settlers, considering the provocations they had suffered. He urged greater control over ration and blanket distributions to Aborigines, greater regulation over their wages and conditions of employment and heavy penalties for whites found supplying natives with opium and alcohol. He insisted that all Aborigines not regularly employed be excluded from white settlements and segregated on reserves specially set aside where they could recover from the shocking consequences of their contact with Europeans in protected isolation, preferably in the care of missionaries.

After receiving Meston's report, the Queensland Government asked W.E. Parry-Okeden, the newly appointed Commissioner of Police to further inquire into Native Police methods and also to make suggestions as to how the conditions of Queensland's Aborigines could be ameliorated. His report of 1897 confirmed Meston's observations and supported most of his recommendations. In December 1897, legislation to protect and care for the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal inhabitants of Queensland and to restrict the sale and distribution of opium was passed by the Queensland Government.

The Act of 1897 officially defined who should be deemed an Aborigine for the purposes of the Act and made provision for Queensland to be divided into districts, under the control of a Protector of Aborigines. The Act also made provision for the setting up of reserves within each district and for the appointment of Superintendents of them. The Minister in charge of the Act was empowered to remove any Aborigine to a reserve and to transfer Aborigines from one reserve to another. A permit system was established for allowing Aborigines to undertake employment outside the reserve. To ensure segregation it was made an offence for any non-authorised person to enter or reside in an Aboriginal reserve. It was also an offence for anyone to supply liquor or opium to Aborigines and for a non-Aborigine to be in possession of blankets issued to

Aborigines for their own use.

The administrative procedures necessary to implement the Act were determined by Regulations made by the Governor in Council. Among other things, the Regulations specified modes of "removal", the duties of Protectors and Superintendents, who was authorised to enter a reserve, how other cash incomes of reserves were to be apportioned, provisions concerning the care and education of Aboriginal children, the distribution of rations, penalties for breaches of good order and discipline, the prohibition of Aboriginal rites and customs thought to be inimical to Aboriginal welfare and the conferral of certificates of exemption on "half-castes" who, in the opinion of the Minister, should be exempted from the provisions of the Act. It was in the context of this legislation that the reserves of the western side of Cape York Peninsula were established.

The Act of 1897 was amended and revised a number of times between then and 1975. The alterations to the amending Acts of 1901, 1927, 1928, 1934 and 1939 seemed to have been directed at controlling the growth in population of mixed-blood Aborigines. For example, the Act of 1901 gave Protectors the right to control the marriage of female Aborigines while the 1934 Act made sexual intercourse outside marriage between an Aboriginal woman and a non-Aboriginal male an offence.

The Act of 1946 (Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Acts 1939 to 1946) was assimilationist in tone. It stated clearly that the amending legislation was designed to differentiate and protect members of the Aboriginal race in Queensland because of their backwardness "in acquiring the arts of European civilisation" (quoted in Malezer 1979: 29). In 1939 the Office of Chief Protector had become a sub-department headed by a Director, who legislatively, wielded extensive powers of control over the lives of the Aboriginal people who were declared to be "under the Act". In 1946 the powers were still extensive. The Director could exempt Aborigines from the Act's provisions and also revoke the exemptions if he saw the need. In all matters regarding the administration of the Act the Director had

wide powers of investigation and inquiry. He was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal under the age of 21 and the Director's consent had to be obtained before a minor under the Act could marry. The Director also administered the estates of deceased or missing Aborigines.

The powers of "Protectors" and "Superintendents" appointed under the Act of 1946 were equally wide-ranging. Such officers controlled the employment of Aborigines, fixed their wage rates and were charged with the responsibility for managing the personal property of Aborigines. They were also empowered to prohibit customary practices which, in their opinion, could have been injurious to Aborigines. The 1946 Act made it an offence for a non-Aborigine to harbour or illegally employ Aborigines, to supply them with liquor, to have carnal knowledge of an Aboriginal woman, except in marriage, or to "remove" an Aborigine from Queensland or from one district to another in Queensland. When an Aborigine was charged with any crime, misdemeanour or offence and had either confessed to it or pleaded guilty, the judge presiding over the case had to satisfy himself that the Aborigine understood the consequences of his confession or plea. The Governor in Council (i.e. the Governor of the State on the advice of his ministers and without the necessity for parliamentary debate) was empowered to make regulations dealing, among other things, with the establishment of elected councils and for the appointment of Aboriginal police together with the construction of gaols on reserves. Councils, where appointed, had no powers invested in them save those allocated to them by the Director, as Rowley (1970b:116) has noted.

Although amended several times in minor ways, the legislation of 1946 remained in force until 1965. The wide powers of control vested in the Director, Protectors and Superintendents did not go uncriticised. The whole administration of indigenous affairs in Queensland was attacked by a group with a large Aboriginal membership formed in 1959 and called The Queensland Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Advancement League. The League issued a Declaration of Rights that demanded Aboriginal ownership of

lands, free secular education and an end to discriminatory practices in wage rates (Lippmann 1981:43). Perhaps sensitive to mounting criticism, the Queensland State Government set up a Special Committee in 1964 to enquire into the legislation affecting Aborigines in the State. The Special Committee recommended that the 1946 Act and its associated Regulations be repealed. Among other things it argued that Aborigines be allowed to have access to liquor off reserves, that the establishment of "wet canteens" should be considered, that Aborigines should be enrolled on State and Federal rolls as voters, that the Director's right to control marriages be relaxed and that Aborigines be admitted to the Station Hands Award.

These recommendations were incorporated in The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act of 1965. It came into operation together with its Regulations in April 1966. The 1965 Act continued the reserves, appointments and institutions provided for by earlier Acts but made a number of changes in terminology. What were known as Aboriginal "settlements" became "communities", the Sub-Department of Native Affairs was restyled the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs, "Superintendents" and "Protectors" were replaced with "Managers", "District Officers" and "Assistant District Officers". The Act also distinguished between Aborigines, part-Aborigines and assisted Aborigines. Aborigines were either full-bloods, Aborigines with a "preponderance of blood" or else a person of a "strain" of Aboriginal blood authorised to be an Aborigine. The part-Aboriginal spouse of a full-blood Aborigine or an Aborigine with a "preponderance" of blood was also admitted to the status of Aborigine. Part-Aborigines were defined as the issue of an Aboriginal parent and a non-Aboriginal parent or the child of parents having less than 25% of "blood". Assisted Aborigines were made up of the residents of reserves, the children of assisted Aborigines, any Aborigine or part-Aborigine declared to be assisted by the Director or by a Judge or Stipendary Magistrate. The status of assisted Aborigine was acknowledged by a "certificate of entitlement" and it was the duty of the Director to compile

a register of persons entitled to certificates. An assisted Aborigine could apply to have a certificate of entitlement revoked by the Director and an unassisted Aborigine or part-Aborigine could apply for a certificate of entitlement. There was provision for an applicant to refer a decision of the Director to a Stipendary Magistrate in the event of a refusal. The Act empowered the Director to make grants in aid (in money, services or goods) to any assisted Aborigine.

The Act authorised District Officers to exercise wide powers of control over the personal property and any economic transactions involving assisted Aborigines. For instance, it made provision for District Officers to assume the management of an assisted Aborigine's property. This could be done either by application from an assisted Aborigine or simply by the District Officer himself if, in his judgement, the assumption of control was warranted. Property management could be revoked on application to a District Officer and, if refused, the matter could be referred to a Stipendary Magistrate for determination. No contract entered into by an assisted Aborigine was binding unless approved by a District Officer and no creditor could sue for monies owing from an assisted Aborigine unless the transaction had the prior approval of the District Officer.

Section 34 of the Act gave the Director power to order assisted Aborigines not resident on reserves to be transferred to one and, on the recommendation of an Aboriginal court, to order an assisted Aborigine to be transferred from one reserve to another. For the first time traditional marriages were recognised. Children born of unions which were not lawfully sanctioned but which were in accordance with recognised tribal practice were considered legitimate in law. The remaining parts of the Act dealt with such matters as the admissability of assisted Aborigines' confessions and pleas of guilty in courts of law having regard to their "stage of development". District Officers could appear on behalf of assisted Aborigines to assess the probability that the person charged understood the consequences of confessing to a charge or pleading

guilty. A special provision of the Act permitted District Officers and Managers to appear in courts and represent assisted Aborigines charged with offences.

More importantly, however, the Act provided for the Governor in Council to make Regulations for effecting the purposes of the Act. Matters subject to Regulation covered an exceedingly wide range including: the powers, authorities and functions of officers of the DAIA; the establishment of Aboriginal courts and associated machinery including appeals; the preservation, development, assimilation, integration, education, training and employment of assisted Aborigines; the discipline and good order of reserves and the control of assisted Aborigines; the establishment of Aboriginal councils; the inspection of reserves; the setting up of gaols and of an Aboriginal police force on reserves; the granting of aid; the care of children; employment and apprenticeship matters; the establishment of various funds; the administration of the estates of deceased and missing assisted Aborigines; the regulation of customs and practices likely, in the Director's opinion, to be injurious to the health and well being of assisted Aborigines; unauthorised entry onto reserves; penalties for breaches of regulations and prescribed forms.

As Wearne (1980:18) notes, the Act of 1965 was aimed at abandoning the protectionist policies implicit in the previous Acts. It sought to do this in several ways. At a cosmetic level it attempted to avoid the terms used in previous Acts that carried connotations of arbitrary control or duress. More importantly the Director's powers were circumscribed in several ways. He was no longer the legal guardian of Aboriginal minors and he no longer had the power to control permission to marry. Further, the Act instituted provision for appeals against some of the decisions of the Director and his officers. The establishment of Aboriginal councils on Aboriginal reserves having the functions of local government authorities with the power to pass By-Laws, Resolutions and Orders "for the well being and progressive development of assisted Aboriginal residents" betokened a further relaxation of paternalistic control

and a recognition of the competence of Aboriginal communities to shoulder responsibility for their own affairs.

However, the relaxation of Departmental control was by no means total. As a study of the Regulations accompanying the Act shows, the Director still exercised wide powers of control. By-Laws passed by the Aboriginal councils had no effect until they were approved by the Director. Managers, of their own volition, could suspend resolutions and orders, though a council could appeal against suspension to a Stipendary Magistrate. Aboriginal councils need not reflect community preferences since of the four members only two were elected by the community residents with the other two being appointed by the Director. Rates, fares, fees and dues levied by Aboriginal councils as well as court fines and grants were to be paid into a community fund and applied towards expenditures incurred by the councils in the exercise of their functions. But no disbursement could be made from the fund without the Manager's approval. Further, any disbursements made by the council and considered by the Manager to be unnecessary, extravagant or not authorised by the Act could be disallowed and recovered from the council members, if necessary, by the Manager. The jurisdiction of Aboriginal courts applied only to assisted Aborigines in respect of breaches of the Regulations, By-Laws and certain civil action concerning the recovery of debts and property where amounts did not exceed \$200-00. The council's powers did not apply to unassisted Aborigines or to non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal policemen could arrest only assisted Aboriginal people on reserves for breaches of the Act, the Regulations or for infractions of instructions issued by the Director, the District Officer, the Manager, the Councillors or other officers. They were directly responsible to the Manager and only he could appoint, promote, disrate, suspend or dismiss and make rules for members of the Aboriginal police force. Their primary role was clearly an extension of DAIA management and control. Managers could also order assisted Aborigines into detention for up to six months (renewable) in supervised, segregated dormitories.

Typically, behaviours warranting dormitory detention were wide-ranging. They included offences against discipline (specified variously as failure to obey instructions, idle, careless or negligent work, refusal to work, offensive or threatening behaviour, indecent behaviour, wilful property damage), attempting to escape from a reserve or leave one without lawful permission, immoral conduct, failure to carry out instructions concerning hygiene, sanitation or infant welfare or dangerous behaviour.

The legislation of 1965 did not go uncriticised. Aborigines in urban centres in Queensland began calling for the repeal of the Act. "Ban the Act" became a popular slogan among them. Academics were also highly critical of the legislation and the reserves it created. Commenting on the 1965 Act, Charles Rowley (1970a:127) wrote:

Many of the features of this legislation indicate that Queensland policy in 1967 remained much the same as it had been in 1897, and it must prove an embarrassment to the Commonwealth. One can only account for the fact that it has not attracted the attention of the International Commission of Jurists by assuming that Australian lawyers have not yet much interest in legislation for Aborigines.

However, the Queensland Government had not only the criticism of its legislation by Aborigines and academics to contend with, but after a referendum held in May 1967, the criticism of the Commonwealth Government also. The referendum amended two clauses in the Federal Constitution discriminating against Aborigines. Full blood Aborigines were no longer to be excluded from being counted in the census and the Federal Government was empowered to pass laws relating to Aborigines living in the Australian States. The Prime Minister of the time, John Gorton, promised that all Commonwealth and State legislation that discriminated adversely against Aborigines would be abolished. Queensland's Act was considered by many to be an especially glaring example of the kind of discriminatory legislation

that should be repealed. On the eve of the expiration of the 1965 Act in 1971, Prime Minister McMahon (who had succeeded John Gorton) conferred with Queensland's Premier, J. Bjelke-Petersen, concerning the drafting of a new Act. A joint memorandum was issued in their names, which, after acknowledging that the 1965 Act was not in essence discriminatory but rather designed to assist and protect Aborigines, it listed nine points of agreement that should be observed in the drafting of a new Act. These nine points were:

1. Aborigines should be able to move freely off reserves;
2. access to Aboriginal reserves should be controlled by reserve councils;
3. Aborigines should have freedom of choice regarding property management but with appropriate consultative safeguards against exploitation;
4. Aborigines should have freedom of choice over control of transactions, again with appropriate consultative safeguards against exploitation;
5. residents of a reserve should be free to decide whether or not liquor should be permitted on their reserve;
6. Torres Strait Islanders should have their own separate Act;
7. the repeal of Section 4 (ii) of the Vagrancy, Gaming and Other Offences Act which made it an offence for any non-Aboriginal person to lodge or wander in company with any Aboriginal native unless

the person could demonstrate a fixed abode, lawful means of support and that such wandering was temporary and lawful;

8. special consideration to wage rates for inexperienced, slow or retarded Aboriginal workers;
9. that Aboriginal and Islander representation on reserve councils be reviewed.

Although the new Aborigines Act 1971 was passed in December 1971, it was not gazetted until December 4, 1972. The Regulations were gazetted December 2, 1972. The full title of the Act was: "An Act to provide for the conduct of reserves for Aborigines and for the admission thereto of persons who wish to reside there; for the granting of assistance to Aborigines who seek it; for the repeal of certain provisions of law; and for related purposes".

The life of the 1971 Act was set at 5 years, renewable for another 5 years by proclamation if necessary. Reserves, communities, agreements and property management arrangements declared or entered into under the 1965 Act were continued. The awkwardly defined categories of "Aborigine", "part-Aborigine" and "assisted Aborigine" were replaced with a single term "Aborigine" which embraced any person who was a "descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of the Commonwealth of Australia other than the Torres Strait Islands". The Minister in charge of the Act shared, or took over, some of the responsibilities that were previously those of the Director. The Act also legislatively recognised the responsibilities of Aboriginal councils in the management of the affairs of reserves. It introduced a permit system entitling people to be on reserves. There were permits to visit for periods not exceeding one month and permits to reside for more than one month. Permits could only be issued by Aboriginal councils, or, in their absence, by the Director. Permits were to be granted only when an Aboriginal council and the Director were satisfied

that residence was in the best interests of the applicant and not detrimental to others. Either the Director or an Aboriginal council could invoke a "show cause" procedure to remove permittees who were considered undesirable. Any Aborigine who was aggrieved at the withholding of, or revocation of, a permit could refer the matter to a Stipendary Magistrate. The only persons entitled to be on a reserve without a permit were the Minister in charge of the Act, the Director of DAIA, any officers appointed by him and their households together with anyone empowered by law to exercise a duty and those elected members of the State and Commonwealth legislatures in whose electorates the reserve was situated.

The Act established a new body known as the Aboriginal Advisory Council which was composed of the chairmen of Aboriginal councils. The functions of the new body were firstly, "to consider and advise the Minister on matters affecting the progress, development and well being of Aborigines" when such matters were referred to it by the Minister or the Director, secondly, "to make recommendations to the Minister concerning matters affecting the progress, development and well being of Aborigines" and thirdly, to make recommendations concerning the administration of the Act. Aboriginal councils and courts were continued.

The Act enabled the Director in conjunction with reserve councils to establish premises for the sale and supply of beer to persons lawfully on the reserve. They were to be conducted by the Director and his servants and could be discontinued on the recommendation of the Aboriginal council. Members of the Queensland Police were granted the same powers on Aboriginal reserves as they exercised elsewhere in Queensland and could also carry out those duties required of Aboriginal Policemen.

Grants in aid could be made by the Director to any Aborigine who applied (not just assisted Aborigines as in the 1965 Act) and the Director was also empowered to grant loans against appropriate security.

The management of property could no longer be

undertaken at the discretion of DAIA officers. Aborigines whose property was not being managed under the 1965 Act could apply to have their property managed or, once under management, to have it terminated provided the Director believed it was not detrimental to the "best interests" of the applicant and his family. In the case of refusal by the Director to grant termination, the matter could be referred to a Stipendary Magistrate. The Director, under the new Act, was empowered to administer only the estates of deceased and missing Aborigines whose property was being managed, instead of the properties of all assisted Aborigines. Similarly District Officers were required to authorise contracts and transactions relating only to those persons whose property was being managed and not to the contracts and transactions of all assisted Aborigines as in the 1965 Act. Aborigines not under property management could apply to the Director to intervene in any agreement and the Director had the power to cancel, vary, require restitution or make adjustments to an agreement if he was satisfied that the terms were harsh, unreasonable or not understood. The remainder of the Act of 1971 was similar to the 1965 Act except that the sections dealing with removals and transfers between reserves were deleted.

The Regulations which supported the Act omitted any reference to dormitory detention and outlined the greater responsibilities to be exercised by Aboriginal councils on reserves. Aboriginal councils maintained the same broad local authority functions as in the previous legislation. The number of councillors was increased to five, three of whom were to be popularly elected while two were to be appointed by the Director. Any By-Laws, Resolutions and Orders passed by councils had to receive the assent of the Minister, rather than the Director, and the rules for the election of councillors were to be determined not by the Director (as in the 1965 Act) but by the Minister acting on the advice of the Aboriginal Advisory Council. Aboriginal councils were charged with the responsibility for maintaining and managing community funds established by previous Acts and the clauses relating to managerial

control over extravagant expenditure were deleted. Aboriginal councils could also call for people to be ejected from the reserve. They shared this power with the Managers and District Officers.

The jurisdiction of Aboriginal courts remained basically the same in the 1971 Act except that it was the Aboriginal council's responsibility to appoint a Clerk of Court (instead of the Manager's) and there was no necessity for the Clerk of Court to be a staff member. And, whereas in the 1965 Act, a Clerk of Court could summarily dismiss any complaint he felt was trivial, vexatious or malicious, the succeeding Act provided for the Clerk of Court to refer such matters to the Aboriginal council. The section on payments of penalties was expanded to include the "restitution of property" and unsuccessful parties could be ordered by the Aboriginal council to pay the costs of the successful party. No-one could be gaoled by written direction of the Manager or council Chairman in the new Act. Detention in a gaol could only be ordered by Aboriginal policemen, members of the Queensland Police Force, or by warrant of an Aboriginal court. A provision was made for release on bail by order of the Aboriginal court on conditions determined by it and it was the responsibility of the council to prepare the rules governing the conduct of gaols. Managerial control over the Aboriginal policemen was reduced somewhat. Appointments to the force were to be made by the Manager in consultation with the council. Aboriginal policemen could no longer arrest people for breaches of "lawful instructions" issued by the councillors or any officer of the DAIA from the Director down. They could arrest resident Aborigines for breaches of the Act, Regulations or By-Laws and they could eject people not entitled under the Act to be on the reserve at the direction of the Aboriginal council or the Director. The Manager still retained control over the promotion, disrating, suspension and dismissal of Aboriginal policemen. This function was not shared with the Aboriginal council.

The 1971 Act provided that in all places except reserves Aborigines should be employed according to their

qualifications, skill and experience and paid according to the appropriate rates and awards ruling in the industries concerned. Where there were no ruling industry rates, Aboriginal employees were to be paid not less than the basic wage. Aged, infirm or slow workers could apply to the District Officer to earn at lower rates and the Director could issue a permit stating the rate to apply in each case. It was no longer necessary for DAIA officers to make out worker-employer agreements for Aborigines working away from the reserves where they normally resided.

The inauguration of beer canteens brought a fresh set of regulations governing the sale and consumption of beer, the hours of trading, restrictions of sale to certain people and standards of hygiene. The profits of beer sales were to be applied to the general welfare of the reserve's residents by the Aboriginal council.

In summary, the Act of 1971 was more liberal than the 1965 Act in that it reduced the opportunity for arbitrary control by Departmental Officers and Superintendents. It conferred greater powers on Aboriginal councils to manage their own affairs and it extended the operation of the Act to all persons of Aboriginal descent rather than to those possessing certificates of entitlement. The creation of a consultative body was seen as a step in the right direction and the sharing of the Director's former powers with the Minister was also a potential legislative safeguard against any excess of arbitrary control. The removal of the provisions for dormitory detention was welcomed. However, the Act still came under heavy criticism. In 1973, Professor G. Nettheim of the University of New South Wales submitted a report on the 1971 legislation to the International Commission of Jurists which was subsequently published (see Nettheim 1973). Nettheim noted that only five of the nine points of the McMahon - Bjelke-Petersen memorandum were implemented. The new Act did not give control to reserve councils over access to reserves since the Administration retained powers of veto. The Act did not give total freedom of choice to Aborigines regarding

property management and transactions since those whose property was being managed under the old Act were still subject to the Director's veto. Residents of reserves did not have full freedom of choice concerning the establishment of beer canteens. It was a matter for Aboriginal councils and the Director to decide.

Nettheim also criticised the 1971 Act for its inadequate provision for consultation with Aborigines, Islanders and others both in the enactment of the legislation and in its provisions. He argued that too many Parliamentary powers had been delegated to the administration with little prospect of effective parliamentary review. Further, he charged the Act with being in violation of some eleven Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, the 1971 Act was no longer in harmony with the Commonwealth Government's policy for Aborigines. In 1951, State and Commonwealth authorities had agreed on a general policy for Aborigines that was referred to as the policy of assimilation. The 1965 version of the policy was as follows:

The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community -- enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Any special measures taken are regarded as temporary measures, not based on race, but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance and to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their social, economic and political advancement.

(Commonwealth 1967:44)

This statement had been the cornerstone of the Queensland State Government's policy towards Aborigines for many years. It was frequently referred to as such in the Annual Reports of the DAIA. For example, the DAIA Report of 1971 explicitly

quoted the definition, and with a reference to the about-to-be introduced legislation, the Director (DAIA 1971:1) noted that the period 1970-71 had probably been:

... The most significant in the history of Queensland's Aboriginal Social Welfare Programmes. The earlier cycles of preservation and preservation/protection have, generally speaking, completed their service to the people whose cause they were designed to espouse. The 1965 legislation, indicated at that time as being a "bridging" programme, has provided a "breathing space", decided upon by the Aboriginal and Islander people themselves as being necessary, prior to embarking upon the third, and most probably the final phase towards total assimilation of all Aboriginal people within Queensland's society generally.

In January 1972, the Commonwealth Government restated its policy objectives concerning Aborigines (Australian Information Service 1974:7). The assimilationist model for Australian society had disappeared and in its place was a vision of a plural society that actively sought to encourage diversity. Aborigines were to be assisted as individuals and as local communities to hold effective and respected places in Australian society with equal access to its rights and opportunities and to accept their share of responsibilities towards it. At the same time Aborigines were to be encouraged and assisted to preserve and develop their own culture, languages, traditions and arts so that they could become living elements in a multicultural Australian society. Aborigines themselves were to set the pace and the degree to which they would identify with a broader Australian society. The new policy expressed the hope that Aborigines would the more readily identify with Australian society if Aboriginal identity, traditions and culture were encouraged. It stressed that separate development was incompatible with policy objectives. Any special measures introduced to overcome disabilities experienced by Aborigines were to be temporary and transitional. Programmes to give effect to the policy would take account of the expressed wishes

of Aborigines and would seek to involve them as much as possible. The policy was directed towards coordinating strategies designed to strengthen the ability of Aborigines to manage their own affairs, to increase their independence, to improve Aboriginal health, housing, education and vocational training and to promote the enjoyment of normal civil liberties and eliminate those provisions in law which discriminated against them.

In 1972, the Commonwealth Government established a Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) to advise the Government on policy matters concerning mining, land issues and the social, cultural, economic and constitutional development of Aborigines. December of 1972 saw the election of an Australian Labor Party (ALP) majority to the Commonwealth Parliament replacing the Liberal-Country Party coalition. The ALP's policy stressed land rights and self-determination. For the ALP, self-determination meant giving Aboriginal communities the right to decide the pace and nature of their future development within the legal, social and economic restraints of the majority society. The ALP's policy on Aboriginal lands envisaged the granting of exclusive corporate land rights to those communities that retained a "strong tribal structure" or could demonstrate a potential for corporate action in respect of reserve lands, or where traditional ownership could be established from anthropological or other evidence. Aboriginal lands were to be vested in public trusts composed of Aborigines and Aboriginal sites were to be mapped and protected. Aboriginal lands in any area were not to be alienated without the approval of the Parliament and the appropriate land trust. Aboriginal land rights were to carry with them full rights to minerals in those lands.

In 1973, the Prime Minister, E.G. Whitlam, announced that the Commonwealth Government intended to assume full responsibility for policy in respect of Aboriginal affairs. He indicated that the Government did not intend to make the DAA an omnibus department but would seek instead to devolve the responsibility for carrying out Commonwealth Government policy on to other authorities and Aboriginal

organisations. Negotiations began with the States to implement this. By 1975 all states, with the exception of Queensland, had handed over their Aboriginal policy planning and coordination roles to the Commonwealth Government. The Queensland coalition Government under J. Bjelke-Petersen, for reasons that are too complex to disentangle, has determinedly opposed the intervention of the Commonwealth Government in State Aboriginal affairs though it could not prevent the operations of the DAA in the State.

In 1974, the Queensland State Government made further moves to reduce the controls exercised by the Director of DAIA and his officers. New Regulations provided for future councils on Aboriginal reserves to be fully elective (withdrawing the power of the Director to appoint two members of the council) while an amendment to the 1971 Act allowed all Aborigines whose property was being managed to opt to terminate property management without reference to anyone else. These changes still did not satisfy the Commonwealth Government. In the Commonwealth view, the Queensland legislation still contained discriminatory features relating specifically to property management, to the "permit" system, to the sorts of conduct warranting expulsion from reserves, to the right of Aboriginal residents to privacy in their own premises, to the right of Aborigines to be represented by legal council before an Aboriginal court and to the normal processes of appeal from such courts, to the power of officers to direct Aborigines on reserves to work and, finally, to the right of Aborigine on reserves to be employed under the same terms, conditions and rates of pay that would apply to non-Aborigines performing the same work. The Commonwealth Government passed the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders (Queensland Discriminatory Laws) Act in 1975. This Act singled out the discriminatory provisions of the Queensland legislation and by invoking the constitutional precedence of Commonwealth legislation over State legislation, sought to override them. Since that time there have been further legislative changes by both Queensland State and Commonwealth legislatures with respect to Queensland's Aboriginal

inhabitants (e.g. see Nettheim 1982:82-107). These changes, though important, will not be discussed here because they go beyond the period of fieldwork.

6.3 Reserves and missionaries 1900-1935

Apart from firsthand information supplied by informants and mission records, the material presented in this section is derived from the general surveys of missionary activity by Bleakley (1961) and Bayton (1965) and accounts by the missionaries Daniels (1975) and MacKenzie (1981). Additionally, The Carpentarian, the quarterly journal of the Diocese of Carpentaria, and the reports furnished by mission superintendents and published by the Queensland Government annually in its reports on Aboriginal and Islander affairs have provided useful contemporary data.

In 1902, Dr. Gilbert White, the Anglican bishop of the newly created diocese of Carpentaria, declared his intention of ministering to the needs of at least some of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the diocese. At the invitation of the Queensland Home Secretary, the Reverend Ernest Gribble, son of the founder of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Mission outside Cairns, undertook an exploratory trip to the Mitchell River delta for the purpose of seeking a site for a mission to the Aborigines. As a consequence of this trip, the Bishop chose an area of land between the Mitchell and Nassau Rivers which was duly gazetted as a reserve for the mission work of the church under the Aboriginals' Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act 1897. In the words of the Bishop, the area was "...the most densely populated Aboriginal centre in Queensland and probably the only one where the natives have not come into more or less disastrous contact with civilisation" (quoted in Bayton 1965:89). In the same year as Gribble's expedition, a similar exploration was undertaken some 250 km to the north on behalf of the Presbyterian Church by Nicholas Hey, the missionary in charge of the Mapoon settlement and Edwin Brown from the mission at Weipa. Both of these Aboriginal missions had been formed at the northern end of the western side of Cape York Peninsula.

Hey and Brown chose a site in the Archer River estuary for a new Presbyterian mission, and in 1904 Arthur Richter, a young Moravian missionary, arrived to set up the mission station that came to be known as Aurukun.

The Anglicans conducted several more exploratory trips before the first small band of mission workers and their native helpers set up their tents at a place called Trubanaman on a freshwater lagoon on one of the upper reaches of Topsy Creek which lay midway between the Nassau River and the southern arm of the Mitchell River. From that point on the destinies of the Aborigines who occupied the country between the two missions were to be inextricably linked with Europeans. In subsequent years the boundary lines of the reserves were to be redrawn and extended until the zone of demarcation between the Anglicans and Presbyterians was set at the Holroyd River, while the southern boundary of the Mitchell River reserve was adjusted after a land exchange with the neighbouring Rutland Plains cattle station.

In official terms, the goals of such missions were envisaged by Howard, the then Protector of Aborigines, as ones of improvement, education and civilization (Queensland 1908). The Anglican missionaries had a fairly clear idea of how they would give substance to these goals. Apart from their evangelical work, they hoped to lead the natives away from their nomadic life style and encourage them to live in village communities that would ultimately be self-sufficient. Since they felt they could do little with the older natives beyond winning their confidence, the missionaries planned to concentrate their efforts on young Aboriginal men and women, who with appropriate teaching they hoped would become the models of the new life-style. These youngsters were to be taught manual and domestic arts and provided with elementary literacy. They were to be married and given houses of their own on the reserve. The men, it was thought, would either engage in farming or stock-raising on the reserve or else find employment off the reserve in the pastoral or pearl-fishing industries. In time the bush-dwelling natives, perceiving the advantages of the alternative way of life, would be drawn into the mission villages.

When the missionaries arrived to set up Trubanaman there was little resistance from the people of the newly created reserves. Indeed from the missionaries' reports they seemed to welcome the establishment of the settlement. The original party included two Aboriginal men from the Mitchell River delta, who years before had somehow found their way to Gribble's mission at Yarrabah. One of them, John Grady, was described as a Koko Gwini man, which appears to be an alternative name for the Koko Bera peoples living in the coastal country between Topsy Creek and the Mitchell River. The other man, Peter Bendigo, was said to be a Koko Wanjana man and probably belonged to one of the Kunjen speaking groups living along the freshwater reaches of the Mitchell River. Both men seemed to have played a key role as interpreters and mediators. The mission's message to their prospective converts was at first a simple one and hinted little at the actual plans for the conversion and civilisation of the reserve's inhabitants. The following is an account from Bishop Gilbert White's diary of an early encounter with some of the reserve people.

Thursday, June 1st. -- After breakfast talked through Grady to a number of natives, and tried to explain the pictures on a Church Almanack. All seemed very pleased to see Mr. Gribble back. Started about 10.30, and at 1.30 reached Yanda swamp, where we camped. About forty natives accompanied us, and many more arrived in the course of the day. After tea we went to the camp for Evensong. It was quite dark, but as there was no wind we carried a couple of candles, which dimly outlined about sixty blacks seated in a half-circle with the women and children behind. We sat down in front with Grady as interpreter, while the old king gravely walked over and seated himself at our side. We sang "O God, our help in ages past", the blacks preserving complete silence until the conclusion of our short service, the meaning of which was first explained. Then Mr. Gribble through Grady gave a most practical address, easy to understand and interpret, something in this style:-

"First the Bishop says thank you that you looked after the house and kept it in good order",

"The missionaries have kept their word. They said they would be back in six moons, and they are here".

"We very glad to hear you have not speared any cattle since our last visit". (Grins of conscious virtue on the part of the audience.)

"We are here to teach you about God the Father, who made you and the grass and the trees and the women too".

"We do not want to make you like white men, but good blackfellows; still walk about, still catch possum and wallaby, still make good corroboree, but not kill cattle, not steal, not fight other blackfellow, not swear, not hit wife on head with waddy -- (symptoms of disapproval at this prohibition among the audience) -- and wife too, she not talk-talk to husband". (Sudden revival of approval in the front rows and an emphatic click of approval.)

The boundaries of the reserve were explained, and they were warned not to trespass, and to bring their sick to the mission station, and were promised protection while they behaved well.

All seemed very simple, but I was lost in admiration of the skill of the address, which very few men could have given.

John Grady was in his element translating with eloquent gesticulations.

(White 1905:158; parenthetical comments White's own)

The Trubanaman mission commenced its life with 13 young Aboriginal men and 9 boys of school age. The difficulties and limitations facing the missionaries were daunting. As things turned out, the whole enterprise was to take place within very severe financial restraints. Mission staff would be few and they had to come to terms with an alien environment, construct a village from local materials, experiment with crops and soils in an effort to find suitable food staples and cash crops, and obtain cattle to build up a mission herd with little aid other than their own resourcefulness. Between 1905 and 1919 the population grew to 140, and the baptismal book reveals that most of its converts were drawn from among the Koko Bera (58%), the Kokomenjen (or Yir Yoront, 24%) and the Kunjen (11%). In 1911, the mission adopted a system then being employed by the Reverend

Hey at Mapoon of settling married couples on individual farmlets. The outcome was disappointing and the experiment was terminated when the Trubanaman site had to be abandoned because of the regular pollution of its freshwater lagoon during the seasonal high tides. The inhabitants of the Trubanaman mission were moved to the present site of Kowanyama, and this became the only village settlement within the Mitchell River Aboriginal reserve. In this new settlement the missionaries concentrated their efforts on the creation of a single village complex as the most practical way of employing their slender funds, expertise and human resources. They continued to aim for self-sufficiency in food crops and hoped that the fertility of the new village site would permit the production of some kind of cash crop as well. The rapid growth of their small cattle herd led the missionaries to realise the benefits of developing the reserve as a pastoral property, both to supply meat for the mission residents and to provide eventual cash inflows from the sale of surplus stock. Additional revenue would enter the mission economy as men, trained for stockwork on the mission herd, brought their savings home. A major problem facing the mission's development was whether a balance could be achieved between the drive for self-sufficiency and the rate of growth of the mission population.

The first decade at Kowanyama seemed to be one of consolidation rather than of active proselytism. By 1929, the mission's permanent inhabitants numbered between 180 and 200. As the settlement grew, the mission staff realised that they could not conveniently accommodate the tribespeople north of the Coleman River, and as early as 1922 plans were discussed concerning the formation of a separate mission to cater for the natives of the northern part of the Anglican reserve. The bush-dwellers there were being troublesome to both missionaries and pastoralists alike. When they came visiting Kowanyama, they caused fights among the settled inmates and complaints were being received from neighbouring stations of cattle-spearing raids. The first attempt to provide a permanent settlement for the non-mission Yir Yoront and the Thaayorre peoples was made in 1932 by W.J.A.

Daniels, then a lay missionary at Kowanyama. He chose a site on a permanent lagoon in a section of coastal ridge and plain country bounded by the Coleman and Melaman Rivers. Yir Yoront people called the place Puiyil and Thaayorre people referred to it as Meer Yuuko.

In 1933, a similar missionary outstation was set up by an Aurukun native preacher named Uki, who settled with his wife at the mouth of the Kendall River to minister to the bush-dwellers in that part of the Aurukun reserve and in the neighbouring region of the Holroyd River. An offshoot from this outstation was also maintained for a time just south of the Holroyd River in the northern section of the Edward River reserve, thus bringing the Aurukun mission influence closer to the Wik Nganchera peoples.

There had been other contacts besides those with missionaries. Several sandalwood gatherers had maintained camps not far from the Aurukun and Kowanyama settlements in the early 1920s and occasionally a lugger would come by and purchase sandalwood from the bush-dwellers themselves. Stockmen from the pastoral properties on the borders of the reserve often mustered wild cattle on the reserves and sometimes, it was said, kidnapped young boys and girls to become station hands or station domestics. It was during the late 1920s and early 1930s that anthropologists came into the area and began writing descriptions of facets of the bush-dwellers' culture (see pp.3-4). Indeed, Lauriston Sharp seems to have used the deserted site of Daniel's mission at Chillago Pocket as the base camp for his anthropological researches. As a matter of interest, in later years whenever the first "Edward River mission" was discussed, "Mr. Daniels" and "Mr. Sharp" were spoken of as the "first missionaries".

6.4 Steel axes and Sharp's analysis

In his early papers and in his thesis, Sharp concentrated primarily on presenting an ethnography of a pre-contact Aboriginal society. This was easily enough done since the Yir Yoront and Thaayorre groups that he observed

were still pursuing a way of life apparently little changed from the time when they still had undisputed possession of their lands. Despite the apparent continuity of cultural patterns, certain items of European manufacture were being incorporated into the daily life of the natives. Metal tools were increasingly replacing indigenous ones made of stone, bone and shell. Men were beginning to wear European clothing and tobacco was eagerly sought. European foodstuffs had acquired such a value that the abodes of the spirits of the dead overflowed with tea, sugar, flour and beef, as well as the traditional foodstuffs.

Sharp found that the attitudes of the reserve's bush-dwellers were highly ambivalent towards European artefacts. The quest for some of those items occasionally gave rise to erratic or non-traditional behaviour. For example, the craving for tobacco sometimes led to fights and men would permit their wives to prostitute themselves in a way that was quite outside the conventional bounds of kinship in order to obtain it. But ambivalence was also apparent in their dreams and in newly made myths that attempted to account for European artefacts within the framework of the totemic cosmology. Sharp noticed as well, a decrease in the performance of the annual increase ceremonies, and this in turn led him to speculate in one of his early papers (Sharp 1934a:408) whether even the mere knowledge of European food had produced a heterodoxy sufficient to undermine the bush people's faith in the efficacy of their rites.

Sharp developed this last idea further in his doctoral dissertation. In Sharp's view the totemic ideology, the "mental world of myth and belief", was the very cornerstone of the Aboriginal socio-cultural system. It mediated and maintained the relationship between the physical and social worlds and welded the whole "...into a cosmic, interdependent system in which the relation of the parts to each other becomes fixed and stabilized (Sharp 1937:52). There could be no change or alteration in any one of the elements of the system without a corresponding change in the others. Moreover, the system formed by the linkage of totemic ideology, the physical and the social worlds was

such that change could only be accommodated within very limited parameters. Novelty was capable of being absorbed in small amounts only. Beyond a certain level, changes were likely to set in motion processes of adjustment that would ramify throughout the entire system in such a way as to cause the whole system to collapse. To put the matter in Sharp's words, "...under extraordinary conditions, such a rigidly interdependent cosmic system proves dangerously brittle, so that if the structure receives a few solid jolts, the aboriginal will find his entire cosmos tumbling about his ears" (1937:54). Sharp (1937:53n) also said in a footnote in the same place:

It is just such a radical upset, of course, which must take place when the white man and his civilization suddenly appear within the bounds of the native cosmos and stay there. There occurs the introduction of unheard of elements into the aboriginal physical world and of conflicting beliefs into the mental world. Usually in such a case the required alteration in native cosmology is so great that the native cannot compass it. As a result of such disorganization of belief and environment, the order which reigned within the aboriginal social world also becomes confused and disorganized, and the entire system collapses, often carrying the society itself with it into oblivion, even when the society is beyond the range of European guns and poison.

Despite the protective shield the reserve afforded against the grosser effects of European contact, nonetheless Sharp thought that the Thaayorre and Yir Yoront groups were on the brink of just such a collapse. Sharp's (1940) analysis of demographic patterns among bush and mission Aborigines disclosed that both populations were declining and both at the same rate. The decline was not due to introduced diseases and Sharp implicated acculturative pressures.

In 1952, Sharp spelled out in detail how largely indirect acculturative pressures could precipitate cultural collapse. To Sharp the substitution of the European steel hatchet for the native edge-ground stone hatchet seemed to

epitomise the whole process. Accordingly, he chose that innovation in his paper, "Steel axes for stone age Australians", to illustrate the complex sequences of interaction between the physical, social and ideological worlds that seemed, ultimately, to auger cultural dissolution. I shall outline his argument briefly. He began by considering the role of the stone "axe" in technology, interpersonal conduct and as a symbol in the pre-contact systems of ideas, sentiments and values. (It should be noted that what Sharp termed "axes" are more appropriately labelled as hatchets, e.g. see Dickson 1981:1-23.)

At the technological level the "axes" were made and owned by men but were used by both men and women in a variety of essential tasks. Two things made the "axe" important in the patterning of interpersonal relationships. Firstly, the rough-outs or blanks from which the "axes" were made originated from quarries some 650 km to the south of the reserve and found their way to the western side of Cape York Peninsula via a network of trading-partner relationships. The blanks were exchanged for bamboo spears tipped with barbs made from sting-aree spines. Both spears and blanks progressively acquired a greater exchange value the further they moved from their sources of supply. The exchanges were made during large scale-formal ceremonies, and the trading that took place then undoubtedly helped to attract participants. Secondly, the older men, by virtue of their trading-partner relationships, monopolised the manufacture and ownership of the "axes" with the result that young men, women and children had to borrow an "axe" from an older male relative whenever they wanted to use one. Kinship statuses determined the patterns in which the "axes" passed from owner to borrower and back again. Thus the repeated borrowings of the "axes" helped define and maintain the essential nature of sex, age and kinship roles.

Symbolically, the "axe" had an important role in the system of ideas, sentiments and values. Its origin was accounted for by a myth which also linked it to one particular Yir Yoront clan, the Sunlit Cloud Iguana clan. Many of the members of that clan derived their personal names from mythical associations with the "axe", and only

men of that clan had the right to re-enact sequences from the myths involving it. Along with spears, spear-throwers and firesticks, the stone "axe" was an important symbol of masculinity and a symbol of a general androcentric bias expressing the precedence of male concerns and values over female concerns and values.

The steel hatchet was greatly prized and was probably traded into the area along traditional networks long before the reserve was established. During Sharp's period in the field, a few steel hatchets were being obtained from natives working on cattle stations to the south, but the main supply was provided by the missionaries at the Mitchell River mission. Steel hatchets could be bought at the mission store, they were distributed freely at mission festivals, they were handed out in payment for work performed, and they were given as gifts to anyone the missionaries thought deserving.

The introduction of the steel hatchet in large numbers raised no problems at the technological level. Its easily sharpened edge, its durability and the facility with which a handle could be replaced all made it a much more efficient substitute for the stone hatchet. In the system of interpersonal relationships, the steel hatchet did pose problems for the older men who had previously monopolised the manufacture and ownership of the stone "axes". By contrast with pre-mission times, it was the missionaries who controlled the main supply of steel hatchets. From the point of view of the older male natives, the distribution of steel hatchets as gifts, as deserving "rewards" and as wages, was much less predictable than their former trading relationships. Moreover, the distribution was indiscriminate. Steel hatchets were given to men and women, young and old alike and even to children. Ironically, it was the older men who tended to miss out in the distribution, because their mistrust of the European missionaries rarely placed them in a position to receive a steel hatchet.

The new ownership patterns resulting from the distribution of the steel hatchets meant a reversal of traditional borrowing patterns. Older men found themselves

having to borrow hatchets from younger and, sometimes, female kin. Sex, age and kinship roles became blurred and confused. The introduction of the steel hatchet brought a new sense of freedom to young men and to women. It meant a release from the unconscious stress inherent in kinship patterns employing androcentric values and age prestige to define dominant and subordinate roles. Further, the traditional trading-partner relationships fell into disarray, and men had fewer reasons to attend the large-scale ceremonies where the exchanges used to take place. In addition, Sharp argued, the disbursement of the steel hatchets by the missionaries brought all the bush people into a new and uncomfortable kind of relationship, one which put white people in the role of "boss". No pre-contact Aboriginal role approached the degree to which Europeans could exercise control over entire groups of people irrespective of age, sex and kinship ties.

This is a point worth noting and emphasising. There were, of course, "boss" roles in pre-settlement Edward River society. Stewards, betrothal-makers and clan ritual leaders all had authority to control and direct the actions of others. That authority, however, was circumscribed in terms of either the resources controlled or the numbers who fell under the ambit of authority. It was the fact that the scope of the European "boss" relationship and its hierarchical structure concentrated total control in a single person that was drastically new and uncomfortable to people accustomed to more egalitarian arrangements. In pre-settlement society, authority and the legitimate right to control the actions of others was diffused among many people, and most could expect to exercise some of the prerogatives of authority during their lifetimes.

The steel hatchet posed a major contradiction for the totemic ideology which in essence categorised and explained a cosmos that characteristically was fixed at the beginning of time. Despite the dogma of changelessness, the system was malleable to a certain extent and minor variations in the physical and social worlds which occurred in the course of normal life were capable of being

incorporated into the ideology. Sharp asked: Could the steel hatchet be so incorporated? He argued that it was difficult if not impossible. There was no distinctive origin myth to validate its assignment to a clan as the stone "axe" was assigned to the Sunlit Cloud Iguana clan. Should the steel hatchet belong to the Sunlit Cloud Iguana clan because it had the stone "axe" as a totem, or should it belong to the Ghost clan because many European things, and Europeans themselves, had already been assigned to it? There were too many such questions with which the myth-makers had to come to terms. Sharp went on to predict that the myth-making process would prove unable to cope with the myriad new traits being accepted into the bush natives' way of life. He saw them abandoning their totemic ideology entirely. "The steel axe, shifting hopelessly between one clan and the other", he said, "is not simply replacing the stone axe physically, but is hacking at the supports of the entire cultural system" (1952:88). The certainties of pre-settlement existence would be replaced by a future that was confused, uncertain and fraught with anxiety, causing perhaps symbolic aggression (such as increased levels of sorcery), or withdrawal and apathy (which Sharp witnessed among Aboriginal groups to the south), or hopefully a more realistic approach to their situation. "In such a situation", he concluded, "the missionary with understanding of the processes going on about him would find his opportunity to introduce religion and to help create the constitution of a new cultural universe" (1952:90)

6.5 The Edward River settlement 1938-67

After the abandonment of the Chillago Pocket outstation, Edward River people continued to make representations at Kowanyama for a mission of their own. With the consent of the local stewards, the settlement was finally established at its present site by J.W. Chapman. The site selected lay in a tract owned by Duck/Spear clan members and was called Pormpuraaw. Between 1938 and 1942 nearly all the bush-dwellers elected to settle down to a village

life. Most of the remaining bush Yir Yoront speakers went to live at Kowanyama. A few of them settled at the new Edward River mission which was composed largely of Thaayorre people and speakers of the various Wik dialects, although not a few of the Wik Nganchera were drawn into the orbit of the Aurukun mission.

Chapman had had a long association with the Mitchell River mission before he founded the present Edward River settlement. He had helped supervise the move from Trubanam to Kowanyama and for many years had been Kowanyama's superintendent. Before undertaking missionary work he had been a farmer. His practical knowledge of agriculture stood the Edward River community in good stead during its early years, since the intervention of World War Two and its associated austerity measures added a further strain on the already extremely limited resources of the Diocese of Carpentaria. Chapman, with the help of his newly settled villagers, planted gardens with potatoes, yams, taro, cassava and sugar cane to supplement the slender mission supply of flour, rice, tea, sugar and salt beef. He planted orchards of pawpaws, bananas, mangoes and custard apples and established a grove of coconut palms from all of which he hoped to produce commercial crops.

During the first decade of the mission's existence, fresh meat and fish had still to be obtained by hunting and fishing, since the mission's cattle herd had not reached a size capable of sustaining domestic killing. From time to time the people were encouraged to go out into the bush to exploit seasonal abundances and thus mitigate the drain on the mission's supply of foodstuffs.

Chapman managed the community's affairs single-handed for much of the time until 1950, when the Reverend R. Brown arrived to undertake the joint roles of chaplain and teacher. Before then, youngsters were sent from Edward River to the "dormitory" school at Kowanyama. During the 1950s the supply of skilled missionaries and material resources improved. By 1956 the reserve population was estimated at 273, and although some of the natives were described as "semi-nomadic" in the 1956 Department of Native

Affairs Annual Report, most of the mission's residents were living in palm-thatched houses, their children were attending the mission school, and cattle yards were being built under the supervision of a European cattle overseer.

In 1957 Chapman retired and the control of the mission was handed over to G.C. Pidsley. By that time the mission staff was much expanded and consisted of a book-keeper, a teacher/chaplain, a nurse-aide in the dispensary, a head stockman and a Church Army welfare worker. The availability of more funds and staff made it possible for the church to embark on a modest developmental programme to consolidate Chapman's pioneering labours. A token wage system was introduced to accustom the people to the use of money and to reduce their dependence on the mission ration system. All Aboriginal men and women who were willing to work were employed on a variety of jobs associated with the physical development of the mission and its cattle industry or with the supply of its services. Aspects of the ration system remained. Clothing, blankets and other items were still issued free, while infants and school children were supplied with breakfast and a midday dinner during school days. The maintenance of the village gardens lapsed as the variety of projects increased.

In the late 1950s the Anglican Church began to examine critically its achievements in the communities under its control on Cape York Peninsula. The earlier missionaries' hopes for independent and self-sufficient villagers were still a long way from realisation. The Aboriginal people at Edward River were heavily dependent on the missionaries and played a largely passive role in the organisation of routine village activities such as work allocation, health and hygiene and schooling. As the village grew in size, so did the missionaries' concern with problems of water supply and sanitation. The quaint thatch huts that housed the people of the settlement required constant maintenance and eventual rebuilding, since caterpillars invariably ate the thatch and termites weakened the house frames. Further, the earthen floors of the huts facilitated the transmission of parasites such as hookworm. Cash flowing

into the mission economy from the earnings of the few stockmen who were engaged on neighbouring pastoral properties and from the sale of mission cattle did little to meet the need for the kind of capital expenditure that would develop the village in a way that kept pace with the expectations of most Australians for such places. Without a substantial injection of outside funds, stagnation at poverty levels seemed the only possible future.

This depressing situation changed radically in January 1964 when cyclone Dora ravaged the lower western coast of Cape York Peninsula and razed the villages of Edward River and Kowanyama. The Queensland Government acted promptly to set aside funds to rehouse the people of both the devastated villages. Town plans were prepared by officers of the Department of Public Works and reconstruction commenced. The thatch houses were replaced with strongly constructed pre-fabricated three-bedroomed dwellings in the style of a conventional European bungalow. In 1967 in the midst of the rebuilding programme, the Anglican Church handed over the control of its settlements on Cape York Peninsula to the DAIA. This change of control inaugurated a quite different approach to the physical and social development of the Edward River community.

6.6 The Edward River settlement 1967-75

The DAIA as I noted above was guided in its approach to the "advancement" of Aboriginal communities by the general terms of the policy of assimilation. The Director of the DAIA in an article in Aboriginal Quarterly, a university student newspaper, in 1967 specified what "assimilation" meant in practical terms for communities like Edward River. Since this article contains the only clear statements concerning the DAIA's intentions at the time of the takeover of the Anglican missions, it is worth quoting at length.

The Department's policy is, simply stated: "to work itself out of a job". This will be achieved in a number of ways which might include:

1. Training of Aboriginal Queenslanders to take over and manage all of the functions necessary to maintain normal towns within Queensland;
2. Develop the economic viability of the reserves to such a degree that they can be converted into some form of organisation which will ensure a living standard for all of the residents;
3. Education and training of all community and reserve residents to the extent that they may choose to move into either rural or urban environments with suitable work opportunity, accommodation etc. and become integrated into the broad social strata of Queensland;
4. Reorientation of present reserve structures to enable them to be converted and owned by either people of Aboriginal racial origin or alternatively an admixture of all Queenslanders irrespective of racial origin.

...It is the desire of the Department that in the ultimate each of the reserves and towns will merge, no longer as special areas but as normal towns within a normal society in Queensland functioning on similar levels as all other towns...

(Killoran 1967:10-11)

As a plan it boldly set out the desirable end-states to be reached by both Aborigines and the settlements they occupied. No separate development of distinctly Aboriginal enclaves was envisaged. In the fullness of time, Aborigines were to have the same kinds of skills and knowledge, and the same sorts of freedoms exercised by other Queenslanders as they moved about in the mainstream society in search of places to work and live and rear their families. The settlements were intended to become townships open to all Queenslanders and integrated into the economic structure of their surrounding regions, just as any other township was. These goals were to be achieved firstly by supplying the settlements with housing and physical amenities similar to those found in conventional towns. Employment opportunities were to be created to provide an appropriate work environment in which training and education could take place.

Finally, it was hoped that the work opportunities created would themselves be related to the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency for each settlement.

When I commenced fieldwork at the Edward River settlement in 1968, the DAIA takeover had been in operation for a year. The officers of the Department pressed on with the housing programme and made plans for the provision of many other amenities, including a new hospital, primary school, store, administrative offices, a reticulated water supply and electricity. It was an ambitious community development programme that ensured there would be sufficient jobs available to maintain full employment for some time. A cash economy had been introduced, and the people were given total responsibility for managing their own cash incomes. Virtually all aspects of the previous ration system were eliminated with the exception that several unsupported women who were not entitled to any form of social service benefit were issued with rations weekly and provided with clothing.

On the surface, the people of Edward River adjusted cheerfully and responsibly to the changes, actual and proposed. In its external respects the settlement indeed appeared to be much like a country town, and a casual visitor might well be excused for believing that the cultural void predicted by Sharp was being admirably filled by the DAIA's plans for the settlement's development and the socio-cultural transformation of its inhabitants.

CHAPTER 7 SETTLEMENT ECONOMY 1938-75

7.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the physical and economic development of the Edward River settlement from its establishment in 1938 up until 1975. The next section deals largely with the founding of the mission and the growth of its economy. The three sections that follow focus on the period 1968-1975 after the DAIA had taken over control. They describe the village and its population, the employment opportunities open to the Aborigines on the settlement and the income such opportunities generated. I also survey the way in which the people of Edward River managed their cash incomes. The final section provides a broad overview of the impact of these changes on the Edward River people.

7.2 Beginnings

As I mentioned earlier, it was at the invitation of the natives themselves that J.W. Chapman made a second attempt to form a mission north of the Coleman River. He selected a site for the mission on the beach ridges some 400m from the beach itself and a little to the north of a creek which the locals now call Chapman River. The porous beach ridges contained good supplies of underground water that could be tapped easily with wells, and the soil in the swales between the ridges was fertile and capable of sustaining gardens. Chapman took up residence in 1938. A report (Sub-Department of Native Affairs 1939:31) on the settlement's founding noted:

The natives of this area are mostly nomadic but generally they are showing a desire to lead settled lives. They are very primitive in their ways, and a good deal of patience is needed with them.

Good headway has been made with building work and the clearing of land. Gardens have been planted, and the coming year should bring a good harvest.

The mission quickly attracted a nucleus of more or less permanent residents and Bishop Stephen Davies was greatly impressed when he visited it for the first time in 1939. He (Davies 1940:250) reported that the crops were growing well and that:

...the Queensland Aboriginal Department has now been able to send a Torres Strait man to this village as a school teacher where he will have from 30 to 40 children to teach. Eighteen months ago this would have been impossible.

During the war years the practice of publishing reports from individual missions lapsed, and it was not until 1947 that another official report (see Queensland Sub-Department of Native Affairs 1947) on Edward River's progress appeared. It was very optimistic:

Only a short time ago the natives of this area were quite wild, having neither houses nor clothes, and they obtained a livelihood from what they could hunt or gather from the bush. Now all is changed. They live in villages and obtain a good part of their food from the gardens and fish traps. The swing over from a nomadic to a more settled life has been remarkable, likewise their ability to learn English...

That the settlement survived at all was a testament to the dogged patience of Chapman himself and to the determination of the Edward River people to have their own mission. It was decidedly a self-help operation. The people laboured with Chapman in building the thatch huts that made up the dwellings, stores and other ancillary buildings of the village. These structures were made from the broad fronds of a local "cabbage tree" palm (Corypha elata) which were tied and battened to a hipped-roof house frame. Each house had a single entrance and an earthen floor covered by locally woven mats. While a good deal of physical effort was needed to cut and haul the thatch, the houses required few imported materials other than some nails and demanded no skills from the men who built them that were not already part of their

traditional technology. The mission gardens, store and fish trap could not provide a sustained supply of food all year round, and so the villagers regularly went bush to forage and hunt. The addition of fishing lines, hooks and wire-pronged spears significantly helped to increase fishing and hunting yields. The following extract from Chapman's diaries gives something of the flavour of the daily round of activities during this early period:

June 1940

- 1st Sent mail to Strathgordon. Two Aurukun boys also left with mail boys.
- 2nd Sunday
- 3rd "Bush school" nearing the end.
- 4th Bush ceremonies come to an end this morning. Cabbage plants put out.
- 5th H Butler of Strathgordon arrived 7.20 pm. Preparing to place aerodrome in order.
- 6th Butler left again this morning. Had well dug to supply
- 7th Had a days work on landing ground. 10 men at work.
- 8th People hunting. Self letter writing.
- 9th Sunday
- 10th Preparing land in swamp for potatoes
- 11th Still working land some potatoes planted.
- 12th Most of the people have gone north of the Edward on a hunting expedition.
- 13th Various odd jobs only about six men available. Some hunters returned this afternoon.
- 14th Preparing land and planting potatoes.

The mission was relatively isolated from other Europeans. Chapman maintained a daily wireless schedule with Thursday Island and the other missions and pastoral properties on the western side of Cape York Peninsula. Supplies arrived monthly in the Mission lugger, but apart from mail day visits from the Europeans on Strathgordon station, white faces were seen very infrequently. Although

Chapman had acquired a smattering of Koko Bera while at Kowanyama, he never did learn any of the languages of the Edward River reserve and he always referred to the mission residents by English names that he or others had bestowed on them. For most of the first decade at Edward River, Chapman had no mission support other than help from three Aboriginal men who had received an education at Kowanyama. One of these was a Yir Yoront man while the other two came from Thaayorre speaking clans. The Torres Strait Islander who had been promised as a teacher arrived in 1940, but he left not long after war broke out in the Pacific region.

During the years of Chapman's solitary tenure as superintendent of the Edward River mission, the subsistence needs of the settlement had depended as much on Aboriginal skill and input as they did on Chapman's agricultural expertise. However, by the time Piddsley, the missionary who replaced Chapman, took over from him, a change had taken place. European foodstuffs (e.g. beef, flour, sugar, tea, and milk powder) were distributed daily via a ration system and the Aboriginal contribution was much reduced compared with earlier years. The Church did not want to see a hand-out system develop and Piddsley was instructed to institute a token wage system. By this means anyone who worked for the mission in any capacity was paid a small amount for their efforts, in addition to receiving rations. Native handicrafts were also bought for later resale. The small sums earned in this fashion could then be spent on personal items such as tinned tobacco (hard plug tobacco was distributed with food rations) or dress lengths of material in the mission store. In the late 1950s the Church found the means to send more missionary staff, more equipment and materials, and most importantly, it began to implement a plan for the gradual development of the community. When the mission entered the 1960s it was firmly embarked on a variety of projects associated with the organisation of the reserve as a cattle property and with upgrading the physical resources of the village itself. This created a range of jobs, and many Aboriginal men became fencers and yard-builders, stockmen, vehicle drivers, plumber's and carpenter's assistants

and general labourers. Other men and women were employed in the store, the butchery, in the school, the dispensary and in the garbage and night-soil collection unit. At the same time a more thorough-going wage system was introduced which was directed primarily at reducing the villagers dependence on the ration system. Wage-earners were expected to use their wages to buy their food at the mission store. It was, however, still a token wage system rather than one based on effort, skill and job responsibility. Rates of pay were allocated according to wage-earners' domestic situations. On the mission wage sheets married workers received higher rates of pay than single workers. If a married man's wife also worked, then he received only the single rate. Those who had family responsibilities but no jobs were classed as "indigents" and given rates of pay similar to those of single men. The objective was, of course, to distribute limited funds as widely as possible in order to give the maximum number of people a cash income of some sort to manage. Clothing, blankets and other items were still issued free since the wages paid were only sufficient to meet basic needs. As well, infants and school children were provided with two meals a day (breakfast and midday dinner). By 1966, the year prior to the Government take-over, average weekly male earnings at Edward River were slightly less than one quarter of the Queensland State Basic Wage of the time, although, obviously, the Aboriginal residents of Edward River were scarcely able to make such statistical comparisons for themselves.

All the changes introduced by the Church administration were, in retrospect, regarded as desirable by the Aborigines. If there were occasional frustrations and irritations, people chose not to talk about them when they recalled the years under the Church administration after Chapman retired. Instead, they remembered with approval the introduction of wages, the arrival of the first truck and the gradual growth of the physical resources of the settlement and the surrounding countryside. Men pointed with pride to the things they had helped to build, and Edward River people began to compare their living conditions with

those obtaining in Aurukun in the north and Kowanyama in the south. They still do this, for firmly embedded in their ideas about Edward River is the notion of its progressive evolution towards some desirable end-state in partnership with Europeans. But if the partnership began with equal contributions from Aborigines and white people at the outset, its character changed as the mission staff introduced the Edward River people to new technologies and materials and introduced work schedules quite different from those that determined the gardening and the hunting and fishing of the early years. The new timetables were symbolised by the mission bell that tolled the start of the working day and became the pulse to which daily activities were synchronised. The Aborigines were thus led inevitably into a situation of almost total dependence upon the mission staff, as the latter assumed their roles as the change agents of a dominant donor culture. The Aborigines were firmly cast into the subordinate role of culture-recipients absorbing what the dominant culture had come to offer them.

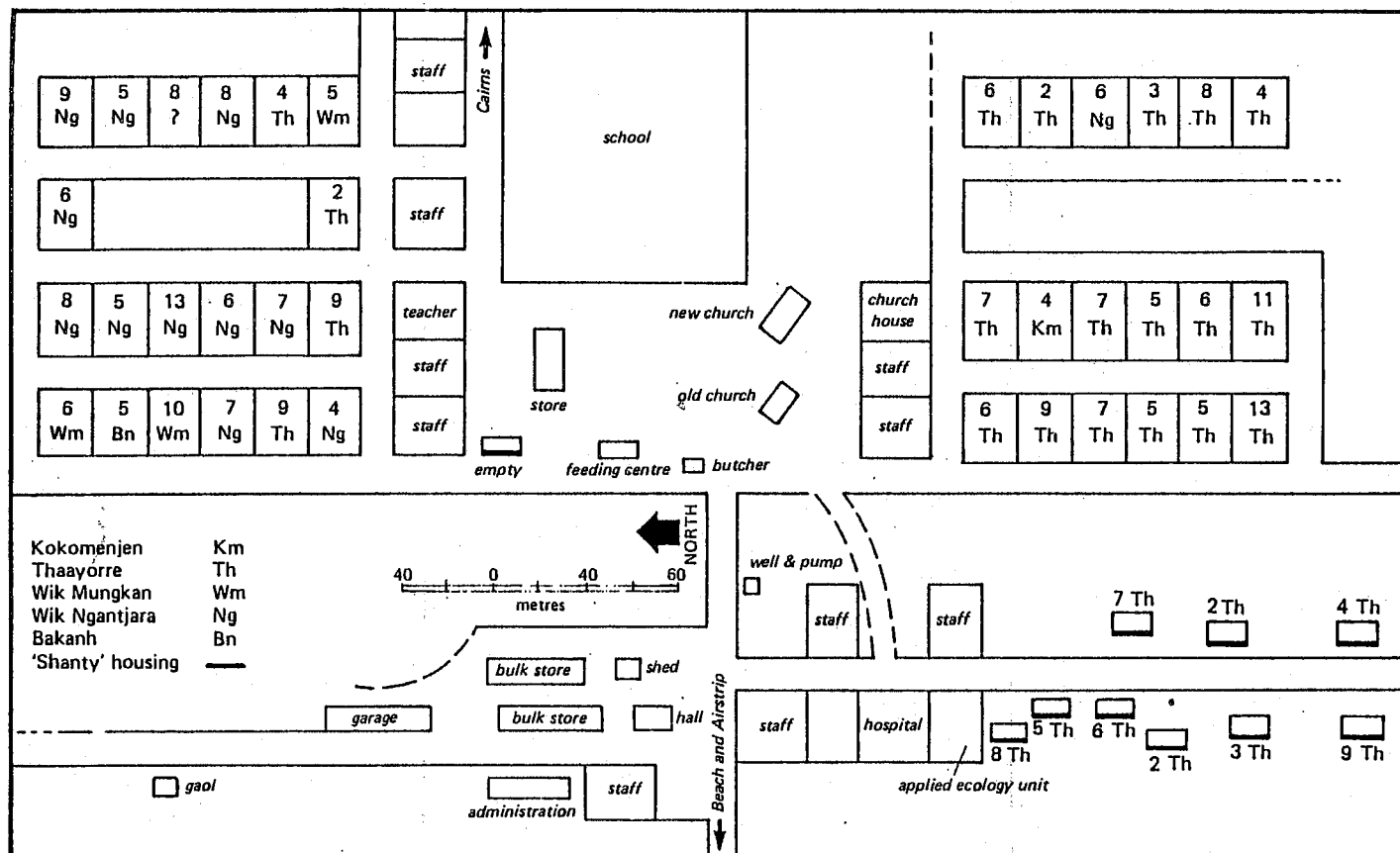
7.3 Settlement and Population 1968-75

The government's plan for Edward River called for a township that was divided into two halves by a central area containing staff houses, a school, a store, workshops, offices and other administrative and welfare facilities. By the time I arrived at the settlement in 1968, the first permanent expressions of the plan, the houses, were already in place. In contrast to the relatively haphazard arrangement of the thatch huts of the mission era, the new government houses stood on equal sized allotments in neat rows along well-defined streets. The houses were pre-fabricated in mass lots and during my stay in the field were of two types. Those built between 1965 and 1969 were set on cement bases. They had large louvred floor-to-ceiling windows and a joint kitchen-dining-living area containing a sink, food storage compartments and a wood-burning stove. Each house had three bedrooms which were generously supplied with built-in cupboards. Bathing, laundry and toilet facilities were housed

in a separate block alongside the main dwelling, to which it was joined by a cement path. The houses built after 1969 also possessed three bedrooms but were seated on stumps above ground level and had wooden, not cement, floors. These later houses also contained indoor bathrooms and provision for flush toilets when sewerage systems were finally installed. They had less cupboard space but they did possess a covered porch. All dwellings were strongly constructed from aluminium panels fastened to iron frames. Some of the houses were assembled by local men under the direction of a DAIA carpenter, but most were erected by contractors from outside the community. Staff houses although larger were similar in design. The houses, ideally, were meant to be occupied by a family of no more than six. In order to cater for the needs of pensioners, several one-bedroom duplex units were also built.

Map 7.1 shows the general layout of the Edward River settlement as it was in 1972. At this time those who were regarded as permanent residents of Edward River numbered somewhat in excess of 290. Figure 7.1 shows the age and sex structure of the population as it was in the population survey I conducted in July 1972. Map 7.1 also shows the distribution of this population between the newly erected houses and the shanty houses that were thrown up as temporary accommodation after cyclone Dora. Clearly some degree of overcrowding was present, as 45% of the new houses contained in excess of six people and much of this overcrowding was caused by several families sharing the same house.

The new houses were rented to the residents at the relatively low sum of \$3.00 per week. I estimated then that a more realistic rental based on cost of construction would be nearer \$10.00 per week. For each family, or group of families, occupying a dwelling there was a household head, usually male, who was officially responsible for the payment of the rent. There was little change in tenancy patterns except when a family that was part of a household moved out into a house of its own, or when a death occurred. Death behaviour will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. Occupants identified strongly with their houses. They referred



Map 7.1 Lay-out of Edward River Settlement 1972, showing number of inhabitants and land/linguistic affiliation of each household head.

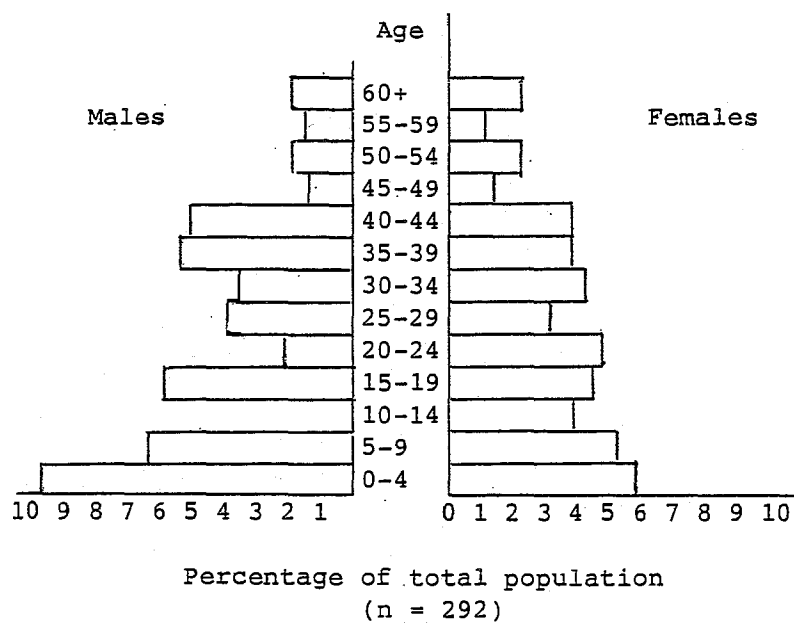


Figure 7.1 Age and sex distribution of the Aboriginal population of Edward River Community, July 1972.

to the house and its yard as their "reserve", and visitors who were not kindred of the household members were careful to seek permission before entering a house.

The majority of the population was composed of Thaayorre and Wik Nganchera clans. There was a sprinkling of people who belonged to Yir Yoront (or Kokomenjen as they were called locally), Bakanh and Wik Mungkan clans. With the exception of the Wik Mungkan and Bakanh men and women, all others could demonstrate that they had primary rights to land within the reserve boundaries. In Map 7.1, I have plotted land/linguistic affiliations by household head. The distribution is not a random one. It shows clear clusterings. By accident or by design the plan of the new village maintained traditional social cleavages that had manifested themselves in the mission settlement and which were based on pre-settlement associations. In church times the settlement had contained three distinct residential clusters or neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods, known as "Kokomenjen side", "Thaayorre side" and "Mungkan side", were laid out in a pattern that reflected the local origins of their core membership. "Kokomenjen side" had as its core, a group of Yir Yoront speakers whose clan estates lay below the Melaman River. Thaayorre-speaking people who hailed from the country between the Melaman and Edward Rivers made up "Thaayorre side". "Mungkan side" consisted largely of those whose estates lay between the Edward and Holroyd Rivers. Not long after Chapman's departure, internal feuding caused a number of the Yir Yoront families to re-settle at Kowanyama, and the village resolved itself into two neighbourhoods, "Thaayorre side" and "Mungkan side", which the town plan and the house allocation processes of the present settlement, together, have perpetuated.

Village residents identified strongly with their particular residential section. In private conversation the men of one neighbourhood tended to disparage the men of the other, attributing to them many iniquities, ranging from slovenliness, meanness and dirtiness, through to insobriety, pugnacity, sorcery and even incest. Work gangs tended to be composed of members from one side or the other, but rarely

both. Each neighbourhood maintained its own gambling ground (not shown in the map), which was patronised by residents of both sides on alternate days. The division was maintained spatially during public meetings, at the picture theatre, in church and could be seen even in the order in which the residents did their shopping in the store. It was maintained in death as well, since each side had its own burial ground. The division also acted to regulate access to local food and material resources. The people of "Mungkan side" who had no primary or secondary rights of access to the Duck/Spear tracts that surrounded the village, tended to use the beach and tracts north of the village in which to fish and to gather firewood and bush materials such as gums and palm leaf for twine making. "Thaayorre side" people tended to use the southern side of the settlement similarly.

I have said enough at this point to indicate that the division of the Aboriginal housing into two sectors did much to encourage a vigorous identity based on neighbourhood and traditional affiliations. This is not to say that no interaction took place between the residents of each sector. Each side took a keen interest in the public affairs of the other side, especially disputes. Not a few people had kindred living on both sides and this accounted for much mutual visiting, especially by younger men and women. Older women rarely visited the other side except for very solemn reasons to do with deaths and ceremonies. Older men visited somewhat more frequently, but when they did the occasions were likely to be those of "business" and marked by formality rather than sentiment and personal attachment. In a real sense, each side competed with the other and I shall highlight this competitiveness in the appropriate places in later sections and chapters, for it pervaded much of the small-scale politics of the village.

The splitting of the township into two halves by an administrative zone also created a third neighbourhood. This neighbourhood was formed by the staff houses that were built around the periphery of the central zone and faced inwards towards each other. (Staff households formed a distinct cultural enclave of their own, but I shall defer a

description of the staff community and its relationship to the Aboriginal neighbourhoods until Chapter 11.) Strictly speaking, the term "staff" applied only to the employees of the DAIA. When Aboriginal people used the term they extended it to cover both DAIA employees and all other white residents. I shall follow Aboriginal practice here. The DAIA staff usually comprised a manager, several administrative clerks, a storekeeper, stock overseer, carpenter, mechanic, liaison officer, two nursing sisters and a general overseer of works, together with the families of these people if they were married. The non-DAIA staff comprised the chaplain, the school teachers, the members of the Applied Ecology Unit who were in charge of the development of the crocodile farm, as well as others whose official business required them to be present in the community (e.g. inspectors, contractors and researchers). Legally, the houses of the white residents were considered excised from the reserve proper. The social importance of this provision was that liquor could be consumed in staff houses whereas non-staff Aboriginal residents could legally only consume liquor in places and at times specified by the Director of the DAIA. There was frequent staff turnover due to holidays, resignations and transfers. The settlement rarely had its full complement of staff members. At any one time approximately half of the staff members were married people who had brought their families to live with them. On average, the white staff numbered about 25 including wives and children.

7.4 Income and employment 1968-75

As well as providing houses, the introduction of a cash economy was also a key strategy in the DAIA plan for the assimilation of Aboriginal reserve residents. The DAIA's annual report of 1969 made the following comments on the introduction of a cash economy on all the reserves under its control:

To ensure the successful continuity of a policy directed towards assimilating Aboriginal Queenslanders, within the

ordinary social structure, it is recognized that on Community areas the economic life of the people must, of necessity, be developed in a manner which creates a sound awareness and understanding of the complex process associated with home economy. The problem of effectively introducing this change of economic life on all communities has been approached by removing the free ration and clothing issue system, increasing rates of remuneration, and creating an incentive to pursue labour.

In the majority of cases, family income is now produced solely on a cash basis and the system is appropriately referred to for administrative purposes as the "cash economy system". The transition is proceeding with satisfactory results and appears to have been well received by assisted Community residents.

(DAIA 1969:8)

There were five regular sources of income available to the Aboriginal residents of the Edward River community during 1968-75. These were welfare payments, employment off the reserve, employment by the DAIA, reserve employment by non-DAIA organisations and finally, self-employment. In the following subsections I shall discuss each of these sources of community income.

7.4.1 Welfare payments

Prior to 1968 welfare payments were credited to the recipients' Departmental passbooks. The passbooks were part of a banking system maintained by the DAIA on behalf of Aborigines under their control. The Departmental passbook system allowed DAIA officers to exercise a degree of supervision and control over the cash expenditures of Aborigines. For example, withdrawals from accounts were limited to no more than \$40.00 per day without the express approval of the Director, and DAIA officers had to receive some assurance that the money was to be spent for some "worthwhile" purpose. During 1968 welfare payment cheques were sent directly to their

recipients, and at Edward River community residents were offered the choice of depositing them in their Departmental passbooks or in the newly introduced Commonwealth Bank savings accounts, which were free of restrictions governing withdrawals. Benefits paid included child endowment and aged, invalid and widows' pensions. In total, they made a variable but important contribution to the community's cash income resources. In early 1970, welfare payments accounted for approximately 33% of community income. By July 1972 the relative contribution to total community income from this source had declined to approximately 20% due to increases in wage rates paid by the DAIA to community workers during the intervening period.

Unemployment benefits and single mothers' benefits rarely, if ever, figured as sources of income. Only those who had worked at award rates for non-DAIA employers were entitled to receive unemployment benefits. DAIA employees were classified as being "in training" rather than in regular employment. When men did return from award rate employment there were considerable communication problems and administrative complexities in dealing with the Cairns office that administered the payment of unemployment benefits in the region. Potential recipients not only had to document their eligibility to receive the benefits, but they also had to be able to demonstrate that they were actively seeking other employment. Edward River's isolation from regular employment avenues made this difficult. Single mothers' benefits were never paid until after 1975 simply because husbands were quickly found for girls who became pregnant.

Invalid, aged and widows' pensions were highly valued because they provided, by community standards, a substantial income without the necessity to be employed. The grounds upon which such pensions were awarded were not always clearly understood and occasionally there was a mismatch between an individual's conception of her/his eligibility for benefits and the official conditions governing them. For example, men and women whose children were adults and who were by traditional norms "old" often felt that they were entitled to a pension, when legally they had not yet reached, according

to settlement records, the age insisted upon by white law (60 years for women and 65 years for men). Some bitterness was caused among several women when it was learned that widows' pensions could only be paid to one wife of a deceased male. The other wives of a polygynous union were not eligible to apply as the law stood then. There was also a notion that pensions were granted in perpetuity, and it was not uncommon when an old pensioner died for one of the deceased's kin to make application to the administration to inherit the pension. These sources of confusion and misunderstanding lessened as people came to understand the basis upon which welfare payments were granted through experience with real cases.

7.4.2 Employment off the reserve

At least half of the adult male workforce had worked off the reserve on at least one occasion. Off-reserve employment was provided largely by the cattle stations of Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf country. A few men had worked on sheep stations further to the south and one man had been a police tracker and even a wolfram miner during his outside working life.

During 1968-75 arrangements for off-reserve employment were administered by the DAIA staff. When they received requests via the radio network from cattle properties seeking Aboriginal stockmen, they arranged for their recruitment, formally negotiated contracts at award rates (up until 1972) and generally were careful to ensure that remittances for dependents were sent back regularly to the settlement. The staff also handled the men's taxation liabilities when they fell due. Managerial staff encouraged men to seek outside employment partly because it was a sign that the DAIA policy of assimilation was seen to be working, but also because it relieved the strain on the settlement's annual allocation for wages, thereby helping to maintain conditions of full employment. Settlement staff usually tried to send their most reliable workers into employment off the reserve.

The general impression I obtained from pastoralists

was that Edward River men as a group were temperamental employees and liable to walk off the job. This had undoubtedly happened in a few cases. Nonetheless, a number of the men had reputations as sturdy and reliable workers and they were often specifically asked for when stations were recruiting labour. In the case of Strathgordon, the station that lay along the eastern boundary of the reserve, first preference in employment was always shown to the Bakanh men whose traditional affiliations lay within the station's borders. Their local knowledge was an obvious asset to the station management.

Within the Aboriginal community, stockwork was a highly regarded and glamorous occupation. Most lads looked forward to the time when they too could don the high-heeled riding boots and leather leggings, the narrow-waisted shirts and all the other paraphernalia that were part of the Aboriginal stockman's gear and travel to distant stations, earn fat cheques and return to spend them with swaggering ostentation at the settlement.

Despite the prestige, there were drawbacks to stockwork. For most Peninsular and Gulf cattle stations there was a long stand-down period because little work could be done during the wet season's quagmire conditions. As well, the demand for labour varied with the export price for beef, and it was not unusual for properties to cease mustering, branding and drafting stock altogether when prices were too low. A commitment to stockwork usually meant giving up long periods of family life since most stations provided for men only and had no quarters for the families of married men. Certain pastoral properties were notoriously tardy payers, and it could be several months after their dismissal before men received their full wages. Men who returned to the settlement with large bank balances at the end of the season often had to wait some months before they could obtain a job with the DAIA and get themselves on the payroll. One manager frankly told me that he was deliberately forcing some returned stockmen to live off their savings in order to stretch his limited wages budget to run the full year. By 1972, many of the men with sound reputations as stockmen

turned down offers of outside employment feeling that the larger amounts they could earn in a brief period as stockmen did not offset the advantages of a regular income at the settlement and being with their own families. Undoubtedly, rising settlement wage levels had much to do with these decisions.

Most Edward River men went to off-reserve employment from the settlement and returned directly to it at the conclusion of their contracts. A handful of men stayed away for several years at a time living during the off-season on country reserves such as those at Coen, Normanton, Laura and Chillagoe. Their affairs were looked after by local DAIA officers or their representatives (usually police sergeants). During the 1950s, one Wik Mungkan man from the Kendall River had made such a success living off the reserve that he amassed sufficient capital to provide himself with his own mustering plant and was undertaking contract mustering on Peninsular properties, even employing European stockmen to help count cattle for him. He gave it up when marriage to an Edward River woman and family responsibilities persuaded him that a settled life on the mission had more advantages for his growing family than the roving life of a contract musterer. Only two men had ever left the Edward River reserve to take up permanent employment and residence in the outside world. One of them earned his living in the pastoral industry. The other man's entry into the outside world deserves description. As a result of a dispute with Chapman he had been banished from the reserve on a removal order (see Chapter 10, p. 519). He was in his early twenties when this happened and the charge upon which his removal was based was a trumped-up one, so people told me. At various times he worked in the cattle, pearling and sugar industries and at one stage undertook preliminary training in the Presbyterian ministry. When I knew him during 1968-73, he lived in Cairns and was employed as a railway fettler. In Cairns, his house (or rather, his series of rented houses) provided a focal point and place of accommodation for people from Edward River, Aurukun and Kowanyama. Those who stayed with him soon learned that life outside the settlement was one of high costs, especially

regarding rent, food and transport. When people compared life on the settlement with life off the reserve they referred to this man's circumstances in making their comparisons. Most came to the conclusion that life on the settlement was better.

7.4.3 Employment by the DAIA

The major source of income for community residents was provided by the DAIA itself. Most adult workers were employed by the Department in a number of areas associated with the provision of community services and with the physical development of the reserve and settlement. From the time the DAIA had assumed control, wage rates had risen quite substantially in comparison with the levels paid in mission times (see Figure 7.2). However, average earnings were well below minimum levels obtaining in Queensland, although low rents, subsidised retail store prices and a wide range of free health-care services made the real income of Edward River residents higher than their wages might have indicated.

In justifying the payment of below award rates the DAIA argued that to wean reserve Aborigines away from a dependence on a ration system, it was more important to give all adults the chance to earn and manage income rather than to employ a limited number of workers operating under the employment conditions and productivity expectations of the normal Australian economy. As the Annual Report of 1969 pointed out:

With the change from a free ration issue to a cash economy basis for all persons who seek to obtain sustenance within a community, it is not possible to assure all residents and prospective residents of full employment at an Award rate of pay. Not only is this uneconomical but it is virtually impossible of achievement when one considers a population density in relationship to a Reserve area and there is no doubt that the residents of Reserves, with their growing populations of younger people, must look to the outside world for future employment opportunity and for improved

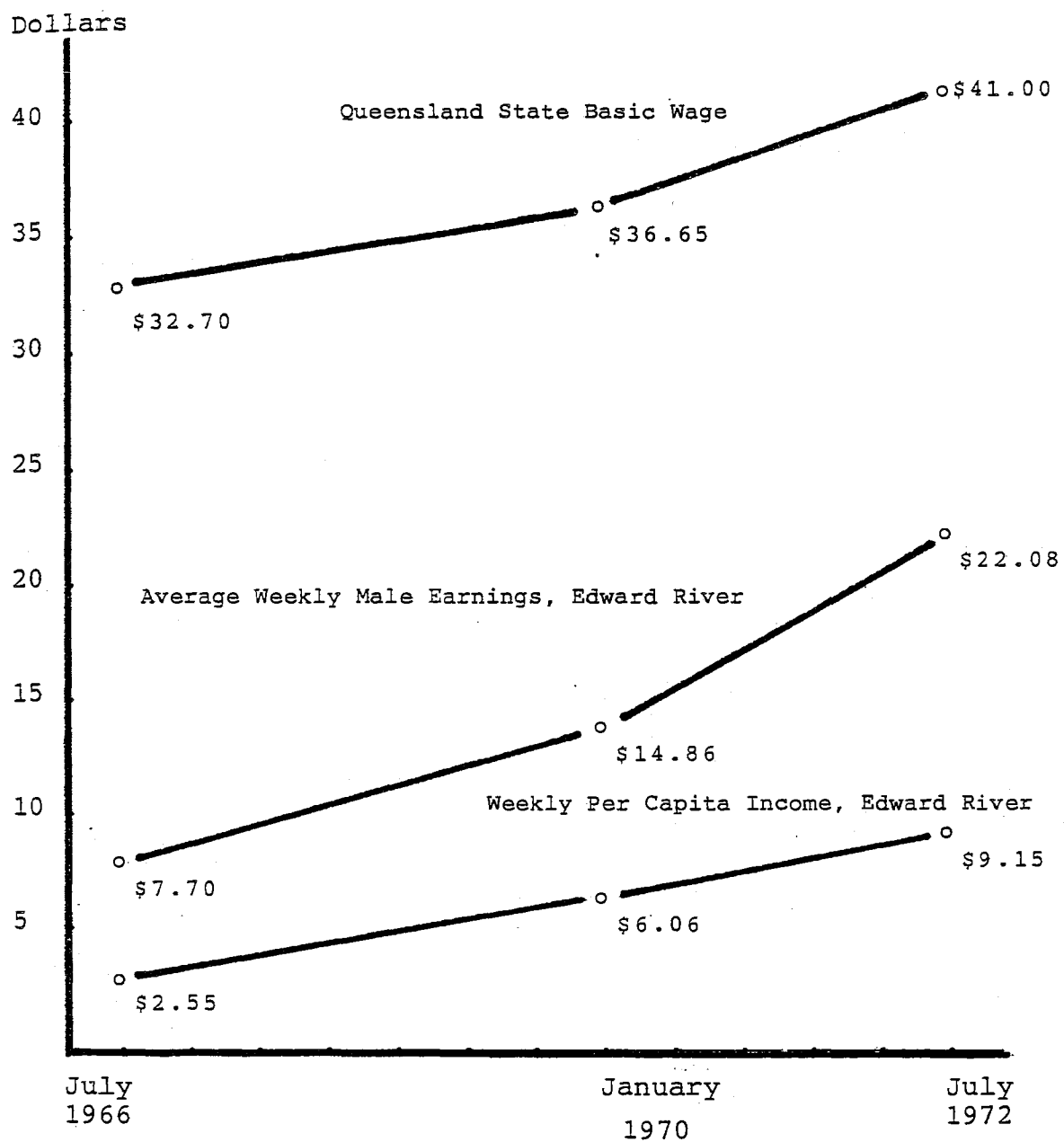


Figure 7.2 Average male weekly earnings and weekly per capita income, 1966, 1970, 1972, Edward River.

opportunity for their children, who are progressing academically to a standard not previously reached by their parents. (DAIA 1969:8)

The last sentence of the above statement also seems to imply that the higher rates of pay obtaining in the outside world would attract competent workers from the reserves, thus relieving population pressure in the communities and promoting the Department's policy of assimilation. Clearly the payment of award wages on reserves would not encourage emigration from reserve settlements into the wider Australian community.

The reserves were also deemed to be "training and pre-employment establishments" (DAIA 1970:8), which carried the implication that settlement workers were receiving training allowances rather than wages because they were either not competent, ready or qualified to receive full wages. The Department made much of its training programmes.

In Departmentally sponsored areas local labour resources are used to the maximum possible extent in essential Community services, under planned training programmes, and indeed in the many administrative, technical, medical and general functions so essential in preserving the status quo of a well regulated and developing Social Community. (DAIA 1971:3)

The employment policy of the DAIA for Edward River was conditioned by its overall plan for all settlements under its control. The plan involved the simultaneous implementation of three strategies:

1. the development of the physical and economic resources of settlement and reserve;
2. the introduction of training programmes;
3. the "cash economy".

In response to these strategies, the adult population would develop work skills and acquire the ability to manage cash incomes responsibly. They would be transformed into a workforce capable of being employed in either the mainstream economy under normal industry conditions, or alternatively, being employed under similar conditions in an Edward River settlement whose potential had been developed into economic self-sufficiency at a standard of living comparable with that of country towns elsewhere in Australia. The linkage between the implementation of these strategies and their anticipated responses is diagrammed in Figure 7.3.

In this subsection, I shall focus on how far the DAIA had gone in the years between 1968 and 1975 in developing the physical and economic resources of the reserve, in instituting training programmes and in increasing work-skills. The distribution of cash incomes and their management I shall leave for Section 7.5.

By 1968, the post-cyclone programme for the reconstruction of the Edward River settlement had gone part of the way towards providing it with the physical amenities appropriate to a "normal country town". For those involved in the planning, the needs of the settlement were many and obvious. When I commenced fieldwork in 1968, 28 prefabricated houses had been built and occupied, but more than 30% of the population was still living in temporary dwellings made of palm-leaves or corrugated iron. A six bed hospital and dispensary, and a school of four classrooms met the community's health and educational requirements. There was a desperate need for more bulk storage space (especially to handle wet season supplies) and for mechanics' and builders' workshops. The retail store, a pre-cyclone relic of the ration system, ill-suited the requirements of the new cash economy with its emphasis on individual choice. Perishable goods could not be kept since both the retail store and butcher shop lacked refrigeration. A few houses (mostly staff) had kerosene refrigerators, while kerosene lamps provided lighting for all homes except a small cluster of staff homes linked to a generator. A 240 volt power supply was high on the list of Edward River priorities. Although a

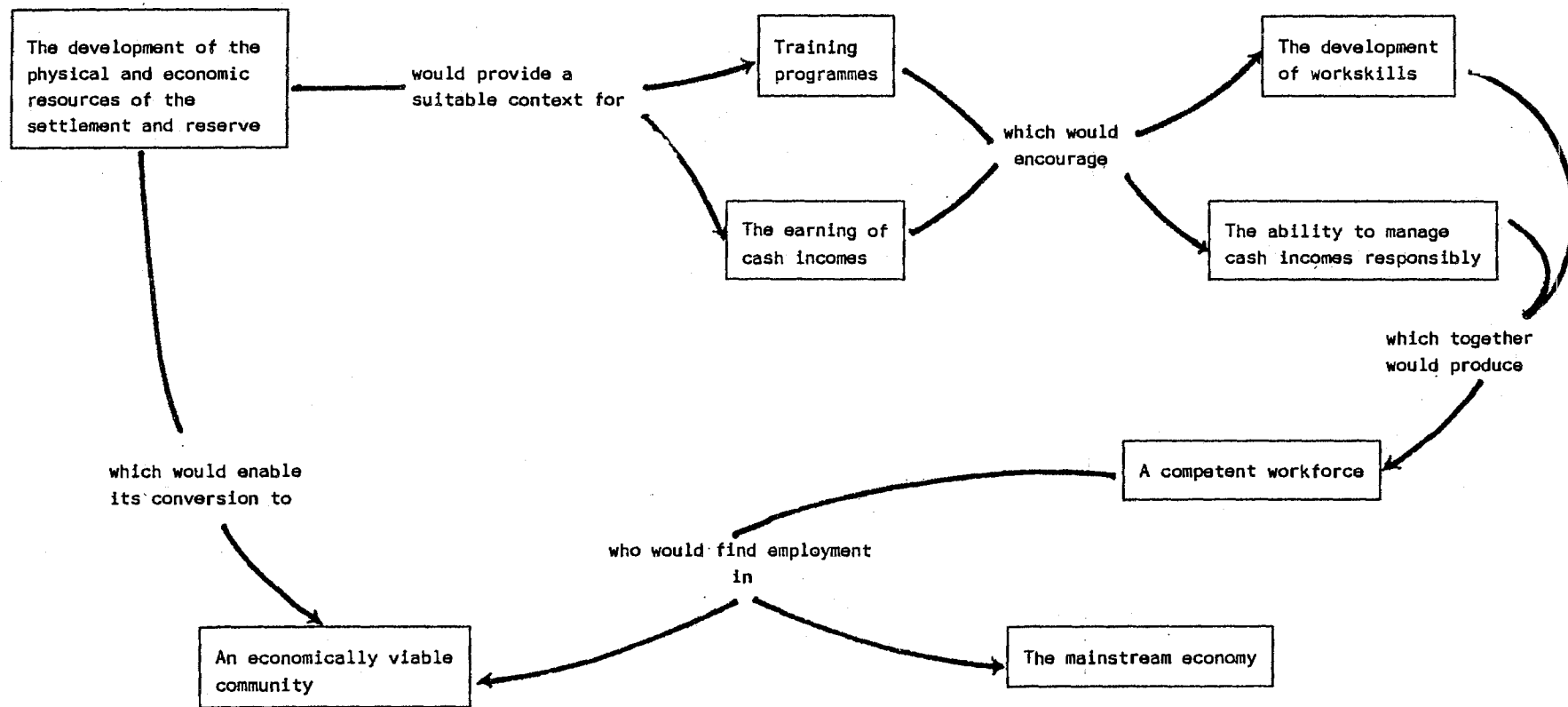


Figure 7.3 A schematic diagram outlining the DAIA strategy for the development of the Edward River reserve and its Aboriginal workforce.

water supply was laid on to all houses, the lack of suitably sized reservoirs made it an intermittent one. Additionally, the water was pumped from an open well in the centre of the community and constituted a potential health hazard due to possible pollution or fouling. There was no community hall and the church was a galvanised iron shed, more like a warehouse than a place of worship. The administrative offices were dingy and cramped. Only three of the eight staff houses were modern in style. The others were all, to a greater or lesser degree, inadequate as tropical dwellings in the 1970s.

In 1968 there was therefore a comprehensive portfolio of developmental projects for the community capable of providing employment and training opportunities for the Edward River people. The rate and order in which they were undertaken depended on a complex interplay between the availability of funds, the priorities of Edward River and other communities under DAIA control, the presence of personnel and the logistics of supply. Decisions concerning each year's expenditures and operations emerged out of consultation between the administrative staff of Edward River and senior officers of the DAIA head office in Brisbane. The Edward River Aboriginal Council was supposed to assist the staff to articulate local needs in the settlement. After 1972 an Advisory Council made up of the elected representatives of Aboriginal and Islander communities, through their access to the Director of the DAIA and the Minister in charge of the Department, provided input in determining priorities and approving new projects annually. Once projects were decided upon, and annual budgets allocated for communities, the expenditure of public monies was closely scrutinised by the Auditor General's Department. The administrative complexities of the operations were compounded by the annual wet season, whose rains made roads impassable and halted the flow of goods and materials for six months at a time.

Notwithstanding the problems of scheduling, by the end of 1975 the Edward River people could point, with some pride, to a substantial improvement in the quality of the settlement's structures and amenities. The number of modern

Aboriginal dwellings had increased to 40. The housing for white staff had increased to 14. Good supplies of artesian water had been located, and a decent and unlimited water supply was established. A new dental clinic, a lavishly equipped hospital and other ancillary buildings had replaced the old hospital. There was a new primary school complex, a library and a kindergarden. New slaughter yards had been built together with a butcher shop and cold room. The old mission retail store was replaced by a larger, counter service style store. This in turn was replaced by an even larger store with more customer area. Older buildings had been converted to new uses. The former school was shifted to become the new administrative block, the mission retail store became the community hall and the former (1968) manager's house became a guest house for visitors and contractors. The old church had been replaced by an airy concrete brick structure that had been built with the help of voluntary labour. There was a substantial generating plant which supplied a system of street lighting and electricity to all the staff houses and public amenities. The following year would see it connected to the rest of the houses in the reserve. Plans were in hand for the construction of a new canteen, for replacing the last of the "shanty housing" and for the construction of a sewerage system.

Compared with the physical development of the settlement, the income earning potential of the reserve was being realised much more slowly. One obvious source of income was to continue to develop the reserve as a cattle property. During 1968-75 pastoral activities were concentrated mainly in the southern half of the reserve. A stock improvement programme was instituted to upgrade the quality of the breeding stock by introducing Brahman and selected strains of British breeds. Fences began to snake over the plains, a number of yards were built and several dams sunk. The size of the cattle herd showed a satisfying increase. The herd on the controlled range grew from 1000 head in 1968 to nearly 4000 in 1975 despite the fact that all the beef requirements of the community were supplied by the herd and that small drafts were sent off each year to other DAIA pastoral holdings

for fattening and eventual sale. One stock overseer's estimate put the ultimate carrying capacity of the reserve at somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 head.

A less obvious source of income, but one which excitingly, promised a great earning potential was the establishment of a crocodile farm. In other parts of the world saltwater crocodiles (Crocodylus porosus) bred in captivity for their hides had helped to build multi-million dollar industries. The original impulse to set up the crocodile farm came from Dr H. R. Bustard of the Australian National University. Under his direction a special unit called the Applied Ecology Unit in conjunction with the DAIA began a pilot project at Edward River in 1971. By 1975 the scheme was still in its infancy. Much had yet to be learnt about the behaviour of crocodiles and a good deal of construction was necessary in order to establish rearing pens and a controlled breeding range.

Within the settlement the responsibility for organising and orchestrating most of each year's work schedules lay with the community's manager. Only the activities involved in the pastoral operation and the crocodile farm were not directly under the manager's control. The powers of the manager and his staff with respect to employment were officially defined in the community By-Laws as follows:

EMPLOYMENT

1. All able-bodied persons over the age of 15 years residing within the Community/Reserve shall unless otherwise determined by the Manager perform such work as is directed by the Manager or person authorised by him.
2. Community work, i.e. work performed under the direction of the Manager, shall be performed between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Provided that in special circumstances such work shall be performed as and when required by the Manager, but shall not exceed 40 hours in any week.
3. A person included in any working gang shall not leave his job without the permission of the Overseer-in-Charge unless urgent circumstances compel him to do so, in which case he shall notify the Overseer as soon as possible.

4. A person included in any working gang who fails to report for work shall within half an hour of the time appointed for the commencement of such work notify or cause to be notified the Overseer-in-Charge of his inability to work and shall furnish a good and sufficient reason for his absence. If sickness is the reason for his absence he should report forthwith to the Hospital or Outpatients' Section for medical attention.

(Edward River By-Laws 1968:4-5)

Officially, work was organised in terms of a hierarchical structure like that charted in Figure 7.4. The Aboriginal workforce was divided into a number of occupational sets or work gangs, one or more of which was under the control of a member of the white staff. Most occupational sets were divided into levels that reflected (supposedly) the degree of training, skill and responsibility of the members of the set. Thus the building gang was divided into a group composed of a senior carpenter, assistant carpenters and junior carpenters, whilst the stock gang consisted of a stock overseer's assistant, a senior stockman, ordinary stockmen, junior stockmen and a cook. Rates of pay were geared to these occupational levels. In 1972 wage rates varied between \$33.00 and \$14.00 for a 40 hour working week. The average weekly rate was \$21.64, while the modal weekly rate was \$22.00.

In practice though, the composition of work gangs reflected things other than white staff attributions of levels of expertise and responsibility in the Aboriginal workforce. An analysis of work gang composition over 3 years shows that it was strongly influenced by settlement neighbourhood ties. Nearly every permanent work gang was made up almost entirely of related men from the same "side" of the village. Men sometimes stated that they preferred to work in groups that were composed of kindred, or "all family" as they expressed it. Even when fresh work gangs were formed by white staff, a subtle filtering process involving resignation and recruitment soon reduced its composition to a majority of men from one neighbourhood. However, there were

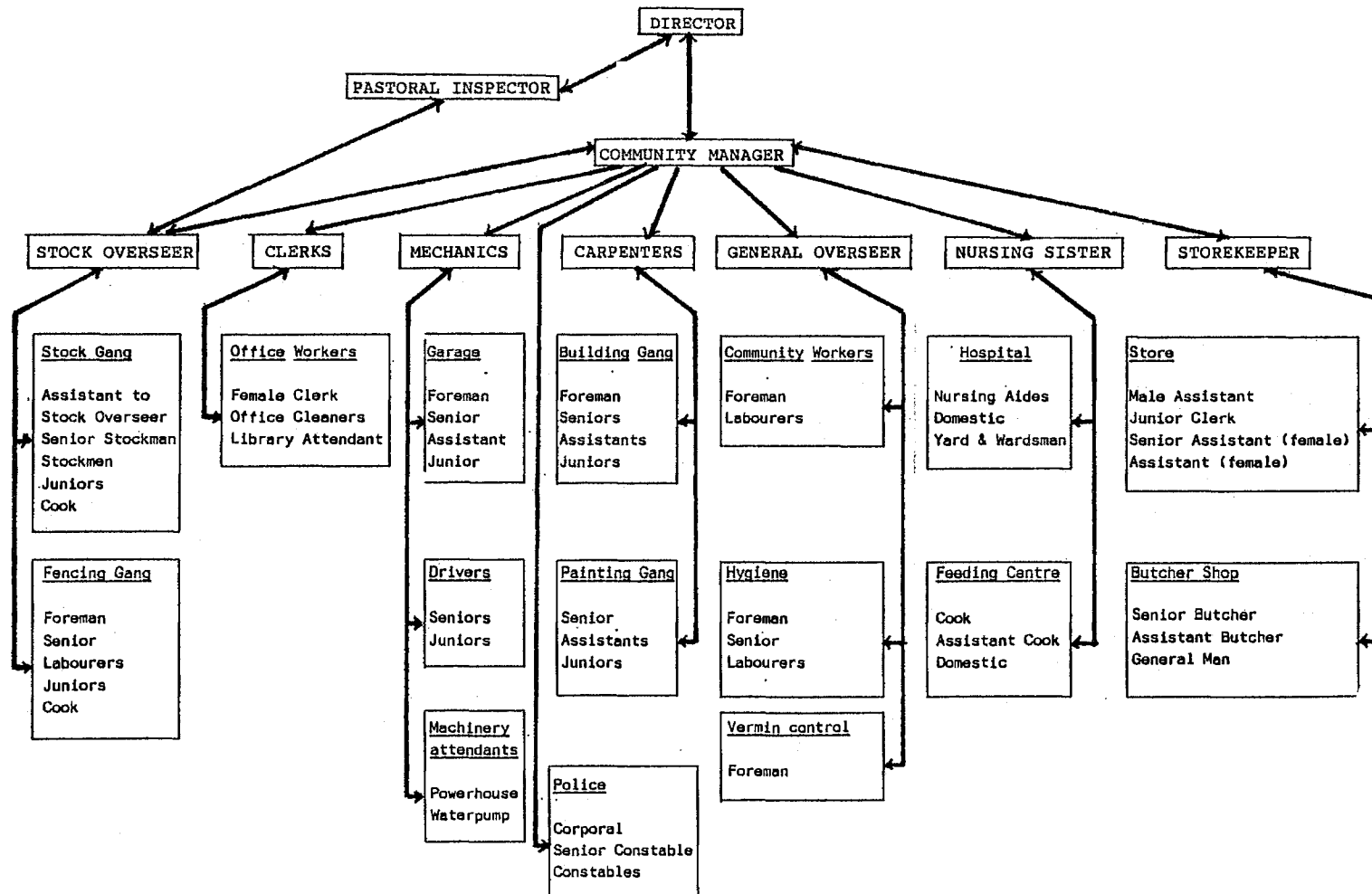


Figure 7.4 Lines of command and reporting in Edward River community workforce.

exceptions to the process. The membership of the police force, the hospital staff and the retail store assistants were usually equally divided between the two sides. As a matter of pride, people wanted only policemen from their own side to monitor the affairs of their neighbourhood, and practical necessity dictated the employment of nursing aides and store counter assistants from both neighbourhoods to act as interpreters for the older people who had little or no competence in either English or the vernaculars of the other side.

Another characteristic of Aboriginal work gangs was that the grades of employment did not represent a structure of authority in practice. Within work groups, kinship norms operated and the organisation of their structures of authority did not mesh with those expressed in Figure 7.4. White staff were aware of a reluctance (some said an "inability") on the part of Aborigines to assume supervisory roles over other Aborigines. In order to get work done, white staff usually took care to issue each day's work instructions to people individually. By making whites the only "bosses", Edward River men circumvented possible conflicts between kinship roles and their work roles. This made for much more harmonious work groups.

In order to give work experience, training and a cash income to as many people as possible, the general practice of the DAIA staff at Edward River was to give jobs to whoever offered themselves for employment. Variations in employment levels did occur. These were due in part to voluntary unemployment, in part to a lack of suitable job opportunities for women who wanted to work and occasionally to financial stringencies that prevented the manager from taking on everyone who offered themselves for work. Table 7.1 indicates employment levels for 3 periods between 1969 and 1972. Detailed figures are lacking for 1973-75, but DAIA reports indicate employment levels similar to those of 1972. The range and number of jobs open to women were limited. They were employed as retail store and office assistants, as school, hospital and kindergarten aides, as library attendants and as cooks and cleaners. Men had a greater diversity

	% of total workforce in work	% of male workforce in work	% of female workforce in work
July 1969	70	84	29
February 1970	64	78	25
August 1972	93	100	66

Table 7.1 Variation in employment levels, Edward River.

(Note: male workforce is defined as all males over 16 years not in receipt of a pension; female workforce is defined as all females over 16 years not in receipt of a pension or child endowment.)

of jobs to choose from which included building labourers, garage assistants, drivers, and equipment operators, storemen, and retail store assistants, yardmen, gardeners, butchers and slaughtermen, garbage and night-soil collectors stockmen, bush labourers, water supply and power station attendants, plumbers and policemen. If the object of creating such occupational sets was to provide vocational avenues into the mainstream economy, or into a future self-sufficient Edward River community, then it is fair to pose the question of how well in practice the organisation of work measured up to the needs of a pre-employment training programme.

The people who were entrusted with the provision of "on the job" training at Edward River were the white staff in charge of work groups. Only one of the many whom I knew had ever had any specific experience in teaching trades or training others in a cross-cultural context. While a handful had had experience of working with indigenous peoples in Australia or elsewhere, the majority were drawn from non-teaching, mainstream occupations and had little

prior awareness of or sensitivity for the problems that accompanied the instituting of "on the job" vocational and pre-employment training. In point of fact, little organised vocational training was undertaken. Often this was not because of lack of enthusiasm of white staff. The adult workforce was mostly non-literate and non-numerate, and this made for great difficulties for a staff who took literacy and numeracy for granted. I well remember the mechanic who wanted to make his garage assistants more than mere passers of tools and washers of engine parts. He began night classes and found that he had to start with counting and measuring. He gave up at decimals and long division. Others invested much effort in enhancing the skills of particular individuals in their work groups with whom they had special compatibilities. But this was an ad hoc affair which ceased when the staff member resigned or moved on, or the particular Aboriginal dropped out of the work gang in order to try another.

There were several other factors which militated against effective "on the job" training. One of these was the pressure to complete jobs within a given time. It was often the case that the need to complete a job precluded its use as a learning situation. When, for example, project plans required work to be finished by a specific time or a piece of machinery had to be restored to order quickly, the white staff member concerned completed the job personally to ensure the meeting of deadlines as well as good workmanship. Another factor inhibiting the expansion of Aboriginal skills arose out of the fact that the persons in charge of particular work gangs were officially responsible for any errors, mistakes or shortages. This applied particularly in any areas requiring the handling of money (such as working the cash register or receiving and paying monies) or keeping accurate records (such as stocktaking). Storekeepers and office clerks, especially, preferred not to give their Aboriginal workmates jobs where their uncertain numeracy put them in danger of making mistakes and causing shortfalls that would ultimately have to be made up out of staff pockets. A third factor was that

the range and variety of tasks performed in many occupational sets did not mirror the range and variety of those tasks as they might be performed in the world outside the settlement. Thus, garage assistants learnt only about the vehicles and equipment employed in the settlement. Nursing aides in training were rarely involved in bedside care of patients since anyone sick enough to require hospitalisation was usually evacuated to Cairns Base Hospital. In short, most training consisted of drilling workers to perform correctly repetitive tasks such as driving, attending a particular machine, filing cards and so forth. For the most part, relations between Aborigines and white staff were cordial and belied the authoritarian tone of the By-Laws. Friendships, especially between male overseers and Aboriginal men in their gangs, often extended beyond the workplace into after-hours activities, such as fishing and hunting expeditions, visiting and occasionally family picnics in the bush. Aborigines keenly evaluated new supervisory white staff. They disliked what they called "hard men". By that term they meant white staff who were overbearing and authoritarian and who were difficult to get on with because they did not explain sufficiently what they required. Edward River people accepted that they were in a situation of tutelage, and they acknowledged the white staff as experts in the physical development of the settlement.

In the bush, however, the work situation revolving around the pastoral operations was different in two respects. Firstly, because of their prior experience of the cattle industry on the reserve and elsewhere, stockmen and bush-workers had the necessary expertise to evaluate critically stock overseers and others who, from time to time, were put in charge of outside work. Edward River men preferred their stock overseers to demonstrate basic bushcraft and horse riding ability and to be prepared to share the relatively rigorous conditions of the stock camp. Overseers who gave their orders from Land-Rovers and slept every night in the settlement earned their contempt. Further, Edward River men expected to be consulted about the cattle and

the vagaries of the countryside. It was unwise for an overseer to ignore their advice. Those who did usually met with frustration. I recall one instance of a stock overseer who obdurately insisted on selecting a certain spot near the Coleman River as a wet season depot in the face of advice that the site was prone to flooding. The stock gang shrugged the matter off and said, "Oh he'll find out himself". Which he did, for after the wet was over, it was found that all the equipment had been submerged under several metres of water.

The second factor which made work in the bush different from that in the settlement was the special relationship Aboriginal people maintained towards the countryside. Throughout the brief history of the settlement most had preserved an unbroken association with their homelands. In part this continuity was fostered in the early years of the mission when people were sent out to hunt, fish and forage to supplement mission supplies. In later years pensioners, together with younger members of their families to assist them, frequently returned to their estates and lived there for months at a time, augmenting their supplies of flour, tea and sugar with bush foods. It was also customary to have a month-long school vacation in August (the dry season). During this time the settlement was all but abandoned by its Aboriginal residents as entire family groups weighed down with rations, camping gear and hunting equipment left for the bush and dispersed throughout the countryside. Such holidays served to introduce children born on the settlement to the physical and supernatural resources of their parents' estates and ranges. Unfortunately this custom ceased in 1970 in order to bring the Edward River school into line with State Education Department requirements. The attachments to and identifications with homelands were strong. In the settlement itself estate ties were recalled every time people sang songs connected with the woochorm, told myths or recounted events from living memory about pre-settlement times. When young men entered into stock or bush work they were being given another opportunity to move around a landscape whose

geography was already familiar, where the patterns of ownership and custodial responsibility and rights of access were still intact and where its supernatural dimensions still asserted a powerful influence.

Pastoral operations on the reserve were considered to be something apart from traditional land usage. Provided their activities did not infringe on traditional rights, stockmen and bush-workers were not constrained in their movements by rights of access and stewardship control. This freedom to move, however, was inhibited by the supernatural qualities of the environment which maintained their full force over people's actions. Ultimately, stock overseers had to come to terms with them because they affected mustering patterns and the location of fences, yards and dams. Any developmental plan for the reserve had to be reconciled with Aboriginal beliefs about the countryside, for most men simply would not work in areas where they considered themselves to be at risk from some supernatural hazard or where the land had been put under a mortuary taboo. Occasionally a stockman would agree to a brief exposure to a dangerous place, but even this could bring dire results. Thus in 1969, a Wik Mungkan stockman was persuaded to make a mustering pass through Waanchikan, an especially dreaded place in the Dog/Goanna estate (see pp.211-12). His horse reared up and threw him heavily to the ground. He subsequently developed an hydrocoele, an embarrassing swelling of the scrotum. From that point onwards, his health gradually declined until his death several years later. No-one had any doubts that this unfortunate sequence of events derived from the malevolence of Waanchikan. When it was rumoured that one stock overseer wanted to build a yard there because of its good water supply and shade, he was told flatly that no-one would work at the place. Having more perception than most, the stock overseer took some of the older men and charted the boundaries of the "poison" place and located the yard elsewhere. In general, the adjustments needed to avoid dangerous places were relatively minor, but some stock overseers regarded beliefs about them as ignorant superstitions which stood in the way of progress and development.

Such overseers got less than full co-operation from their work gangs

Outside work, especially stock work, was different from settlement work in another respect. When pastoral operations were well under way after the wet, work output and general productivity was on a par with that obtaining in the industry elsewhere. The men knew they were being underpaid on a "value for work" basis. Stock overseers frequently made representations to have their good men paid at higher rates so that they would not be tempted to take up employment off the reserve. By contrast, the work-load in most of the settlement occupation sets was light and work-space relatively leisurely. People were well aware of this when they compared DAIA working conditions and expectations with those of the outside contractors who occasionally hired Aboriginal labour from within the settlement's workforce and who demanded the mainstream society's productivity norms. The light work-load came about primarily because of the need to maintain full employment, which in turn necessitated the spreading of a given work-load among more people than would normally be the case in a country town of comparable size.

In summary then, the community was still a long way from providing from its own resources the economic skills and knowledge necessary for community self-sufficiency. There was no Aboriginal person who had both the practical background and the educational qualifications to fill any of the overseer roles of the community, even if the conflict between kinship norms and the hierarchical work structures of European worksets could be resolved. The only trained marketable skills the men of the community possessed were those of stockmen, and perhaps those of meatworkers, for a few men had attended a basic butchering course at the Gatton Agricultural College. Most Edward River men could only have filled unskilled labouring positions if they ever wanted to leave the settlement and try their luck in the outside world. Leaving the community was not an option that Edward River people wanted to exercise. Each new development, each project completed, each perceived improvement in the physical resources of the settlement and reserve, confirmed

in the minds of the villagers that Edward River was a good place to live, and strengthened pre-existing ties.

7.4.4 Non-DAIA employment on the reserve

When the installation of structures and amenities was beyond the skill and capacity of Edward River's workforce, as it was for example in the construction of specialised buildings like the hospital or the primary school, or in the provision of a town water supply, outside contractors were called in to undertake the work. At times they employed Edward River men as labourers. When they were so employed they were paid award rates and they were expected to work under the conditions and work output loads prevailing in Australian industry generally. Work of this sort did not occur often, but Edward River men who took it on were glad of the extra money. Privately they complained that the work was often "too hard" and contrasted the work effort involved with the more leisurely demands on the settlement workforce. The few employers that I spoke to said that their Aboriginal workmen were neither better nor worse than workers they had employed elsewhere.

7.4.5 Aboriginal self-employment on the reserve

The scope for earning money in situations where work output, work organisation and wages were not in the hands of white people was very limited. During my fieldwork there were only three ways in which income could be earned under what might be described as Aboriginal self-employment situations. These were in contract work, in handcraft production and in crocodile shooting.

Contract work had an unfortunate history at Edward River. It was introduced in 1968, when in an effort to encourage a certain degree of independence of action and an appreciation of the relationship between productivity and pay rates, the DAIA offered to pay for fencing at a fixed price per panel. The contract gang, an all-Thaayorre work group, was given the use of power saws and other tools, a

tractor and a trailer. The organisation of the team was left in their hands. In the first pay fortnight the men did well despite initial problems, earning more than they would have had they remained just another bush gang. In the second fortnight of their operation, the team's fencing output dropped markedly and they earned far less than they would have normally obtained. The reason for the drop in output was that their tractor and trailer had been commandeered for long periods by an outside overseer whose own tractor had broken down, thus interfering with cutting and transporting of fencing posts. The men were disgusted and requested that they revert to their former status as a bush gang working at the usual community pay rates. The experiment was never tried again on a large scale. Individual Aboriginal stockmen were occasionally offered contract rates for breaking-in horses.

The native handcraft industry was based on the fact that a number of items from the pre-settlement inventory of artefacts were still in regular use. Women made a variety of dilly bags from palm-tree twine and dyed them in an attractive assortment of colours, using bush dyes and European dyeing agents. The bags were used when shopping and for storing personal items. Men still made spears and spear-throwers for use in fishing and hunting. The spear used universally for fishing consisted of a light wooden haft fashioned from a native Hibiscus, on which was mounted an array of prongs made of fencing wire. Heavy hunting spears consisting of a single lancewood (Acacia sp.) prong hafted to a light wooden butt and tipped with bone were also common, as were variations of this basic type that included spear blades made from metal. These heavy spears were used for hunting large game such as wallabies, pigs and sharks. Almost the complete array of pre-settlement weapons of dispute were still being made except for wooden swords and shark-teeth duelling knives. Digging sticks also were made, but they were used more often as adjuncts to women's disputing behaviour, rather than for digging yams. Metal bars had replaced wooden yamsticks as digging implements.

The items were made by individual adults as they

needed them. There was a lively exchange system operating among men for supplies of Hibiscus wood for hafts, for lance-wood and for supplies of gums, resins, waxes, ochres, paints and other materials used in their manufacture. European items such as tar and saddler's string were frequently used as replacements for some of the gums and twines used traditionally. The men's tool-kit showed many substitutions of pre-settlement tools for European axes, knives, files and wood rasps. Handcraft manufacture was a social occasion providing a focal point for the formation of groups of people who sat round the craftsmen or craftswomen to learn, to evaluate critically the work in progress and to exchange gossip.

The market for the items was provided by the DAIA itself, operating through an organisation known as Queensland Aboriginal Creations, and also by white staff members and visitors to the settlement who wanted to carry away some memento. The chief items bought were dilly bags, boomerangs, spears, firesticks, shields and spear-throwers. The prices offered by both the DAIA officer acting on behalf of Queensland Aboriginal Creations and other Europeans were subject to variation, and none bore any relation to the number of hours invested in the manufacture of the items. By my calculation most items were greatly underpriced even if one used the pay scales obtaining on the settlement to estimate their value. Low prices did not appear to be a source of complaint to the people who made the things. Most of them seemed to be offered for sale when their owners had a pressing need for cash and they had decided to convert something from their personal gear into money. At other times items were requested by staff members and they were then made to order, as it were. The amounts of money earned from this source as a whole were small, and provided little more than pocket money. There were many difficulties surrounding the implementation of a successful handcraft industry in places like Edward River, and these are being investigated currently by Mr M. O'Ferral, a postgraduate student at James Cook University.

Crocodile shooting was the other area that gave scope for individual enterprise and initiative. Unlike

artefact-making it promised a good income to shooters who could successfully manage to keep a flow of skins going through to the agent in Cairns. An unspoiled skin of a 2 m crocodile could net a shooter close to \$100.00 in 1969. A number of men had sought crocodiles on a casual basis in previous years, but during 1968-69 only two men attempted to derive their main income from crocodile shooting. These men hunted principally for saltwater crocodiles in the tidal creeks and rivers of the coast. Long-term shooting required a certain amount of capital investment over and above the possession of a good rifle, a sure aim and a spotlight. Camping gear, rations, fine salt for preserving skins, skinning knives, rope, harpoons and some means of transporting everything from place to place were all necessary. Both shooters possessed dinghies which did double service as their means of transport and their shooting platforms. The activity required steady nerves, for crocodiles had to be approached closely enough to allow a killing shot to dispatch the reptiles as they lay exposed on sandbars and mudbanks. If a wounded crocodile reached the water it was usually lost.

The men rarely went after freshwater crocodiles (Crocodylus johnsonii), even though this species provided the main income for white professional shooters. There was no shortage of freshwater crocodiles in the waterways of the Edward River district, but a four-wheel-drive vehicle was required to travel to the lagoons and waterholes, and nets were also necessary in order to maximise the yield.

The two full-time Edward River shooters learnt their skills from other Aborigines who had been taught by European shooters. Unfortunately both men rarely managed to realise first grade prices for their skins because of poor preserving methods and careless skinning techniques. After appropriate advice from the Cairns skin buyer, I was able to help them amend some of the deficiencies in their techniques during 1969.

However, unlike pastoral activities, crocodile hunting was subject to the pre-settlement codes governing access to hunting areas. In general both of the shooters discussed above hunted over ranges where they had appropriate rights of entry. Thus one of the shooters, N. E., a Thaayorre

Watersnake clansman, confined his hunting to between the Chapman and Coleman Rivers, where he had clear primary and secondary rights of access. The other shooter, S. B., a Wik Nganchera Possum clansman, hunted around the mouths of the Edward River which coincided with his traditional range. To move into another area required much negotiation, as the following example shows:

In August 1968, T. E., an active pensioner with a boat, decided to join the ranks of the crocodile shooters and I helped him move his gear and dinghy to an area known as "the Holroyd" 50 km north of the settlement where a number of people from the northern side of the settlement were already camped. The campers were expecting the arrival of some people from Aurukun who were walking overland and who had made arrangements to rendezvous at "the Holroyd". Unfortunately T. E. became very ill as a result of the bone-shattering overland trip and I had to make a number of excursions back to the settlement to obtain medical supplies and aid for him.

On one of these trips, N. E. enquired whether T. E. was having any success crocodile shooting at "the Holroyd". N. E. said he was having a lean time of it in his own area and he was thinking of asking J. K., one of the campers at "the Holroyd", for permission to shoot on the King River a little further to the north. I conveyed N. E.'s request to J. K. who agreed that N. E. could shoot on the King River, provided that T. E. agreed to the notion and that N. E. did no shooting in "the Holroyd" area. J. K. further added that the best place to go was really the Kendall River, but that this would entail getting the permission of the Aurukun people. T. E., on the other hand was completely against having N. E. on his country and he made arrangements with one of the camp members to shoot both in "the Holroyd" area and on the Kendall if permission could be obtained from Aurukun, and where he also had rights of access through his father. Meantime, the Aurukun party arrived. I took some of them to the settlement so that they could officially pay their respects to kinfolk and the managment, and to notify Aurukun of their safe arrival

in Edward River country.

N.E. meanwhile took J. K.'s conditional approval as a good sign and persuaded me to transport him, his gear and the other two members of his team (both "ZS" whom he called thuuwun) to "the Holroyd" camp to talk with T. E.. After some discussion, T. E. agreed that N. E. could shoot on the King River, but only after T. E. had gone through the country first. Clearly this would not be for some time since T. E. was still sick, and moreover his boat needed waterproofing and painting. But there were a number of external events to be taken into calculation as well. An early wet season and the high tides were in the offing and these would make crocodile shooting all but impossible. Further, the stock overseer had sent word to the effect that all campers had to be out of "the Holroyd" by the end of September because he wanted to conduct a muster there in conjunction with the Aurukun stockmen. Meanwhile a message had come from Aurukun stating that no Edward River men were permitted to shoot on the Kendall River. Further, a good deal of tension had arisen because T. E. had asked one of the Aurukun visitors to help him shoot crocodiles in "the Holroyd" area where the visitor had no traditional rights. This aroused much protest from N. E. and his "nephews" who felt that if Aurukun would not allow Edward River men to shoot on Aurukun country, then Aurukun men should not be allowed to shoot on the Edward River reserve. However, this was countered by an argument from another member of T. E.'s proposed shooting team that Thaayorre men were supposed to shoot crocodiles "...in the middle country" centering on the Coleman and Chapman Rivers. To complicate matters even more, one of the very old people in "the Holroyd" camp, P. H., a Snake clan member and senior steward for many of the tracts in the vicinity of the camp site had announced that he did not want anyone at all shooting in the area because of the possibility of killing some of the crocodiles he claimed to have "made" when a young man (see pp. 241-2). T. E. was frankly contemptuous of this suggestion. He argued that none of the crocodiles in the area were tame ones, even if their parents might have been. N. E., on the other hand, was not so willing to set old man

P. H.'s claims aside. He made it quite clear to me that he was loth to shoot on "the Holroyd", "just in case".

Circumstances drew me back to the settlement just when feelings were running high. When I returned the next day, an amicable arrangement had been concluded. N. E. was to go to the junction of the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers to shoot while T. E., after first working the King River would himself go to the Holroyd/Kendall junction to try his luck after N. E. . T. E. explained his change of stance as due to the fact that N. E. and his "nephews" had made his boat seaworthy and had painted it for him. One of the Aurukun group, E. K., agreed to these arrangements on behalf of the Aurukun people. E. K. was an Aurukun councillor and his brother-in-law was the Aurukun chairman, so he obviously felt competent to make such decisions. As he said, his agreement was influenced by the fact that I had offered to transport all the Aurukun people as far as the Kendall when they were ready to return home and thus save them a long walk.

Before setting off for the Holroyd/Kendall junction the next day, E. K. gave me two letters (he was literate), one addressed to the Aurukun stock overseer and another to the stockman in charge of the Aurukun team who were mustering in the area in case they challenged our right to be there. Our party, somewhat larger than I intended, included two men, one from Aurukun and the other from the Edward River reserve who had rights to the country. The area into which we were going contained among other things an important "big snake story", and it was necessary therefore for newcomers to be ritually introduced to the place. We reached our camping spot just on dusk and the shooters set out as soon as it was dark enough. Their small dinghy was heavily overloaded because it contained the two men who belonged to the country as well as N. E.'s shooters. They returned early. The tide was too high and had covered the banks of the watercourse, so it was pointless to proceed further since crocodiles shot in the water were lost crocodiles. The next day the party reviewed the situation. N. E. said that it would take at least 10 days before the tides would work

in his favour and allow him to hunt there at night. He added that he was uneasy about the presence of the Aurukun musterers whose fires we could see, and he clearly had little faith in E. K.'s safe conduct passes. (I personally felt that he was uneasy about the "big snake story" as well.) He wanted to go to the King River where he could hunt during the daytime low tides. Another of our party who was familiar with the King River country agreed to go with N. E. and his team to show him where the freshwater was. Hence, we returned letting N. E. and his party of shooters off in the upper reaches of the King River while the rest returned to "the Holroyd" camp with me.

A week later, N.E.'s team rowed down along the coast from the King River to "the Holroyd". They were dispirited and tired. They had seen no crocodiles. N. E. asked me then to convey his team to the Nutwood crossing on the Edward River where his "nephews", being Duck/Spear clan members, had rights of access and where he thought the team might get a few freshwater crocodile skins at least. In fact they got several before they returned home to the settlement, but the result hardly seemed commensurate with all the effort expended.

After that disappointing experience N. E. never ventured out of his own range to shoot crocodiles on another's country. The network of traditional rights, interpersonal difficulties and reserve rivalries, to say nothing of the supernatural hazards, was simply too difficult to negotiate.

N. E. was a man of some pride. He, like quite a number of other men, disliked being tied to the DAIA wage system. He was continually looking for ways and means to employ his experience and bushcraft together with his small stock of capital assets to produce an income that was independent of the DAIA. None of his attempts succeeded even when manifestly they seemed to be reasonable ventures with more than a fair chance of commercial success. His failure had much to do with the attitude of DAIA staff towards the entrepreneurial ambitions of men like N. E.. The following case is illustrative of the problems he encountered:

In 1969 N. E., by borrowing some money from me, bought himself a strong nylon net to replace an old net someone had given him and which was rotten past repair. He was going to use the net whenever I could help, to catch freshwater crocodiles during the wet season. Our first attempt at setting the net for freshwater crocodiles failed simply because it seemed that every barramundi in the lagoon had chosen to become entangled in it. In doing that, the trapped fish created such a disturbance in the water that it was obvious that no freshwater crocodile would ever venture near it. There was nothing for it but to take the barramundi back to the settlement and attempt to sell them. N. E. sold the fish for either \$2.00 or \$4.00 each and managed to earn more in that night's work than most men earned in a week.

N. E. promptly decided that supplying the community with fresh fish had more potential than hunting freshwater crocodiles (if only because I could not always be available to supply transport). He developed a plan whereby he would work the tidal arms near the community in his dinghy initially and, when profits permitted, he would buy an outboard motor to power his boat and increase his range. While N. E. was away fishing, his wife would sell the fish. He wanted to sell them through the newly completed butcher's shop which had a cold-room and scales. His wife would offer fish for sale on the days when meat was not available. Since meat was generally offered for sale only two days a week, it seemed like a good way to increase the consumption of fresh foods, because people relied on tinned meats when they could not obtain fresh meat from the butcher's shop or from weekend hunting and fishing expeditions.

The community manager was uneasy about the plan from the very start. He agreed that it was a good idea in nutritional terms and that it was likely to be a commercial success. Finally, however, he denied N. E. the use of the butcher's shop cold-room and refrigeration facilities because of a health regulation which stated that meat and fish could not be stored together. (The health regulation, incidentally, did not prevent white staff members from storing their surplus fishing

catches in the butcher's shop coldroom.)

N. E. finally gave up his attempts at earning an income on his own. When the export of the skins of wild crocodiles from Australia was banned, the crocodile shooting industry collapsed. Fortunately, the Applied Ecology Unit offered both N. E. and S. B. jobs with the unit where they could employ their knowledge of crocodiles and their habits in a new way and not directly associated with the DAIA.

The willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities was not lacking among Edward River people. Many persons expressed an interest in having their own business. One might have thought that if the DAIA was attempting to create reasonable facsimiles of country towns out of Aboriginal settlements then entrepreneurial enterprise might have been provided with routes to realisation. However, it seemed that the DAIA was oriented primarily towards their own training programme organised around the concept of occupational sets. They had never really articulated their position with respect to individual Aboriginal small businessmen. There were, for example, no clear guidelines on how much aid the DAIA was to supply to people who wanted to operate independently, but who did not want to place themselves under the property management provisions of the Act. Obviously any budding Aboriginal businessman, given the lack of literacy and numeracy, would have to rely heavily on DAIA staff to supply elementary business management and bookkeeping skills. Additionally, such people would need access to repair and maintenance services which were largely under the control of the DAIA. Even for Aboriginal householders the repair of domestic furniture, appliances and machinery such as motors constituted a problem, since the servicing and repair of DAIA equipment always took first priority and there was no clearly established scheme for dealing with non-DAIA property, apart from enlisting the goodwill of the relevant DAIA staff member whose skills and tools were needed.

A further problem revolved around the supply of capital required to initiate an independent enterprise and keep it going until it became self-supporting. The DAIA did

not themselves in practice provide loans for businesses on settlements. Such loans were provided by Commonwealth Government agencies (the Aboriginal Enterprises Capital Fund in 1968, the Aboriginal Enterprises Fund in 1974 and the Aboriginal Loans Commission thereafter). Unfortunately, official antipathies which marred relationships between the Queensland State Government and the Australian Commonwealth Government at that time were reflected in the attitudes of DAIA staff. They felt they had no part to play at all in any enterprises funded by the Commonwealth Government. Hence, the general response of DAIA managerial staff to proposals for the development of economic independence via individual enterprise within settlements was lukewarm at best and usually obstructive in practice.

Other schemes besides N. E.'s had been canvassed at one time or another at Edward River. Some of them at least promised commercial success on a full-time or part-time basis. They included barramundi and crab fishing ventures based on access to southern markets, a bakery and a local barber's shop. They all required a degree of capital input and a reliance, at least initially, on the skills of white staff. None of them went forward as serious proposals to the appropriate funding bodies. One scheme which certainly received no DAIA support at all was the proposal to form an outstation either in the Edward River area or in "the Holroyd" country. This idea had been in the minds of several men from the Mungkan neighbourhood. They pointed out that the northern half of the reserve was not being worked as a cattle property should be. (This was true, for the plan for the development of Edward River's pastoral resources called for the development of the southern part of the reserve first.) They proposed to set up their own settlement, plant gardens and bring the area and its wild cattle (which were numerous) under control. Income would be derived from welfare payments and the sale of cattle. The idea was first put to me in 1968, some years before the outstation movement was officially recognised and assisted by the Commonwealth Government (see Gray 1977) in other parts of Australia. The Queensland State Government was opposed to the setting up of outstations

because of their implications in the Aboriginal Land Rights issue. However, the scheme failed to develop at Edward River primarily, I believe, because most people were unwilling to invest time and effort in some untried group enterprise when the settlement itself was perceived to be developing satisfactorily under DAIA control.

7.5 Managing cash incomes

During January and February of 1970 and again during July 1972, I conducted household income and expenditure surveys between two consecutive pay days in order to gain some insight into how the Edward River people were coping with the cash economy that had been introduced by the DAIA. Some of the data from these two surveys are included in Table 7.2 below. It details the sources of cash income for community residents in those two periods and the relative importance of each source.

Source	1970 survey		1972 survey	
	amount	% of total	amount	% of total
DAIA wages	2212.00	67.1	4058.20	75.1
Child endowment	224.50	6.8	198.00	3.5
Pensions	861.00	26.1	911.00	17.0
Applied Ecology	---	---	238.93	4.4
Total	\$3299.50	100%	\$5400.13	100%

Table 7.2 Sources of income for the fortnights commencing 23/1/70 and 3/7/72, Edward River.

Average household income for the 1972 survey period was \$107.70, but obviously the actual distribution of income across households varied with the number of income earners living in them. Figure 7.5 shows the distribution of income across households.

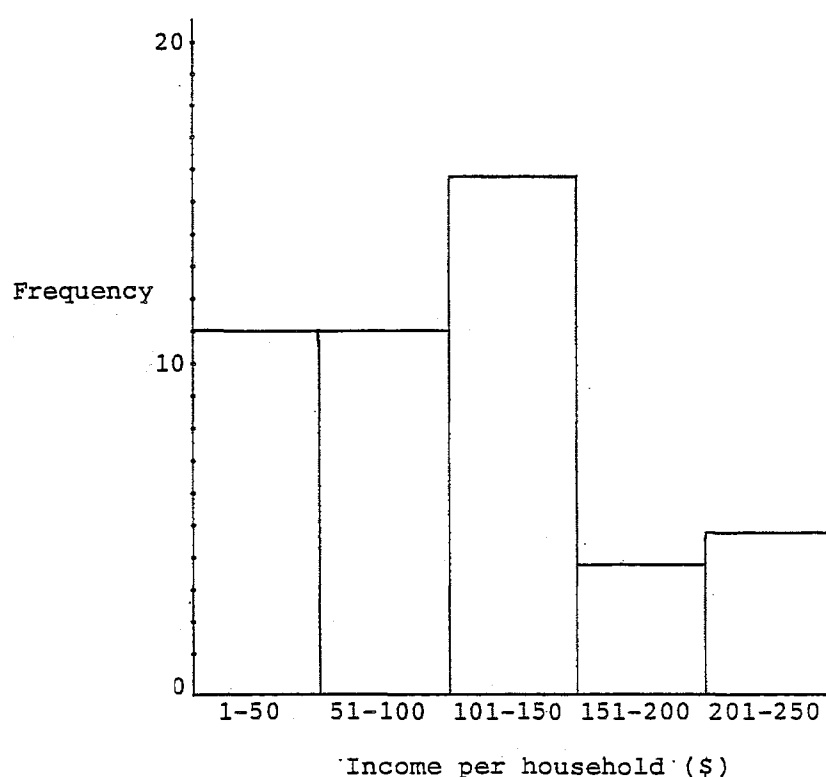


Figure 7.5 Distribution of income across households,
Edward River 3/7/72 - 14/7/72

There were many demands on household income over and above those associated with subsistence. The development of the settlement and the introduction of the cash economy had brought with it a dramatic expansion in the scale of material wants compared with pre-settlement times and even with the perceived needs and wants of the mission era. One set of demand pressures resulted from the attempt to realise traditional activities more efficiently or more comfortably. I noted earlier that when men crafted traditional artefacts, they did so with the tools of Western technology rather than their own. Hunting gear began to include rifles and shot-guns, nylon fishing lines, metal knives and axes as a matter of course. Camping out in the bush also demanded the use of swags, blankets, bush-nets, tent-flys, camp ovens and billy cans, and most families had such an assortment of camping and hunting gear. This in turn induced a demand for transportation of some kind in order to convey people, rations

and all the encumbrances that seemed necessary for comfortable living in the bush. The most desired forms of transportation were either boats with outboard motors that could travel along the coast and tidal waterways or else four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles. By 1972 a number of men owned boats, two of which were powered, while by 1975 at least one group of men owned a 4WD vehicle with the ability to traverse the mostly trackless terrain of the reserve.

The new houses also created demands for things. Structurally, they incorporated the tastes, preferences and material lifestyle of white Australians of the 1970s. The model for the proper expression of those tastes, preferences and levels of creature comfort was provided primarily by the manner of life of the resident white staff. At the time of occupation each Aboriginal house was provided with only a few items of furniture such as a table, several chairs and possibly bedframes and mattresses. Table 7.3 provides a list of household furniture in use in July 1972. The quantity of furniture detailed had to serve 43 households and 270 people.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Number</u>
Mattresses, single	50
Mattresses, double	32
Bedframes, single	17
Bedframes, double	7
Tables	28
Chairs	120
Refrigerators, kerosene	1
Radios	9
Radiograms	5
Record players	6
Sewing machines	6
Dressing tables	1

Table 7.3 Serviceable domestic furniture in use, Edward River, July 1972.

If the houses were to attain a level of material comfort comparable with the models provided by the houses of the staff then a considerable outlay on consumer durables was necessary. Bedrooms required not only beds but also sheets, pillowslips, blankets and curtains. Sitting rooms needed easy-chairs and dining rooms needed at least a table to sit down at and eat from (as Table 7.3 shows, only every other house had a serviceable table). The wood-burning stove with which each house was equipped involved a style of food preparation different from open hearth cookery and required new kinds cooking and eating utensils. Edward River housewives began to acquire assorted pots, pans and baking dishes and to replace the enamel plates that had given good service in mission times with china crockery. Refrigerators were especially desirable objects. Up until 1975, the needs that had been engineered into the houses remained as an enormous back-log of deferred consumer expenditure waiting the chance for realisation when more immediate demands on income had been met.

Ranged against the demand for consumer durables were other demands. With the introduction of the cash economy, families were then responsible for feeding and clothing themselves. Traditional gift-giving obligations tended to find expression in presents of rugs, clothes and rifles, rather than in the food, tobacco and spears of the pre-settlement and early mission years. Another dimension to the scale of wants was added when the all-weather airstrip became serviceable and the settlement was included on the regular flight schedules of a North Queensland bush airline. It then became possible to visit relatives and friends on other settlements, or to make trips to Cairns to bring back the things the local retail store lacked, as well as to buy liquor which was smuggled illicitly into the community in defiance of the By-Laws.

Edward River people were acutely aware that they lacked the worldly goods and purchasing power that white people seemed to command. They often depreciatingly referred to themselves as "poor people". Nonetheless, within the limitations of their incomes they strove to satisfy their

competing wants and in doing so evolved their own particular style of cash management and budgeting behaviour. This in turn was a response to the realities of income possibilities within the settlement and the availability of subsistence and consumer goods. In the following subsections I shall deal firstly with the way in which families organised their expenditures around their recurring needs (7.5.1). This will be followed by a discussion of the strategies employed in purchasing the more costly consumer durables and in financing trips away from the settlement (7.5.2). Finally, I shall discuss the consumption patterns that emerged out of the employment of these strategies, drawing attention primarily to food purchases since these appeared to be nutritionally inadequate and had implications for general community health levels (7.5.3).

7.5.1 Recurring expenditure

Ideally, expenditures for food, clothing and recurring domestic needs were organised within family groups. Circumstances could, however, mould family groups into several variant forms larger than a married couple and their unmarried children. For instance it was often augmented by an older person, usually a widowed parent of the wife or husband. In 1972 at least a dozen old people were being looked after in this way. Nuclear families were occasionally augmented by young single males who had not yet married but whose parents had died. The usual pattern was for such men to live with a married brother, or less often with a married sister. The settlement lacked any form of institutionalised bachelor's camp which had been a feature of pre-settlement hearthgroup arrangements. Another variant of the nuclear family occurred when a woman's husband died while she still had dependent children. A widow's pension allowed such women to maintain independent domestic consumption units. Additionally, several married couples were fostering children of other close kin.

While the nuclear family and its variants might be seen as a form parallel to the hearthgroup, the roles of

husband and wife changed considerably from the traditional dichotomy that made men the hunters and women the gatherers. With the development of the settlement's economy, men became wage-earners and married women became housewives, with all that that term implied in terms of food preparation, child-minding, house-cleaning and clothes-washing. More importantly, the women became the managers of their families' finances and were responsible for the purchase of most of their families' subsistence and recurring domestic needs.

It should be noted that "household", defined as those co-resident in a house, did not automatically coincide with the nuclear family and its variants. Seventeen of the houses contained two or more nuclear families. The basis upon which people shared their houses with others will be discussed in the next chapter. The important point to note here is that when nuclear families shared a house they each functioned as separate units for the purposes of organising their domestic expenditure.

The allocation of fortnightly pay packets and welfare payments within nuclear families conformed to the same general pattern. After paying their rent, men turned the largest part of their wages over to their wives. Some men deposited a portion of their wages in savings accounts. Most retained a small proportion for their own personal needs (e.g. smoking) and a certain amount for gambling. Wage-earning, unmarried children also handed over part of their income to their mothers, as did those other relatives whose presence augmented nuclear families. Thus the greatest proportion of Edward River's purchasing power lay in the hands of women.

Shopping in the Edward River retail store was not exactly straightforward for the women. The staples of the Edward River diet were nearly always held in stock, but planning expenditure on other necessities like clothing, softgoods and other durables such as household hardware was difficult. These latter goods arrived in unpredictable bulk lots due to the combined effects of DAIA ordering methods, the isolation of the community and the seasonal vagaries of transport. The women had therefore, to put aside some household funds against the possibility of the arrival of such goods. This money was usually hoarded. The amount of cash held in reserve was difficult

to calculate, but it was considerable. Whenever a consignment of desirable goods arrived in the retail store a sale-like atmosphere prevailed as women competed with each other to purchase them. On such occasions it was not unusual for the retail store's sales receipts for that fortnight to exceed the amount of income flowing into the community for the same period.

Table 7.4 shows the distribution of expenditure in the retail store across three broad categories for the two survey periods. A comparison with Table 7.2 shows that expenditure in the store for the 1970 survey period exceeded community income for that period and store purchases were therefore subsidised from bank accounts and the hoarded savings.

	1970 survey		1972 survey	
	amount	% of total	amount	% of total
Food purchases	1856	49.9	1595	51.1
Smoking needs	804	21.6	509	16.3
Other household & personal needs	1063	28.5	1015	32.6
Total	\$3723	100%	\$3119	100%

Table 7.4 Retail store expenditure patterns for the fortnights commencing 23/1/70 and 3/7/72, Edward River.

Not long after the completion of the second survey of income and expenditure, a new demand on recurrent expenditures appeared in the shape of a canteen that sold beer. Men began to reserve additional portions of their pay packets to spend in the canteen. While the amount of beer available for sale was rationed, its availability would nonetheless have made serious inroads into the budgeting behaviour of the women, had there not been in the interim wage increases that offset the new demand.

7.5.2 Saving strategies and buying of consumer durables

Saving money to purchase specially desired items was not limited to Edward River housewives. It was an important feature of all individual budgeting behaviour. For example almost 40% of the total amount of money put into circulation during the 1972 survey period was not recouped through retail store sales, rent collections, movie takings, petrol sales or other official charges. This sum was either saved or disposed of through non-DAIA channels. Savings existed in two forms. People either kept their money in Commonwealth Savings Bank accounts or else kept it at home in private hoards. Many preferred to keep most of their money at home because of prior unfortunate experiences with the DAIA pass-book system which preceded the introduction of Commonwealth Bank passbooks. From time to time I was asked to count someone's private savings in order to ascertain whether enough had been amassed for some special purpose and these often amounted to several hundred dollars. For the year of 1969 (the only year for which I have complete statistics) 25% of the community's earnings could not be accounted for in the official collections and receipts. While a proportion of that money was represented as savings or private hoardings, most of it would have gone to purchase goods and services from outlets other than those provided by the DAIA.

Between 1968 and 1975 the Edward River retail store could not, for a variety of reasons, supply all the things that Edward River people wanted to buy. For instance, clothing was rarely in the styles and sizes considered appropriate. Edward River women at that time preferred dresses that reached below the knees. (The reason was that when they sat cross-legged their dresses could be tucked modestly between their legs thus avoiding any improper displays of underwear.) During this period such dress styles were unfashionable elsewhere, and often their only source was the second-hand clothing shops of Cairns. Equally, men preferred the colourful but hard-wearing apparel sold by stockmen's outfitters. Such clothing was expensive, and DAIA storekeepers often, but mistakenly, sought cheaper and far less durable substitutes

from manufacturers. The retail store's range of household furniture was limited to mattresses. Very few items of basic furniture such as chairs, tables and chests of drawers ever appeared for sale. Kerosene refrigerators and treadle sewing machines were greatly desired but were never ordered for sale since they would have become obsolete, so it was argued, when the settlement was electrified. Nor did the retail store stock boats, outboard motors or second-hand 4WD vehicles.

Edward River people employed a variety of ways to make good the deficiencies in the retail store's normal range of goods. Items not in stock could be obtained on special order through the retail store itself but few people used this avenue, complaining of the time it took for goods to arrive. Helping with such orders was normally the duty of a DAIA liaison officer, but Edward River people rarely had one resident between 1968 and 1975. Mostly they had to request the after-hours assistance of staff members to help them write orders for, and calculate the cost of, the items they wanted to buy. Occasionally staff members undertook to buy things for people when they went out on leave. Staff themselves were a source of consumer durables. Not infrequently a staff member leaving Edward River would dispose of excess personal belongings to people in the community. In this way a small number of refrigerators, battery-operated radios and record players, bedroom furniture, firearms, boats and vehicles were acquired.

From the Edward River point of view the most satisfactory way of making their non-store purchases was to go to the eastern seaboard city of Cairns and buy what they wanted from the relatively enormous range available there. The airfare was expensive and accommodation was often difficult to obtain due to cost and discrimination. But these disadvantages were more than offset by the excitement of the trip itself and the opportunities it provided for shopping, for meeting other Aborigines from the Peninsular settlements or simply sight-seeing and trying to make sense of the world of Europeans. For men the trip to Cairns was especially liberating because they were able obtain liquor freely. A

trip to Cairns was a desirable commodity in its own right, but taking all its associated costs into account (airfares, money for accommodation and meals, as well as cash for spending) it was usually beyond the resources of individuals to save the necessary money without making exceptional personal sacrifices. Many people in fact made the trip at the expense of the government when they were sent out for medical treatment. Pregnant women, for instance, were sent to Cairns Base Hospital to be delivered of their babies. Airline regulations required them to be sent out in the seventh month of their pregnancy so that expectant mothers had at least a three month's stay in the city. In the majority of cases those who did not make the trip under some free scheme, funded their journey with the gambling winnings of themselves or their close kin.

Gambling and saving were seen as rival solutions to the perennial Edward River problem of obtaining large sums of money. In effect, gambling functioned as a lottery that aggregated the surplus cash of a number of individuals and randomly redistributed it to a lucky few. The principal game played on the Edward River gambling grounds was "cut". It was a straightforward game in which the cards were shuffled and dealt face up into two piles called "inside" and "outside". The game was played on a blanket around which the players sat and made bets with each other by placing the money on the blanket and gambling on whether a given card would fall "inside" or "outside". In operation the game tended to concentrate money in the hands of fewer and fewer players. There was little room for skill or cheating, although there was a lively market for charms and other practices said to enhance the luck of gamblers. I estimated that at times as much as \$400 would be in circulation around the gambling blanket on a payday night. Winners were under strong social pressure to bring at least part of their winnings back on subsequent days to give the losers a chance to win something back. In fact the gambling funds in circulation diminished from their payday peak as amounts were siphoned off into savings or were used directly to purchase consumer durables or fund trips to Cairns. The games themselves provided much excitement within

the community and were played with (to my eye) bewildering speed. Both sexes gambled but those women who occasionally gambled away their family's "tucker money" came in for a good deal of criticism.

Most wage-earners both gambled and put aside some money from their wages. Saving from one's wages was much more certain (if less exhilarating) than gambling, but it was a slow way to accumulate money. It was not uncommon when the desired object was something involving a large outlay (e.g. a boat or a vehicle) for several men to pool their savings. Invariably such savings groups were composed of sets of brothers. I knew of several boats and one vehicle that had been purchased in this fashion.

7.5.3 Food consumption patterns

The people of Edward River were often exasperated by the gap between their desire for material things and their means to achieve them. Their sense of dissatisfaction often manifested itself in complaints such as: "The store eats up our money". When people said such things they were referring to the constant recurring expenditure on subsistence and other domestic needs that made the realisation of other goods so difficult and slow. Certainly weekend and after-work hunting activities were motivated as much by the need to stretch family incomes as by a desire to vary diet. But in truth, an analysis of Edward River food consumption patterns showed that they could not have spent much less on food and that by nutritional standards their purchased diet was inadequate.

During the two surveys, I noted all the purchases by individual community members in the retail store and butcher's shop and recorded these on sets of cards, one for each individual purchaser. The completed cards could be grouped to yield consumption patterns of nuclear family units or households or aggregated to yield total food consumption patterns. The analyses and methodological details upon which the following description is based are contained in an earlier series of publications (Taylor 1973, 1977b). Figure 7.6 provides a comparison of 1970 per capita food-buying patterns with

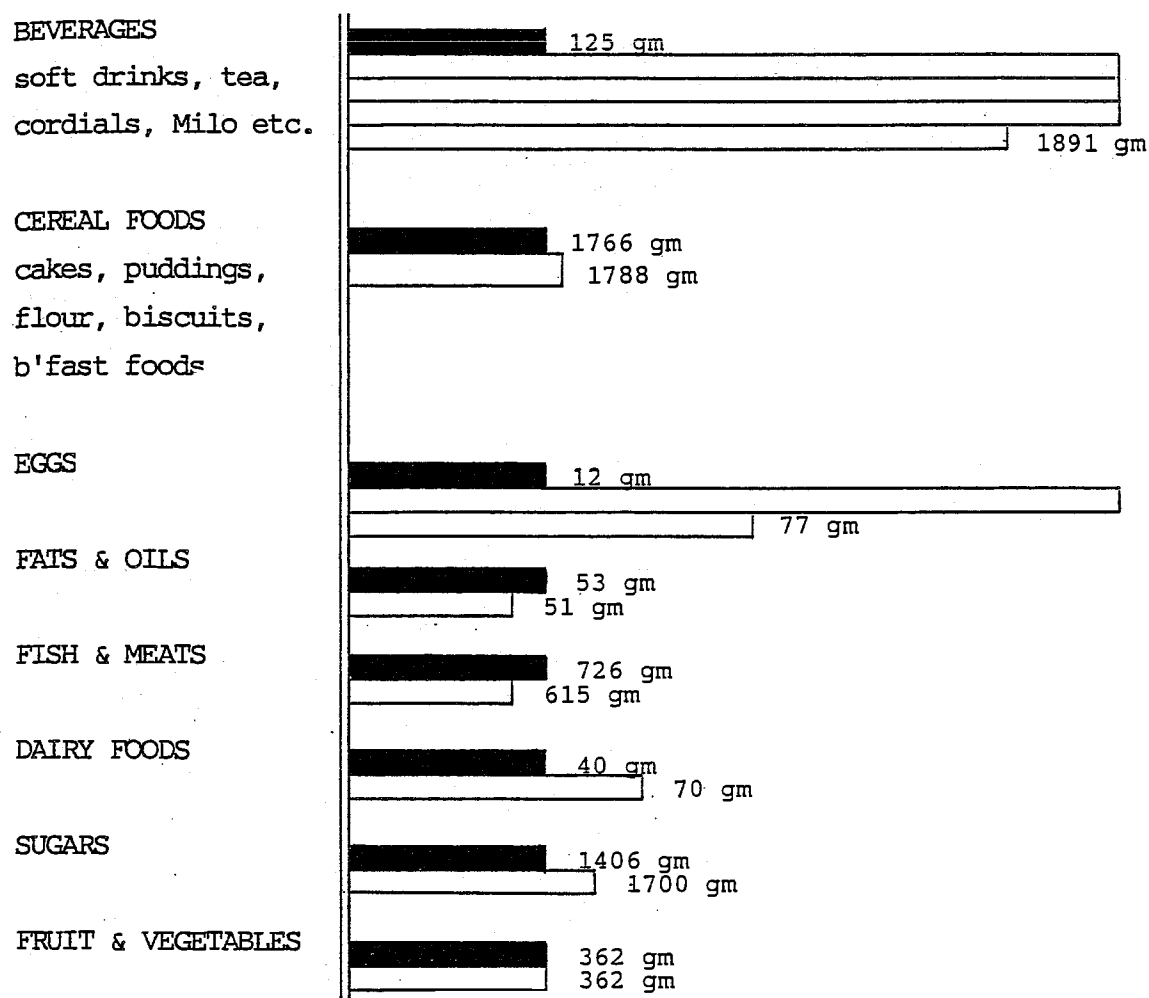


Figure 7.6 Average weekly per capita consumption of main foodstuffs, Edward River 1972 (unshaded) compared with Edward River 1970 taken as standard (shaded).

those of 1972. Between the two survey periods the purchased diet had remained substantially the same. The increased consumption of eggs and dairy foods in 1972 was offset by a decrease in the consumption of meat and fish, while purchases of sugars (primarily refined sugar, but also golden syrup and honey) in 1972 stood at an extraordinarily high level of 1.700 kg per head. The enormous increase in the consumption of beverages in the 1972 survey was due to the sale of a brewed non-alcoholic soft drink with a beer-like taste. The retail store sold its complete stocks in one day when a rumour spread that it was real beer. The purchased diet lacked variety and 75% of the money outlaid for food went to purchase

fresh meat, refined sugar, white flour, tinned meats and tea. Mean weekly per capita expenditure on food had risen from \$2.18 in 1970 to \$2.67 in 1972, but this increase (of 22.5%) merely reflected the fact that food prices had risen by 24.3%. The Edward River housewife spent less than half the amount her white Queensland counterpart spent on food purchases. For example, in Queensland the mean weekly per capita amount spent on food was \$4.60 in 1970 (source: Bureau of Census and Statistics 1971).

On analysis, the 1972 surveyed diet was, if anything, less nourishing than the 1970 diet. Using tables of composition of Australian foods (Thomas and Corden 1970) it was possible to estimate (with some limitations, see Taylor 1977b: 157) the nutrient content of the purchased diet. Table 7.5 presents a comparison of the nutrient content for the two surveys in terms of mean daily nutrient levels. The nutrient content of the purchased diet is expressed as a percentage of the actual nutrient value of the purchased diet divided by the daily nutrient intake levels recommended in the food tables for a population with demographic characteristics like those at Edward River. It should be noted that the values in Table 7.5 are likely to be over-estimates since there was no feasible way of taking food wastage or nutrient depreciation due to cooking processes into account during the surveys. This being so, nutrient shortfall was certainly worse than Table 7.5 indicates.

Table 7.5 shows some variation between the two periods. The 1972 intake of protein, iron and niacin was lower than in 1970, and although the values of retinol activity (Vitamin A) and ascorbic acid (vitamin C) show increases over 1970 levels, both sets of values are substantially below recommended daily levels. The extremely low values for iron, retinol, ascorbic acid and the low value for niacin indicate that the purchased diet was less than nutritionally adequate. The low value for calcium was of less concern since the "hard" water from the settlement well, filtered as it was through beds of seashells, contained more than sufficient calcium compounds to offset the meagre levels of the purchased diet.

The nutritional deficiencies of the purchased diet did not, fortunately, extend to the smaller children. From

Nutrient value of purchased diet expressed as a percentage of recommended dietary levels.		
Nutrient	1970 survey	1972 survey
Calories	103%	117%
Protein	106%-89%	92%-74%
Calcium	49%-24%	58%-26%
Iron	73%	33%
Retinol activity	10%	24%
Thiamine	260%	233%
Riboflavin	56%	70%
Niacin equivalent	71%	53%
Ascorbic acid	11%	28%

Table 7.5 Mean daily nutrient value of purchased diet,
Edward River, Jan-Feb 1970 and July 1972.

October 1969 onwards, all children up to and including six-year olds were given a specially prepared midday meal that included vitamin and mineral supplements. The establishment of the "feeding centre" was a response to evidence provided by a number of medical surveys (e.g. Kettle 1966, Probert, Edmonds and Parsons 1968, Maxwell and Elliot 1969, Jose and Welch 1970) conducted on remote Aboriginal settlements, including Edward River, which indicated that high levels of malnutrition existed among Aboriginal children. It was most evident in children between the ages of six months and three years. Here it manifested itself as growth retardation and a high susceptibility to infection, which in turn resulted in much higher mortality rates than those of comparable white children. It was thought too that the poor nourishment of pregnant women resulted in the delivery of low birth weight babies, who having less than optimal stores of nutrients had therefore a lowered capacity to survive nutritional and infective stress. The most obvious effect of the Edward River diet among adults could be seen whenever they

smiled. Virtually every adult had large gaps in their dentition where teeth had been extracted because of the caries that had been induced by the high intake of sugars.

Hunting and fishing in the settlement's immediate environs supplemented store-bought food to some extent, but it was not an important alternative source of food. During October, 1973, I conducted a survey of children's meals over a period of six days when beach fishing conditions were particularly good. Hunted food figured in only 10% of the meals. None of the pre-settlement plantfood staples were gathered by the women. Flour and other prepared cereals had completely replaced them in the diet. Children did, however, make great use of the wild fruits that grew in the vicinity of the settlement when they were in season.

Although the Edward River retail store contained a sufficient variety of foodstuffs to allow the staff to produce nutritious and varied meals, Edward River's Aboriginal housewives had many reasons for not seeking to change their food purchasing habits. In the first place they were used to their particular diet. Flour, sugar, tea, rice, tinned meat and salt beef were the first Western foods to which they were introduced by missionaries. By 1968, damper, meat, and tea heavily laced with sugar had become the staples of every household. Further, the majority of the settlement's housewives lacked both the knowledge and the culinary ability necessary to make the best nutritional use of the retail store's variety of Western foodstuffs. Apart from one short-lived voluntary effort by a staff member's wife, no-one between 1968 and 1975 had attempted to increase the home management and domestic skills of Edward River women. Edward River women in general lacked the kind of knowledge of food values that their European counterparts used. Since Western foodstuffs lay outside the prescriptions and taboos surrounding bush foods, they were all accepted as good for eating. Therefore the Edward River housewife chose foods that were cheap and filling and within her capacity to prepare. Though posters on the walls of the retail store and the hospital urged the value of careful food selection and nursing sisters frequently talked about "good" foods in the course of giving advice to mothers and patients, Edward

river women had other uses for their money than to "waste" it on the preparation of what were to them exotic foodstuffs.

7.6 Summary

From the inception of the mission, it was clear to both Aborigines and Europeans alike that an economy based on hunting and gathering was largely incompatible with a settled life. From the Europeans' point of view, it was fundamental to the success of the settlement that the pre-settlement subsistence system be augmented or totally replaced by something else that, hopefully, would lead to economic independence. From the Aborigines' point of view, the expectation was that their hunting and gathering lifestyle would be replaced by something that gave them access to European goods and services. The endpoint of these processes of cultural diffusion was, I suspect, only dimly perceived by Aborigines if it was perceived at all. For the missionaries and for the DAIA the endpoint was the same. The settlement was to be developed to the stage where its economy could be articulated as a productive unit in its own right with that of wider Australia. Moreover, the Edward River workforce was to have the skills and abilities necessary to enable them to compete for employment within the mainstream economy.

As things turned out, the economy of the settlement evolved through several stages, beginning with a subsistence system that relied as much on hunting and gathering activities as it did on gardening and the distribution of rations. With the introduction in mission times of modest community development programmes, gardening activities lapsed and inputs from hunting and gathering to the community food supply diminished. The settlement's economy became one in which the ration system dominated, although the introduction of token wages permitted Aborigines a certain amount of discretionary control over expenditures on personal needs. With the take-over of the settlement's management by the DAIA, the ration system was replaced by a full cash economy. The take-over also saw the introduction of occupational training categories and a wage system that gave individuals total responsibility for the

disposal of the income they earned.

Through the evolution of the various forms of the settlement's economy, the major dimension characterising the interaction between Europeans and Aborigines was that implicit in the culture-donor/culture-recipient relationship, one which in many ways parallels the relationship obtaining between master and pupil. Edward River people were fond of referring to their pre-settlement ignorance of the ways of Europeans and their goods. They had many stories about their encounters with new aspects of the European way of life. Seeing themselves as pupils, they entrusted the direction and pace of the economic development of the settlement to Europeans, while they themselves began to learn new skills, acquire new tastes and wants, and participate in other kinds of systems for the redistribution of goods.

The analysis of the responses of the Edward River people to the cash economy showed that they evaluated rationally their income-earning possibilities and organised the expenditure of their incomes in a way that attempted to maximise the fulfilment of their perceived needs. The ability to realise those needs was constrained by the limitations of the economic structures created around them. To overcome some of these limitations the Edward River people created additional means for the aggregation and redistribution of personal income via gambling. Even though most adults could not count precisely, it could be said that Edward River people were developing "...a sound awareness and understanding of the complex process associated with home economy" (see p. 353) in line with DAIA expectations.

At the same time, however, the responses of the Edward River people to the various changes in the economic organisation of the community and to the development of its physical structures were shaped in part by pre-settlement influences. Thus traditional preferences were at work in the formation of neighbourhoods and work groups. When the new economy moved away from the village to operate within the setting of the reserve itself, pre-settlement patterns of land tenure and ritual attitudes towards the land also had a powerful influence on the behaviour of Aboriginal workers and potential

entrepreneurs. The operation of these pre-settlement behavioural codes went largely unnoticed by the European staff.

If the major portion of the villagers' time was taken up with the emerging life-style of the settlement and the work patterns underpinning it, this did not mean that the pre-settlement subsistence economy was a thing of the past. The crafts, skills and knowledge that produced the tools, utensils and other artefacts of the hunting and gathering subsistence system were still intact and being put to use despite the veneer of Western technology that surrounded their employment. Through their continuity of association with the hinterland of the reserve, Aboriginal perceptions of the countryside in terms of place-names, of the resources of tracts and of the supernatural characteristics of ritual estates, as well as notions of ownership and access, remained firmly held by most adults, even though they now visited their traditional ranges only during holidays in the bush. So firmly held was this knowledge that I felt that if the DAIA were to leave the settlement to its own devices, the old system could be re-activated the day after the departure of the staff. This is not to say that anyone seriously contemplated such a possibility while I was in the field. At that time Edward River people were firmly committed to their new lifestyle and its accompanying consumerism. However, the acquisition of larger and larger amounts of personal property was not without its implications for interpersonal relationships. Some of these implications will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8 KINDRED AND MIGLOO -- THE RESTRUCTURING
OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The formation of the Edward River settlement not only meant that there would be fundamental reorientations in economic schedules and roles; it also meant that there would be radical changes in the codes and principles which the Edward River people used to structure and interpret their pre-settlement social relations. In part, the revisions and extensions of interactional codes were made necessary because Europeans could not (and would not) be incorporated into the pre-settlement patterns.

In my analysis of kin based roles in Chapter 3, I demonstrated how the sets of reciprocal kin terms (see Figure 3.5) that made up the vocative kin terminology of the languages of the Edward River reserve could be disassembled into distinctive clusters of rights, duties and expectations. For the purposes of this chapter it is useful to follow the terminology employed by Goodenough (1965) and Keesing (1970) and refer to actors linked together in such relationship pairs as "social identities". The term "role" can then be reserved for the enactment of the rights and duties together with the technical competences expected of the actors in such relationships. In pre-settlement society, social identity relationships were largely couched in the idiom of kinship and assigned on the basis of closeness of relationship and by the operation of rules of succession (whose detailed workings were only dimly perceived by this researcher). There were other social categories besides those that were lexically marked by reciprocal kin terms. One might distinguish relationship pairs such as "steward and band member" in subsistence activities, "ritual boss and clan member" in ritual and ceremony, and in disputing "plaintiffs and defendants" and "fighters and blockers". In most situations, kinship codes provided the primary organising principles for the conduct of interpersonal relationships. Even in the assumption of a social identity relationship, such as "steward

and band member", kinship was the most important factor governing the recruitment of actors to those capacities and roles. Given the difficulties anthropologists have had in mastering the polysemic complexities of Aboriginal kin terms and the distribution of rights, duties and expectations across them, it is little wonder that most Europeans could not frame their interactions with Aborigines with any degree of competence using Aboriginal codes.

In any case, European and Aboriginal relationships lay outside the contexts and situations of the pre-settlement world. They were different in kind and quality. Firstly, the establishment of the mission cast Aboriginal/European relationships into a special category of their own, that of culture donor/culture recipient. Secondly, the Europeans in their general role of change agents were attempting to create around the Edward River people an environment that not only mimicked the physical and economic structures of the dominant society, but also its social relationships. This in turn meant that Aborigines were expected to relate to Europeans and to other Aborigines in capacities and contexts that lay quite outside pre-settlement guidelines and values in order to prepare them for entry into a social world whose profusion of social positions and roles reflected the complex industrial society that generated them. During the field-work period Aboriginal interpersonal relationships could be clearly seen to have changed in two ways. One was the modification of the pre-settlement codes for interacting with other Aborigines; the other was the development of an additional repertoire of codes for interacting with Europeans. Before proceeding further it will be analytically helpful to characterise the social structure of the Edward River settlement between 1968 and 1975 as composed of five major sets of relationships. These sets are the terminal taxa of Figure 8.1 below.

In Figure 8.1, kin-based relationships refer to the pre-settlement codes for framing social interaction which the people of the reserve brought with them into the settlement at its formation and which, though modified, still provided the basis for many of the on-going interpersonal transactions

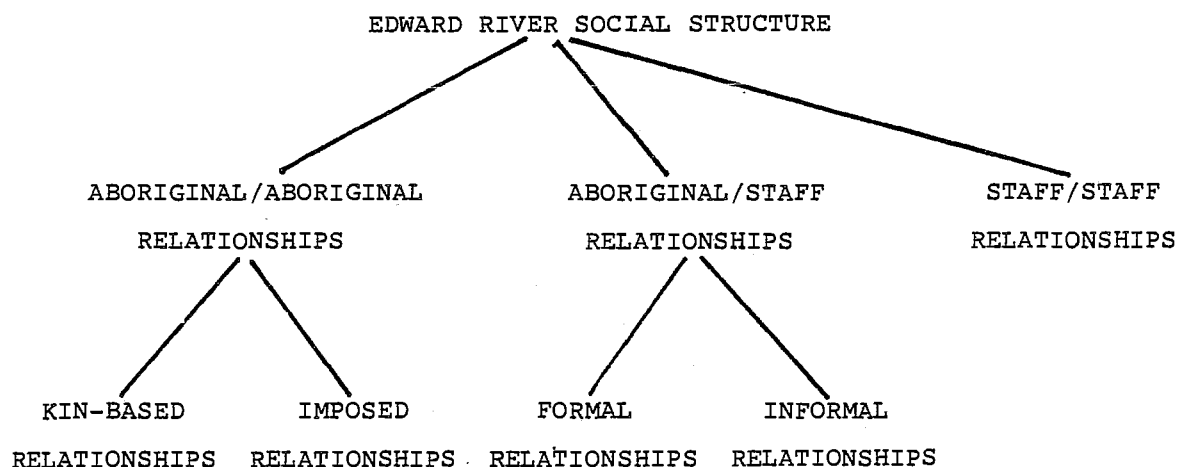


Figure 8.1 The broad categories of relationships structuring interpersonal relations, Edward River 1968-75.

between the Aboriginal residents in the settlement. Imposed relationships refer to the positions and capacities created by the Europeans in their attempt to build around the Edward River people the physical and social structures of the mainstream Australian society. In these relationships Aborigines were expected to interact with other Aborigines according to a European model that stressed an impartial and, to borrow a term from Parsons (Parsons and Shils 1951:82), a universalistic orientation that set familial and egocentric ties at naught. Here, I am referring to the community's occupational categories described in the previous chapter, and to positions such as councillor or policeman, which had to do with the maintenance of law and order. Formal relationships refer to those exchanges between Aborigines and Europeans in which Europeans were acting in their official capacities as both providers of services and skills and as change agents. Imposed and formal relationships were specified by Act, Regulation and other administrative means. Both Aborigines and staff had reasonably clear (though not necessarily similar) conceptions of the rights, duties and ambits of operation associated with such relationships. Informal relationships refer to those out-of-working-hours situations when Aborigines and staff found themselves interacting in terms other than the designated roles of the settlement's workplace. These

relationships were not officially subject to direction or prescription. The lack of guidelines constituted something of a problem for the settlement's staff in managing their off-duty relationships with community residents inasmuch as they were free, within very broad limits, to choose what kind of informal relationships they wanted to maintain with the Edward River people. Consequently, the degree of familiarity staff members established with community residents varied. And whereas formal and imposed relationships were moulded within a European template, informal relationships between Aborigines and staff that achieved any degree of intimacy were insensibly shaped in the direction of Aboriginal codes for interpersonal behaviour.

The final set of relationships, those between staff members themselves, represented a substantial element in the community's social organisation. However, I shall postpone a discussion of these until Chapter 11.

In practice, the relationships described above were not as neatly compartmentalised as the diagram would have it. There were many situations in which Aborigines and staff members suffered personal and interpersonal stresses, because other actors held conflicting expectations concerning role enactment in those situations. Role conflict was an important factor in the dynamics of interpersonal relations within the Edward River community. Indeed, as I hope to show in this and succeeding chapters, role conflict and its resolution had much to do with the conservation of cultural boundaries and the maintenance of Edward River as a distinctly bi-cultural community. To understand role conflict and the circumstances in which it arose, it will be necessary to look in more detail at each of the main relationship sets. I do this in the next four sections and I begin with a discussion of formal relationships.

8.2 Formal relationships

It would seem that very early in their dealings with Europeans, the Aborigines of Edward River reserve had decided that their relationships with whites would be of an order

different from that which governed their own interactions. They classified white people as "devils" (wang in Kuuk Thaayorre). In doing so they were grouping Europeans with the supernatural denizens of their environment and conceptually placing them on a plane that was different from that inhabited by the Aborigines, who in most languages of the reserve referred to each other as pam. This was perhaps appropriate enough considering how strange European skin colour, apparel, domestic beasts and artefacts must have appeared in Aboriginal eyes, and perhaps more appropriate considering how powerful and unpredictably dangerous their weapons made them. The European historical record testifies to a number of lethal early encounters between Aborigines and Europeans (e.g. see Chapter 1, p. 2, and Loos 1974:6). Some of the encounters that occurred at the turn of the century had passed into the Aboriginal oral tradition. It was not uncommon for the early pastoralists to drive Aborigines off their runs at gunpoint. One such incident on Rutland Plains station which had fatal consequences for both whites and blacks was well remembered at Edward River. The pastoralists involved, the Bowman brothers, unwittingly lent their names to a series of similar atrocity stories that were still recounted during my field-work at Edward River (see Sommer N.D. for an account of this event as seen by Aborigines). The collection of "Bowman stories", most of which had nothing to do with the Bowman brothers, represented a macabre and cruel aspect of Aboriginal and European confrontation at the frontier of white expansion into Aboriginal realms on Cape York Peninsula. Despite the atrocities, informants' accounts of early contacts with Europeans reveal a lively, albeit cautious, curiosity about them and their artefacts. Europeans had things that Aborigines wanted, two of the most important being metals, to substitute for stone and wood in their own technology, and tobacco. Equally, the Europeans on the frontier had an interest in establishing regular and non-hostile relationships with Aborigines. Itinerant sandalwood gatherers began to engage them for short periods to help them find and collect supplies of the timber on the reserve. Pastoralists on the reserve's boundaries

appreciated the Aborigines' knowledge of landscape and season and employed them as casual stock workers. Many of them permitted the establishment of semi-permanent camps on the outskirts of station homesteads and did not object to the presence of "bush blacks" or "mission blacks" visiting their kin who were employed on the properties. For the missionaries, of course, the Aborigines of the reserve were the raison-d'être for their presence in the area. They welcomed curious visitors from the bush and supplied them with tobacco and trade goods, treated their ailments and, whenever their circumstances permitted it, supplied them with rations. From time to time the missionaries made forays into the domains of the reserve's bush-dwellers to maintain contact with those not yet brought into the mission fold.

Out of such contacts the people of the Edward River reserve began to adopt a set of codes for interacting with Europeans. The new codes clearly bore the stamp of the social orders of European society. The lexicon of terms used to distinguish the social identities of the newly emerging social relationships were drawn from Aboriginal English, which as a frontier pidgin rapidly gained a wide currency and became the principal medium of communication between Aborigine and European, and between Aborigines of different language groups. In Aboriginal English, the Europeans were collectively termed "migloo", while people of Aboriginal descent were called "murries". Within these two broad categories there were finer distinctions. Male Aborigines, with the exception of the very old, were referred to and addressed by whites and other Aborigines as "boys"; similarly female Aborigines were called "girls". "Boss", "missus", "Father" were terms Aborigines used in talking to the white men who employed them, to white women and to missionaries, respectively. The status connotations of these terms reflected both the hierarchical organisation of European society with its asymmetrical power relationships (e.g. see Robinson 1972:127, Brown and Ford 1961) and, from the white perspective, characterised Aborigines as being like children, which is to say, in a position of tutelage and dependence vis-à-vis Europeans.

To aid the identification of individual Aborigines, Europeans also conferred English personal names on those natives of the reserve with whom they had regular contact. These names were accepted by the people of the reserve and incorporated into their own systems of terminology for addressing and referring to people. In speech between Aborigines and Europeans the use of names as terms of address also reflected the unequal power differential between the two groups. When Europeans addressed Aborigines they called them by their first names. When Aborigines spoke to whites they employed the person's surname prefixed by the appropriate title of respect (e.g. Mister so-and-so, Missus so-and-so, Father so-and-so). When Aborigines spoke to each other using their European personal names, they normally addressed and referred to each other by their first names only.

For the Edward River people, pre-settlement relationships with Europeans were mostly temporary and entailed no obligations other than rendering services for the rewards offered. When a given contract was fulfilled an Aborigine was free to return to a life in the bush, ostensibly unaltered by the experience (but see Chapter 6, Section 6.1). The establishment of the settlement brought Aborigine and European into permanent contact and made relationships between the two groups something of everyday concern.

Officially, the various pieces of legislation enacted by the Queensland Government for the welfare and benefit of Aborigines spelled out in broad terms the duties of departmental officers and mission superintendents and the scope of their control over their charges. I have already discussed these in Chapter 6, Section 6.2. If the wording of the Acts, Regulations and By-Laws was taken as a guide to the quality of social interaction between settlement staff and Aborigines, one might expect that the dominant mode would be one of authoritarianism and paternalism on the part of the whites and of tutelage and dependency on the part of the Aborigines. In fact, paternalistic authority and dependent tutelage were key aspects of the relationships between staff and community residents in many areas of community life,

though it should be noted that the authoritarianism was rarely harsh nor was the dependency necessarily subservient. Out of their interactions with mission and settlement staff the Edward River people evolved a clear set of norms concerning their formal relations with them. These norms stood as an ideal behavioural template against which staff behaviour could be assessed. The norms were embodied in a phrase used frequently by the Edward River people in referring to past staff members whom they admired and whose loss to the community they regretted. Such staff members were called "good helpers for the people", and the rights and duties of a "good helper" explicitly acknowledged the Europeans' role as change agents. The characteristics of "good helpers for the people" could be assembled out of the positive and negative statements Edward River people made concerning past and present staff behaviour. The more important of them were as follows:

1. "Good helpers for the people" did not interfere with or upset arrangements within the settlement that were subject to kin-based codes for behaviour. In the manoeuvres and machinations of groups and individuals pursuing private goals, staff as "good helpers for the people" remained neutral. Thus for example, in 1969, when it seemed that the chaplain was about to consent to marry a young Thaayorre couple whose union was still subject to dispute, the marriage bosses were irate. When the chaplain learnt of the indignation he had seemingly caused, he earned approval by publicly stating that no-one would be married until all parties had agreed to the match.
2. "Good helpers for the people" treated Aboriginal statements about their world with respect and without cultural bias. When it was proposed to build a stockyard near the dangerously potent place Waanchikan, there was great disquiet and concern (see Chapter 7, p. 373). Because the stock overseer listened patiently

to his men's warnings and relocated the stockyard site, he earned respect. On the other hand, the stock overseer who ignored his men's comments about flood height levels (Chapter 7, p. 372) not only ruined some government property, but also forfeited his reputation.

3. "Good helpers for the people" were competent in their professions and were able to impart at least some of their skills to Aboriginal people. Mechanics who could not repair vehicles, storekeepers who ran out of tobacco, flour, tea or sugar and stock overseers who never got on a horse, became objects of scorn in Aboriginal eyes. By contrast, staff who successfully imparted some new skill to Aboriginal people were looked on with affectionate regard.
4. "Good helpers for the people" demonstrated a concern for individuals and for the community as a whole. Specifically, they were people who maintained easy interpersonal relations with the workers under their control and insisted on the reciprocal use of first names.
5. In their role as change agents and as the organisers of the settlement's daily activities, "good helpers for the people" did not attempt to use their official powers and authority unduly to force compliance on people. Rather, they achieved their ends through consultation, negotiation and agreement. Staff who used coercion and mandatory rulings to achieve their ends were styled "hard".
6. "Good helpers for the people" were also "straight". They practised no guile and were truthful and straightforward in their dealings

with people.

In fashioning their concept of the "good helper for the people", the Aboriginal community as a whole was drawing on a history of dealings with mission and DAIA staff to provide the experiences upon which to formulate a reasonable and general set of duties for staff to observe in their formal relationships with them. The implication of the concept was that the observance of these general duties gave the staff the right to expect that Aborigines would participate in the plans for the development of the settlement. It can also be seen as a necessary standard for fair dealing in a situation in which Aborigines had become greatly dependent on European resources, management and control for the functioning of their community.

During the years 1968 to 1975, I found little evidence to suggest that staff members were aware that their formal relationships with Aborigines were being monitored against a local code. The primary orientation of the staff was to meet the expectations of their employers, who were principally the DAIA and the Queensland Department of Education. No staff member appointed to Edward River during that time had had any prior experience with the community. Many of the staff, those with trades and professions, were appointed to Edward River on the basis of competences developed within their own society. However, unlike the occupational roles of the dominant society, the DAIA appointments carried with them dimensions and responsibilities that set them apart from the way in which the roles of nursing sister, school teacher, clerk, plumber, mechanic etc. were performed in an ordinary country town of equivalent size. In carrying out their official duties, staff were also expected to be change agents and models of behavioural patterns that were seen as desirable for Aborigines to copy. Yet at the same time, staff had to come to terms with the problem of communicating and dealing with a people whose languages and culture were markedly different from the mainstream culture. All staff members, whether they were career officers in the DAIA or simply transitory tradesmen or

professionals, had to make allowances for local custom and language to enable them to perform their official tasks. Career officers in the DAIA with experience from other Aboriginal communities to draw on, seemed to adjust to their niche in the structure of Edward River with the least strain. Other staff found adjustment less easy.

I will return to the theme of adjustment in Section 8.6 where I undertake a preliminary analysis of the dynamics of role conflict and the consequences of its resolution. It is necessary at this point to examine the patterns of Aboriginal kin-based relationships at Edward River between 1968 and 1975 to understand why accommodation was necessary at all.

8.3 Kin-based relationships

As I have already indicated, kinship persisted as a dominant mode for organising interpersonal behaviour between Aborigines at Edward River. In many contexts people still referred to each other by kinship labels rather than personal names. Closeness of relationship determined behaviour within kindreds. The Aboriginal use of the environment depended on kin links to provide primary entitlements and secondary access to land beyond the settlement's immediate environs. It provided that basis for the pursuit and settlement of disputes within the settlement that had their origins in breaches of pre-settlement codes of behaviour.

As might be expected, the pre-settlement codes for interpersonal behaviour did not carry over into the settlement without change. Some of these changes were consciously instituted by Edward River people and they would freely discuss them, although as I will demonstrate, the changes were sometimes less than real. In other areas kinship had assumed a new significance. This seemed to be so in the case of the determination of clan membership, but the case for this assertion will be advanced in Chapter 9. In this section I will not attempt to cover all the areas of interpersonal behaviour for which kinship was relevant.

The purpose of this section is firstly to demonstrate in broad terms how the pre-settlement codes and values for relating to other Aborigines still persisted to shape everyday transactions between all Aborigines on the settlement, and secondly to show its specific operation in the domestic life of family groups and in marriage and residence arrangements. The influence of kin-based behaviours in dispute settling will receive an extended discussion in Chapter 10.

The importance of kin-based relationships was formally recognised in Aboriginal English. In addressing and referring to each other, Edward River people employed a lexicon of kin terms that derived largely from English. Such terms were used in discourse between one Aborigine and another when it was inconvenient to use terms drawn from a vernacular. They were also used in communication between Aborigines and Europeans. Few Europeans were aware of how far the pidgin terms departed from the meanings conventionally ascribed to them in English. Table 8.1 presents a list of the terms of address, together with their meanings, in common use at Edward River between 1968 and 1975.

The terms in Table 8.1 could be applied referentially in conversation with the addition of appropriate pronominal markers to indicate whose kin (or rather, whose kindred) was being talked about, for example, "that cousin mine", "granny yours", "uncle belonging to we-two". Another set of kin terms and qualifying phrases were used almost exclusively in referring to relatives. The more common of them are indicated in Table 8.2.

In Chapter 3 (pp. 122-3) I noted that pre-settlement relationships fell into two categories. In one category, the relationships were relaxed, informal and even intimate; in the other, they were associated with avoidance and respect behaviours that were expressed in terms of taboos of speech, touch and food-giving. People referred to someone who stood in a relationship of restraint as a "longway" or "poison" relation. In the main, the rules of etiquette for dealing with "poison relations" were still functioning during 1968-75. There were signs, however, that they were being eroded and losing some of their force because of the

Term of Address	Used by
Boy	both sexes in addressing their S, ZS and FZH and others who were classificatory equivalents
Girl	both sexes in addressing their D, BD and ZD and their classificatory equivalents
Mum	both sexes in addressing their M, MZ and occasionally by men addressing their SW
Dad	both sexes in addressing their F, FB and their classificatory equivalents
Brother	both sexes in addressing B, MZS, FBS and those classified with them
Sister	both sexes in addressing Z, MZD, FBD and those classified with them
Granny	both sexes in addressing FF, FFZ, MM, MFZ and all those who were terminologically in the same generation level; and also by both sexes in addressing SC, DC and all those terminologically in the same generation level.
Cousin	males addressing MBD and those classified with them; and by females addressing their FZS and those classified with them
Sister-in-law	both sexes addressing their BW; and by males addressing "straight" women who were married or otherwise ineligible as spouses
<u>Paanchi</u>	by men addressing their MBS and their FZS and those classified with them (an Aboriginal English word of uncertain origin)

Table 8.1 Aboriginal English terms of address in common use at Edward River 1968-75.

inconvenience they caused.

The changes were most apparent in the "poison-cousin" relationship of those in their early twenties or younger. A number of young people in "poison-cousin" relationships no longer observed the requirement of strict avoidance. People described it as "talking to each other". The decision not to "go poison" was made by the parents of the pair involved. They instructed their children to ignore the conventions of avoidance and speech behaviour. Social awkwardness and, sometimes, the expectations of

Term	Referential Meaning
"Small Father"	father's siblings
"Small Mother"	mother's siblings
"Son", "Daughter"	used by parents to refer to own children
"Cousin-brother", "Cousin-sister"	parallel cousins and those grouped classificatorily with them
"Uncle"	MB and males classified with MB
"Poison-uncle" (male speaking)	males in the MB category towards whom avoidance should be practised; also WF and and potential WF
"Poison-auntie" (male speaking)	WM or potential WM
"Poison-granny"	those in the grandparental generation towards whom avoidance was prescribed
"Poison-cousin" (male speaking)	ZHZ, FZD and those classified with them
"Poison-cousin" (female speaking)	BWB, MBS and those classified with them
"Widow"	a male or female undertaking mourning seclusion or observing mourning food taboos, usually wife, mother or father of the deceased
"Blood-relation"	a kindred member and one not necessarily related by a demonstrable consanguineal link
"Full", "Full-blood", "Really"	qualifiers which, when followed by a kin term, indicate kindred membership rather than a blood tie
"Straight" ("man" or "woman")	used by either sex to denote a person in the marriageable category
"Wronghead"	applied to marriages that were not "straight"
"Longway relation"	someone to whom avoidance etiquette was due

Table 8.2 Aboriginal English referential terms and
qualifiers in use at Edward River 1968-75.

European staff were the reasons advanced for abandoning the code. Thus one of my informants described how she had told her schoolboy son to abandon avoidance behaviours towards a certain "poison-cousin" who was in his class at school:

"I told my boy, you can't go poison-cousin towards her. What's the teacher going to think if you can't talk to her or sit next to her?"

The relaxation of pre-settlement etiquette did not extend to the rule forbidding marriage between "poison-cousins". Even when the interactional rules were relaxed, a young man, for example, would still refer to his FZD as his "poison-cousin", implying thereby that they could not marry. Not all young people had dropped their "poison-cousin" behaviour. In one family, the older of two sisters still maintained the appropriate restraint towards her "poison-cousins" while her younger sibling spoke to the same young men avoided by her sister. Older people generally had not relaxed the "poison-cousin" codes, while those cross-generational relationships of avoidance or restraint (e.g. between WM and DH, or between MB and ZS) were still publicly maintained. Nonetheless, they were at times socially inconvenient. The settlement, with its fixed neighbourhoods and its permanent dwellings, with its clearly defined and immutable settings for carrying out activities (e.g. the school, the retail store, the administrative offices, the church, the community hall, the hospital) often constrained "poison relations" to come together and accept a degree of proximity that would probably not have been tolerated in pre-settlement times. Grumbling and complaints about the invasion of rule-defined space was especially noticeable when the settlement's limited transportation facilities forced people to crowd together in vehicles. The space with which the pre-settlement people used to mark and embroider their interpersonal relationships was no longer available to them in the new living-space formed by the settlement. One might predict that there would be a further erosion of "poison" relationships over time.

Perhaps more important than the erosion of the etiquette of interaction was the change in the distribution of the performance of kin-based duties and obligations. Tables 3.3 to 3.19 in Chapter 3 enumerate sets of rights and duties defining the identity relationships of the kindred. I noted (p. 124) that the role obligations of the kindred comprised a mix of long-term commitments (such as, for example, those of parents to children or of mother's brothers to sister's children) and short-term demands surrounding status-changing events like initiation or life-crisis events such as birth, illness, disputes or death. The changes came about either because the occasion that called for the performance of duties had been suppressed or neglected, or because responsibilities that once belonged to kin were absorbed in part or in whole by the welfare and service mechanisms built into the settlement's structure.

For instance, the elaborate prescriptions surrounding the disposal of a dead body were cut short when the missionaries forbade corpse exposure and insisted on immediate interment. The settling of the deceased's outstanding grievances and the mounting of revenge expeditions also lapsed because missionaries and police alike could not approve of violent displays and attempts at homicide. A death in the settlement put in motion a new set of activities in which the pre-settlement duties were transformed into codes that suited the changed circumstances, but which maintained pre-settlement beliefs and values. These new codes will be discussed in Chapter 9. Similarly, the death of a kindred member called for new ways of dealing with problems created in the wake of a firm belief that most adult deaths were attributable to the actions of sorcerers. This topic will be pursued more fully in Chapter 10. When the mission was established, the missionaries would not permit the formation of any new polygynous unions. One result of this was that a man who was already married could not also marry a deceased brother's wife and thereby assume the responsibility for looking after her and her children. In 1968-75, widows and their children were financially supported by the normal Commonwealth pension scheme and were provided with special housing within the

community. Old people, too, were eligible for pensions, thus obviating the need for their sons and daughters to contribute resources directly to their maintenance. However, the institution of the cash economy devolved fresh duties on the children of aged parents. They assumed the responsibility for managing their parents' pensions and assisting them with their shopping at the retail store. During 1968-75, women only rarely assisted with the birth of their female kindred's children. Pregnant women were normally sent to Cairns Base Hospital to be delivered of their babies. Because of an airline rule concerning the carriage of pregnant women, mothers-to-be were usually sent out to Cairns in the seventh month of their pregnancy. It was only through some miscalculation of the birth date or through subterfuge on the part of some women (see Chapter 11) that babies were born in the settlement, thus activating the pre-settlement system for providing midwifery help.

The education of children was another area where responsibilities were divided. Two systems of education were in operation. The first was represented by the school and was, of course, modelled on the educational procedures of European-Australian society. Its formal structure of classrooms and teachers, of syllabus and grades, was meant to prepare children for their entry into the evolving lifestyle of the community and to equip them with knowledge and skills necessary for their induction into the community's training programmes. From its beginnings as a one-teacher school in mission times, teaching a non-standard and comparatively restricted syllabus, the school had, by 1975, elaborated to the point where some of the children emerging from the system could be sent away to an ordinary residential high school to further their education. The second system of education had its roots in the pre-settlement socialisation process in which parents, kindred members, peer groups and the community as a whole had responsibilities for imparting some aspect or other of cultural competence. In the settlement, the pattern of the distribution of responsibilities for communicating knowledge and codes of behaviour that lay outside the school curriculum was little changed from that of

the pre-settlement socialisation process. For example, mothers and fathers still had a major responsibility to teach their daughters and sons the appropriate sex-specific techniques associated with obtaining and processing food, crafting local materials and participating in the ceremonial and ritual life of the community. Like the pre-settlement socialisation experience, this "local" educational system was based largely on learning by observation and by participating in situations and activities that had immediate relevance and application. In the settlement, both the content and the order of such informal learning reflected the way in which the settlement lifestyle differed from the pre-settlement one. Thus fathers were more likely to teach their sons how to handle fishing lines, rather than how to engage in shallow water fish poisoning techniques, simply because line-fishing was more appropriate in the settlement environs and had a potential year-round productivity. On the other hand, fishing with spears had not been replaced by line-fishing, because fish would not always take baits reliably. Wading over the submerged tidal flats in search of stingarees, sharks, barramundi and other large marine creatures was a profitable way to augment a family's larder. Hence, men still made small spears and spear-throwers for their own sons and their brothers' sons to practise with and, when they were old enough, instructed them in the making of those items. Similar changes had taken place in the domestic education of daughters. A girl was more likely to learn how to use flour, the settlement's staple plant-derived food, than how to prepare such things as "cheeky yam", arrowroot, bulguru or the hearts of palms. The operation of the "local" educational system was, of course, constrained by the fact that those who taught and those who learnt were caught up in the official activity schedules of the settlement. Hence, much informal learning took place in the hours after work and after school when people had a measure of control over their own routines. The processes of "local" education continued well past childhood as older kin took advantage of the opportunities provided by time, place and occasion to augment appropriately the knowledge and the skills of their

younger kin. In a sense, the local informal system and the imposed formal systems of education competed with each other for relevance in the minds of the Edward River children. The introduction to the school of a vernacular language teaching programme during the early 1970s provided a bridge of sorts between the two systems, since the teaching materials were prepared in association with Aboriginal teaching aides and they tended to reflect "local" content rather than content derived from non-Edward River sources.

While there were, then, clear departures from the pre-settlement patterns of kin-based duty and obligation, the codes for regulating the interpersonal behaviour of the Edward River people remained substantially unchanged in their essentials. The differences between pre-settlement and settlement patterns lay in the fact that the same basic set of principles and values was finding expression in two different social and physical environments, the bush on the one hand, the settlement on the other. For example, within the settlement an individual still owed duties and had rights within the kindred. Although some of the pre-settlement distribution of duties had disappeared or had been shared with staff and other outsiders, the kindred persisted as the individual's primary support group in both emotional and practical terms. Just as in the pre-settlement era, key identity relationships within the kindred (e.g. father, mother, mother's brother) were maintained through replacement when the actual kin died or were absent. In Edward River English, people called this process of kin succession "taking over". The protocols of dominance and authority based on age, sex and relationship still seemed to apply with undiminished force. Mothers still retained the principal right to control and discipline their children. Older brothers still exercised the right to admonish younger siblings. A mother's brother was expected to interfere when a woman's grown child became unruly.

There was little change in the decision-making rights individuals exercised over others in their kindred. For instance, no action could be taken by anyone with respect to a child without first consulting its mother. Thus, it

was a mother who decided how others should call her child if there were alternative ways of determining the appropriate kin term. Parents and mother's brothers still exercised a controlling interest in the marriage destinies of their children and the children of their sisters. Surrogates recruited to fill these positions when actual kin were missing seemed no less punctilious about exercising their authority in marriage matters. It was sometimes asserted by young Edward River adults that settlement marriages were acts of free choice and unconstrained by the betrothal system. But it was hard to reconcile this assertion with the realities of spouse selection. The rule that enjoined young women to seek a FZS or someone classified with him, or for a man to seek a MBD or "MBD" still guided the preliminary search for spouses. Further, an examination of marriage disputes (e.g. Case No. 15, pp. 536-8 in Chapter 10) showed that older people exercised a major influence in the choice of marriage partners. An examination of settlement marriage patterns also revealed little deviation from the patterns prior to settlement.

In Figure 8.2, I have constructed a diagram of settlement marriages after the fashion of Figure 2.11 which represented the flow of women in marriage between the clans of the Kuuk Thaayorre and their neighbours. Figure 8.2 focuses on the marriages of the same core of Kuuk Thaayorre clans, namely Spear/Duck, Jewfish, Watersnake, Brolga, Wallaby/Lightning, Darter and Dog/Goanna. Further, the Spear/Yuuchup clan, for which data were not available in constructing Figure 2.11, now appears as a clan in its own right in Figure 8.2. The Freshwater/Rain clan (Yir Yoront) is still shown, and the Grass clan (Olkol) is especially identified as well, since some of the members of these two clans were living permanently at Edward River. Both of these clans had representatives at Kowanyama. Marriages between these two clans and Kuuk Thaayorre clans had been contracted by members of both the Edward River and Kowanyama branches. In 1975, the Darter clan was represented by one elderly lady and the Jewfish clan was also on the verge of extinction, having no surviving male members.

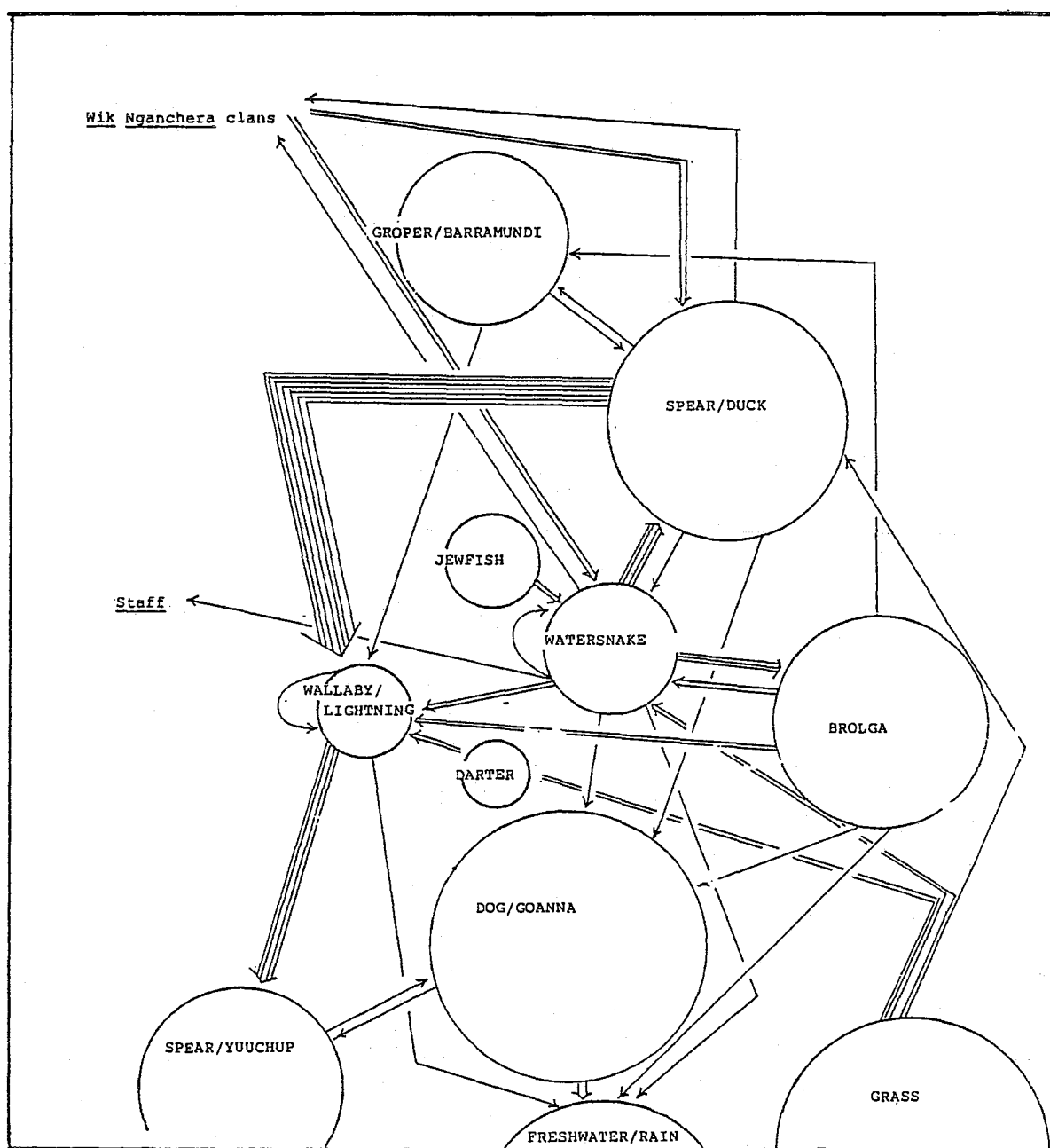


Figure 8.2 Flow of women in marriage between Kuuk Thaayorre clans and their neighbours, 1939-75.

Marriages took place within two clans, Wallaby/Lightning and Watersnake. These marriages are indicated in Figure 8.2 by recursive arrows. Numerically, these clans were among the largest at Edward River (see Table 8.3). One of these marriages was said to be "straight" while the other, that within the Watersnake clan, was said to be "wronghead" and was subject to a series of disputes that lasted some three years before the principal objector, the father of the young man involved, conceded with bad grace to let the union be acknowledged. At no point in the dispute was it ever suggested that common clan membership was a reason for opposing the marriage. The existence of these marriages may be taken to support the argument in Section 3.4, Chapter 3, that clans such as these were not the units involved in marriage exchanges. Nonetheless, when due allowance is made for clan resettlement and demographic vicissitudes, the patterns of the flow of women in marriage between the clans remain remarkably similar. The pattern of cyclical exchange still dominates along much the same routes as in pre-settlement times. This reflects the fact that marriages were still in the control of betrothal-makers whose prejudices and preferences for directing and consenting to marriage choices were still moulded by pre-settlement considerations.

Marriages between Kuuk Thaayorre and Wik Nganchera clans (other than Groper/Barramundi) had increased to 11% of the total marriages compared with 6.9% for the pre-settlement period. However, a difference of 4.1% does not constitute a very great change in this context. A new factor was the availability of staff members as marriage partners. Staff members sometimes contracted liaisons of some intimacy with Edward River people, but only one of these, as at 1975, had resulted in marriage. I shall discuss these liaisons in more detail in Section 8.5. Information concerning the status of marriages between Aborigines was available for 41 (75%) of the post-settlement unions. Of that number 31 (75.6%) were "straight" and 10 were "wronghead". This compares with the pre-settlement percentage of "straight" marriages of 66% (see p. 114). Given the

CLAN	NUMBERS			SURVIVING PATRILINEALS
	Males	Females	Total	
OLKOL				
Grass *	-	4	4	-
YIR YORONT				
Roughback Stingaree *	-	1	1	-
Freshwater/Rain	3	4	7	1
THAAYORRE				
Dog/Goanna *	13	9	22	2
Watersnake	15	22	37	4
Wallaby/Lightning	30	14	44	2
Jewfish	-	1	1	-
Darter	-	1	1	-
Duck/Spear	25	21	46	3
Brolga *	11	9	20	1
WIK NGANCHERA				
Groper/Barramundi	4	3	7	2
Diver	3	3	6	1
Possum *	16	16	32	4
Jabiru *	3	4	7	1
Snake	11	2	13	1
Shark	4	6	10	2
WIK MUNGKAN				
Freshwater Crocodile *	8	5	13	1
BAKANH				
Ghost	6	3	9	1
TOTALS	152	128	280	26

Table 8.3 Clans permanently represented in the Edward River settlement as at January, 1970. Clans marked with an asterisk have clan members known to be resident at Aurukun, Kowanyama or elsewhere. Note three "outsiders" not listed.

lack of information on the other 25%, it would be unwise to conclude that settlement marriages were becoming more orthodox. It does seem fair to conclude that they were no less orthodox.

8.4 Imposed Relationships

Imposed relationships refer to those situations in which interaction between the Aboriginal residents of Edward River took place in the context of social identities that were defined from the outside. They were not in any sense modified kin-based relationships. Rather, they were relationships whose purposes and functions were linked to the official scenes and activities of the settlement. In that sense they represented a new code for interpersonal behaviour. I am referring here to the social identities of the occupation sets (e.g. retail store assistants, carpenters, hygiene men, crocodile farm workers, the butchering gang and so forth), to the named positions and roles associated with the church and community welfare organisations (such as altar server or welfare committee member), as well as those official positions whose functions related mainly to community management and the maintenance of law and order (such as councillor and policeman). Some of the positions in the occupational sets required little interaction between members of a particular set and the community at large. Stockmen, for instance, and carpenters or fencers had little to do with "the public" as they went about their tasks. Other occupations or positions entailed a good deal of interaction with community members in complementary identity relationships. Thus for retail store assistants, community members were "customers", for nursing aides they were "patients", for policemen they were "the public" or "lawbreakers", for councillors they were "the people".

When Edward River people were interacting on the basis of their imposed roles, kin-based modes of address, and to a degree kin-based behavioural etiquette, were put aside. Imposed relationships had their own codes for addressing and referring to people. In imposed relationships

actors tended to use English first names or, depending on the situation, even surnames preceded by a formal title such as "Mrs", "Mr", "Chairman" or "Constable". Strongly ingrained behaviours such as "poison-cousin" avoidance could be suppressed if the occasion demanded it. I once saw this happen in the case of an Edward River Councillor who in his capacity as Chairman of the Court had the responsibility to hear a charge related to a dispute between two middle-aged women. One of the women was his "poison-cousin". In other circumstances the two people stringently avoided each other. In the context prescribed by the Aboriginal Court, and in their roles as "Chairman" and "defendent", it was necessary for them to interact. Interchanges between the two were marked by the elaborate use of formal titles and a total avoidance of eye contact.

When people referred to the actions of others in contexts that called for imposed relationships they generally employed the title that characterised their particular status in that context rather than use kin-based terminology. Hence, they used phrases like "the Chairman", "that store-keeper" or "the welfare man" when they were describing situations that lay outside the ordinary domains of kin-based relationships.

The term "imposed" is not meant to imply that these guidelines for interpersonal behaviour were necessarily unacceptable to the people of Edward River. They were adopted as reasonable ways for doing things in the evolving social organisation of the community, always provided that the claims of kin-based relationships asserted no prior authority or set of conflicting expectations. From time to time such conflicts did occur, as I shall describe shortly.

8.5 Informal relationships

As I noted earlier, the degree to which staff and community residents interacted outside the structured settings of the workplace varied. For the staff there were no departmental expectations concerning after-work relationships with Aborigines other than that they should

conform to the very broad standards for reasonable conduct laid out in the official codes (e.g. see The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Regulations of 1966, paragraphs 10, 12 and 16 [2]). Indeed, new staff arriving at the settlement had much to adapt to, both in terms of amenities and Edward River's residents, before they could reasonably begin to form personal relationships with Aborigines that extended into non-work settings.

On the other hand, the Aboriginal residents of Edward River did possess a minimum set of prescriptions concerning such Aboriginal-staff interactions. These prescriptions were part of the general "good helper for the people" concept which I described in part when discussing formal relations. As "good helpers for the people" staff, in their spare hours, were expected to act as mediators between the Edward River people and the world beyond the settlement's boundaries. Edward River people relied on staff to supply them with information and opinions about the events and products of urban Australia. They needed staff help in writing for mail-order goods and arranging for their payment. They also needed staff skills in repairing broken items such as gramophones, radios, boat motors, refrigerators and so forth. By Aboriginal reckoning, all staff members were very affluent. Staff who made not even the least portion of their material resources and skills available to community residents were resented. Staff were also expected to play an appropriate, though generally minor, part in public festivals (such as the New Year celebrations) and in ceremonies such as funerals and "house openings" (see Chapter 9).

The process of inducting recent staff arrivals into their out-of-work roles as "good helpers for the people" began when one or other of the village residents (often someone in the staff member's work gang) would visit a new staff member's house for the purpose of requesting help with some problem. It might be the repair of a broken domestic appliance, or the writing of a mail-order letter, or it might be to make use of some part of the staff member's resources, perhaps to borrow a firearm or to ask for

assistance with transportation if the staff member had a 4WD vehicle. Initial overtures were undertaken with some hesitancy and not before canvassing opinion among other community members concerning the staff member's likely reaction. The actual request was usually carefully phrased to allow the staff member to refuse without incurring any embarrassment. Normally a request was preceded by some cautious enquiry such as:

"I don't know whether you will agree..."

"I don't know which way you are thinking. You might say 'yes'. You might say 'no'."

A refusal was accepted with a show of good grace and a comment such as:

"Oh never mind. I just gammon ask."

Out-of-working-hours demands on staff time were not heavy as far as I could gauge. The form in which they were addressed made it easy for staff members to reject proposals that were beyond their means or their competence or else were simply too inconvenient to fulfill. Some staff members went little further in developing their informal relationships with the settlement's residents other than to service such requests as they occurred. When they encountered people in non-work contexts they tended to display a surface camaraderie that eased them in and out of social situations without creating expectations of greater familiarity.

Other staff members, however, permitted their informal relationships to develop beyond the banalities of staff-Aboriginal greeting ritual and the "good helper for the people" image. Typically, there were two main routes to forging relationships of more depth and meaning.

One route lay through the elaboration of friendships that developed in the workplace between people of the same sex. The majority of those that I observed were between male staff and Aboriginal men. Friendships between staff

and Aborigines of opposite sexes usually began as sexual liaisons and provided the second route to forming meaningful informal ties. I shall discuss workplace friendships first.

Workplace friendships became informal friendships when a staff member and a particular Aboriginal worker began to organise some of their spare time activities together. The activities usually consisted of joint hunting and fishing trips, family picnics and a certain amount of visiting. Probably little more underlay the formation of such friendships than personal compatibility and a desire on the part of the staff member to come to terms with the environment and its people. In trips away from the settlement, it was usually the staff member who supplied the means of transport and the Aborigine who provided the knowledge of countryside, quarry and hunting and fishing techniques. Within the settlement visiting patterns were markedly asymmetrical. Almost invariably it was the Aboriginal partner who went to the staff member's house to yarn, perhaps to share a meal and, before the establishment of the canteen, to be invited to share a surreptitious beer or two. (Since staff houses were specifically excised from the reserve, a staff member could offer an Aborigine a drink without breaking the law. Drinks were offered more or less surreptitiously, because no staff member wanted to be thought of as being in a position to supply liquor freely to any member of the community.) Staff members scarcely ever reciprocated by informally visiting the home of their Aboriginal friend. It was even rarer for a staff member to take a meal, or be invited to share a meal, in an Aboriginal home. Workplace friendships hardly ever extended to include other members of either person's family except in a very peripheral fashion. For example, I know of no case where the wives of two men who were friends ever developed a similar level of familiarity and interaction.

Among the people of the settlement such friendships were noted and the friends were said to be "good mates". An Aborigine who had a staff member as a "good mate" often acted as mediator between the staff member and other Aborigines who wanted that staff member to perform some service

for them. In this role, the Aboriginal "good mate" often acted as a filter to choke off demands judged to be too unreasonable for the staff member to perform. There were times when this filtering caused complaints within the Aboriginal community which led to accusations that the staff member's time and resources were being monopolised to the detriment of other community members.

If permitted, the "good mate" bond could develop further into what I term a "quasi-kin" relationship. There were clear interactional markers in this process. It began when a staff member's interest in his companion went beyond the specifics of their mutually profitable spare-time activities to include a general concern for his well-being and personal circumstances. To the Aborigine, such interest was taken as a sign that the relationship was beginning to resemble something much more like the expressive and emotional content of the primary relationships of the kindred, and it was usual for him to respond by suggesting to the staff member that they call each other by kin terms more appropriate to the relationship. Such a proposal was generally flattering to the staff member (often because it was interpreted, in some fashion, as being "accepted into the tribe"). The kin terms chosen were generally those which, in Edward River kin-based relationships, were capable of the greatest familiarity. Between male friends, the terms normally chosen were either "brother" or "father-son" terms. The labels reflected the tone of the relationship. They were not meant to specify any particular set of duties from the kin-based relationship set. Duties of a general sort, however, were implicated. They included "being sorry" and participating in transactions that were "secret way".

In Edward River Aboriginal English, to "be sorry" for someone meant both to be affected by that person's circumstances and to want to do something about them. Put in the context of staff-Aboriginal informal relationships, a staff member would be appropriately "sorry" for his Aboriginal friend when, learning that his "brother" had no flour, he would commiserate with him and give him some flour to tide him over without expecting any recompense. "Being

sorry" also meant giving people gifts to take their minds off some trouble or worry. The material circumstances of staff members were such that there were few situations in which Aborigines felt "sorry" for them, except perhaps, when a staff member was single, or temporarily without his wife. Then an Aboriginal "good mate" might feel so "sorry" about his friend's womanless state as to organise a girl for his bed.

A "secret way" transaction was one that was hidden from the public view. In pre-settlement life, there were many occasions that called for communications to take place in private, as for example in the passing on of proprietary secret ritual and formulae, in arranging for the revenge of the death of a close kinsman and in organising ceremonies and such things as the "abduction" of initiates which preceded their period of isolation and seclusion from their parents and the main body of the community. In the settlement there were many reasons for wanting what passed between staff member and Aborigine to lie beyond the gaze of the community and the scrutiny of the staff. Thus a staff member might accede to a request to supply liquor illicitly to his Aboriginal friend on the understanding that it was drunk "secret way", i.e. unobtrusively and without being shared. Or the staff member might undertake to procure for his friend some item to be used as a lucky charm for gambling or perhaps some sweet smelling toiletry to be used for love magic. From the Aboriginal point of view, the use of magic was always a secret business and hence the staff member would be urged not to tell anyone about the transaction. There were also "secret way" conversations in which the topic was to remain privy to the conversationists. They usually revolved around tales of love affairs, of the illicit actions of others, of gossip, inuendo and rumour and, if the staff member was sympathetic enough, of sorcery. The public voicing of such suspicions would be tantamount to making an accusation which would almost certainly lead to an open dispute.

In their initial advances to staff as "good helpers for the people", Aborigines were careful to observe (indeed

to over-observe sometimes) the phraseology of civil request and gratitude. Their solicitations were usually filled with words like "please" and "thank you". Such civilities tended to drop out of the vocabulary of the Aboriginal partner as the quasi-kin relationship progressed. Requests were more likely to take the form of the blunt demands that were characteristic of kin-based interactions rather than courteous petitions. So far as I could determine, there were no words for "please" and "thank you" in any of the vernaculars of Edward River. It would seem that when obligations are clearly distributed, there is little need for polite words to grease the wheels of social interaction. I well remember one occasion when I had gone to Cairns with a group of young men and was offered a beer by one of the party with whom I was relatively intimate. I took the beer and said, "Thank you." My Aboriginal friend turned on me almost fiercely and said, "Don't you say thank you to me. You're an Aborigine now. You just take it." Harris (1975:290) draws attention to the idea that the acknowledgement of generosity is incompatible with the basic etiquette of reciprocal exchange in egalitarian hunter-gatherer economies. He notes that to call attention to one's own generosity implies that others are in debt to you and that repayment is expected. This could well be the case for Aboriginal exchanges as well. But whatever their origins, the seeming peremptoriness and lack of gratitude accompanying requests and gift-giving was off-putting to staff members who were brought up in other codes of civility. So too were the implications of doing things "secret way". "Secret way" transactions sometimes had the unsettling habit of going awry, especially those involving liquor, and becoming public knowledge. When this happened, a staff member could be placed in a compromising situation. From the staff point of view there were negative consequences to becoming too familiar with Aborigines.

An alternate route to closer interpersonal relationships was provided through sexual liaisons. If gossip was to be believed, sexual encounters between Edward River's young single women and single male staff were common. Whatever the

truth might have been about their frequency, such encounters did occur. Furthermore, they were not confined to single male staff and Aboriginal girls. For the most part, they seemed to be treated in much the same fashion as the light-hearted sexual experimentation that went on "secret way" between the young single people of the settlement. From time to time a casual liaison would shift from the "secret way" mode into public gaze when the Aboriginal partner began openly consorting with the staff member.

Edward River people tended to treat such affairs on their merits. For instance, when a storekeeper began earnestly to court a young single mother at Edward River, the community as a whole approved of the match. The woman concerned had maintained a determinedly independent stance regarding marriage and had long ago fallen out of anyone's marriage calculations. The couple eventually married. Similarly, when a Wik Nganchera bachelor of mature age became enamoured of a linguistic researcher, people expressed great satisfaction that he had at last found a woman to look after him. The relationship was broken up when the researcher was transferred elsewhere. On the other hand, a great deal of dissatisfaction was expressed when a nursing sister formed an attachment with a young Kuuk Thaayorre man. He was expected to marry elsewhere. The relationship not only threatened a long-standing agreement, but people complained that the nursing sister was neglecting her duties because of her infatuation and that the young man's kindred were being given favoured treatment. When the nursing sister resigned and left Edward River, most of the community was relieved.

The reaction of other staff to a sexual liaison between one of their number and an Edward River resident was nearly always one of disapproval, if not outright opposition. While there was no overt official policy in relation to such liaisons, nonetheless subtle and not-so-subtle processes were generally called into play to break up such unions and transfer the offending staff member elsewhere. Edward River people were well aware of staff reactions to "improper" liaisons between staff members and the community's women. I was earnestly cautioned by some of my younger informants

to have nothing to do with the single women of the community in case they "spoiled" me and caused my leaving. They told me that before I came to the community, several mission staff and one DAIA officer had been forced to resign or accept transfers because of sexual entanglements with some of the women. Indeed, during my stay in the field, there were several occasions when accusations of improper behaviour were used to secure the resignation of a number of staff members (see Chapter 10). A liaison of which both staff and community residents disapproved was bound to be short-lived. However, as I noted above, Edward River people did not oppose liaisons on principle. Opposition occurred when a relationship constituted a threat to existing arrangements and understandings. If the cohabitation of a staff member became public and encountered no opposition at the village level, it was usual for the close kin of the Aboriginal partner to begin to refer to the staff member by appropriate affinal terms. In one of the unions at least, the staff member was given some formal coaching in "in-law" behaviour.

Speaking generally, the level to which informal relationships developed depended very much on the degree to which a staff member was prepared to accept the entailments of quasi-kin behaviour. In Aboriginal eyes, the bestowal of a kin term reflected the growing intimacy of the relationship. It made the staff member less like a "migloo" and more like a kindred member. However, the staff member always remained an unconventional addition to the Aboriginal kindred. In the first place, the duties and responsibilities were negotiated rather than fixed. Secondly, unlike the true members of an Aboriginal kindred who were linked to each other by networks of reciprocal duties, there was little diffusion of responsibility and obligation beyond the pair immediately involved. This was most likely due to the fact that individual staff were only temporary features of the human landscape, and between their arrival and their departure there was insufficient time for the families of those who entered into quasi-kin relationships to define their roles in a mutually satisfactory way. In my own case, I found that the special bond I enjoyed with my informants

did generalise to some extent to members of my informants' immediate families, and they would refer to me by kin terms which reflected the relationship between my informant and myself. Whenever I camped out with such a family, I was incorporated pretty much into the family's structure of responsibilities and duties as any temporary kindred member might be (see Chapter 3, p. 131). At the same time, it was also clearly recognised that I was a "migloo" who had "migloo" responsibilities that took priority over my marginal status as a kindred member. In the settlement especially, the "migloo" responsibilities were likely to take precedence over any nascent rights and duties in a whole network of kin.

For the staff member who cared to develop an informal relationship to the quasi-kin level, there were rewards. The primary benefit lay in the way the relationship helped the staff member to interact with the Edward River community by providing insight into the events and processes of settlement life. Such understandings may not have been ethnographically accurate, but at least they recognised that much settlement behaviour was explicable in terms of Aboriginal cultural codes rather than being merely baffling.

Equally, for Aborigines who were able to engage in an informal relationship with a staff member, there were benefits over and beyond the exploitation of the staff member's resources. The relationship gave individual Aborigines a chance to view at close quarters the kind of life-model they were expected to emulate. I suspect, however, that the more a staff member conformed to Aboriginal codes of interaction in informal relationships, the more likely it was for an Aborigine to think that European relationships were predicated on the same familistic basis as Aboriginal relationships. And to the extent that this occurred, the universalistic orientation that characterised the majority of outside Australian social relationships was masked.

The second benefit to the Aboriginal partner in an informal relationship was the way it helped the Aborigine to confront the labyrinthine and seemingly incomprehensible

structures of the dominant society. He or she could be confident that there was at least one friend from the other side of the cultural chasm who could act as a guide. To illustrate this, I once had the good fortune to overhear my chief informant trying to explain the nature of our relationship to a visitor from another reserve. He described how the relationship had developed, what terms we used in addressing one another and some of the things we had done together. Then he elaborated on my role as a kind of personal cross-cultural facilitator. "Its like this," he said. "Suppose I have some trouble. It might be a big court case in Cairns. Alright, he'll be there," he said, nodding in my direction. "To explain for me," he added. "He's..." He hesitated, searching for the right word in his limited vocabulary of English. "He's Aborigine for me," he said finally.

8.6 The dynamics of role conflict

Near the end of Section 8.1, I observed that the various sets of relationships governing interpersonal behaviour at Edward River did not function independently of each other. In the roster of settlement activities there were a number of recurring situations where differing expectations about role performance led to situations of role conflict for Aborigines and staff members alike. Sometimes the conflict arose out of having to choose between alternate models for role performance, when each had a penalty associated with it. At other times, conflict came about because an actor had to reconcile two competing sets of expectations surrounding the performance of a role.

Role conflict could be resolved in a variety of ways. Sometimes resolution was brought about by actors readjusting their expectations. This was a frequent staff response. Sometimes it was resolved by an actor seeming to meet the expectations of all parties involved. Aboriginal councillors frequently employed this tactic when caught between the expectations of the people they represented and DAIA management. It was a strategy that required considerable political

adroitness. In some roles the personal and interpersonal stresses caused by conflicting values and expectations were so high that opting out of the role entirely was the only remedy available. This was particularly the case with Aboriginal community policemen and nursing sisters. There were yet other situations where the inherent conflict lay unresolved, as for example when two competing models were available for the same role. In these instances resolution would only emerge when a community-wide consensus developed concerning appropriate role behaviour.

In the following subsections I shall discuss three kinds of situation that commonly invoked role conflict. They have to do with the use of personal property, the acquisition of which required considerable outlays of money, with the performance of newly appointed overseers and with the general functioning of the Edward River council. Further examples of role conflict involving Aboriginal policemen and nursing sisters will be discussed in Chapters 10 and 11, respectively.

8.6.1 Role conflict and the use of personal property

Under the token wage system of the mission era, there was little opportunity for the Edward River people to acquire desirable but costly consumer durables such as boats, outboard motors, 4WD vehicles, repeating shotguns, high-powered rifles, tents, sewing machines, refrigerators and other kinds of domestic furniture. When the DAIA ushered in the cash economy and brought about a series of increases in personal disposable income, the way was opened, for some people at least, to begin to acquire some of these things. It was not an easy matter to amass the money required, given the low levels of Edward River incomes. Funds came from either the haphazard allocation of the gambling school or else from personal savings. There were many competing uses for a growing cash reserve, and many special purpose savings projects foundered because of the pressures of more salient demands. When an Edward River resident obtained some costly example of Western technology, it usually represented a

triumph of iron-willed determination over a host of tempting alternative ways for spending accumulated savings.

During 1968-75, the acquisition of items of domestic capital had not gone all that far, but their appearance upset the relatively egalitarian distribution of private personal property that characterised both the pre-settlement and mission life-styles. Things such as boats, outboard motors, 4WD vehicles and high-performance firearms were all capable of being borrowed. Because they were scarce, they had many potential users. These included members of an owner's kindred who expected to share in the resource through hiring it in some fashion. The proud owner of, say, a new boat and outboard motor would be besieged by requests from kin and non-kin to use them.

These requests created problems, especially when the resource was a complicated piece of equipment that required training in its use and maintenance, and which could be rendered inoperative through over-use or misuse. To conserve an investment meant saying no to people who felt they were entitled to a share in its use. It was relatively easy to refuse non-kin, and a standard tactic was to set the price of the hire of the item well beyond the borrower's means. It was harder to refuse kindred members. Those who yielded to kin pressures generally saw the useful life of their possession rapidly eroded through constant use and inexperienced handling.

Others, perhaps only too aware of the personal cost and sacrifice entailed in the purchase, deliberately restricted the ambit of those who could have access to their equipment. In doing this, they said they were acting like the staff, who also did not make their possessions available to all and sundry. People who maintained control over their goods in this fashion were often accused by frustrated would-be borrowers of being "mean men" and of being "too much like migloo". In their defence, those so labelled pointed out that they did not want their belongings broken up, and they said if people wanted such things they should save up and buy their own instead of frittering their money away on useless pursuits.

There was no immediate resolution to the problem of choosing between alternative role models. The owner of a costly consumer durable could choose to honour the kin-based ethic and make the possession available to all who felt they had a legitimate claim on it. While this preserved the owner's reputation as a kinsman it usually resulted in the rapid deterioration of the item. If the "staff" model was chosen, the piece of equipment was preserved but at the cost of the owner's reputation. Presumably, in the long run, a consensus regarding appropriate borrowing and lending behaviour would emerge as more people acquired such items. With the greater availability of costly consumer durables one might expect that the sheer weight of demand on particular individuals would decrease and hence reduce the number of refusals. Perhaps too, with greater availability, there would be a wider distribution of knowledge concerning the use and misuse of capital items, and consequently, less reluctance to lend and fewer charges of meanness. The emerging model for borrowing and lending might eventually honour the kin-based ethic provided the user had the technical competence to operate the thing being borrowed.

8.6.2 Role conflict in the workplace

The role conflict discussed in the previous section was confined, of course, to Edward River's Aboriginal community. The workplace provided another setting for role conflict which involved both staff and Aborigines. At the heart of the conflict lay discrepant cultural attitudes concerning who had legitimate authority in work situations.

In the staff view Edward River's work gangs were meant, in their structure and function, to mirror the way work groups were organised in mainstream Australian society. That is to say, the appointment of workers to gangs was supposed to be independent of family relationships. Positions of authority within work gangs were to be filled by people who were qualified by reason of their competence or skill at the task. Work gangs were supposed to have a structure of authority which could be diagrammed as in Figure 8.3 below

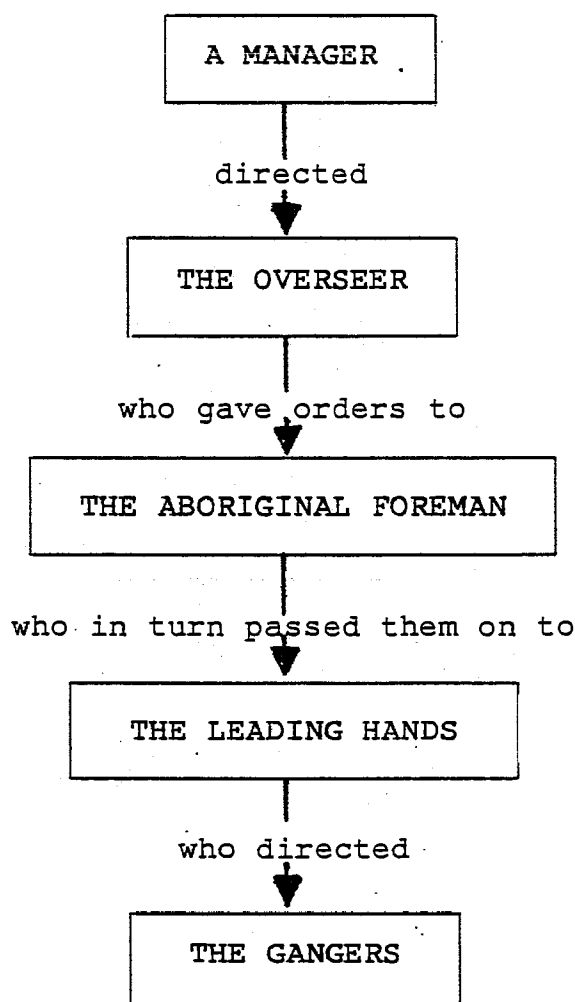


Figure 8.3 The presumed or "official" structure of Edward River work gangs.

and which was implicit in all the occupational sets of the community's official organisational chart (see Figure 7.4).

The Aboriginal view of the way work gangs should function was different. There was no question in Aboriginal minds that staff should control the activities of the work groups. The "boss" role was the primary formal role for Europeans to occupy. However, work gangs could not be composed of a random aggregate of individuals selected only upon the basis of their skills. Rather, they should be composed either of close relatives or people who had the same language ties and neighbourhood affiliations. This was a tradition that went back to the early mission work groups, whose composition was largely a product of

self-selection. (In Chapter 7, I drew attention to the subtle sifting process that produced work gangs of just this composition.) More importantly however, the work gang was an egalitarian grouping in which interaction between the Aboriginal members was guided by the etiquette of kin-based relationships. In the ideal work gang all members should be "brothers" so as to promote an easy set of relationships. It was rarely the case, however, that work groups could be so conveniently arranged, although during my fieldwork there was at least one stock gang which was composed of men who were all related to each other in this way.

Conflict between the two opposing sets of expectations was usually sharpest when a new overseer arrived at Edward River. Most overseers who came there were tradesmen or professionals accustomed to working within the structures of the mainstream society. Moreover, they were expected to instil those structures into their own work groups and operate according to them. Overseers then, expected their Aboriginal foremen and leading hands to be able to direct work in the overseer's absence, to assign particular jobs to whomever they thought capable, to ensure workers' output and standards were maintained and to exercise reasonable individual judgement and responsibility. In fact, Aboriginal foremen and leading hands would not and could not function in this way within the work gang. Edward River people resented and simply ignored any Aborigine who attempted to assert more authority than that accorded to him by virtue of his membership in a kindred. The line of command and authority imposed over work groups virtually never coincided with the limited circle of kin-based authority structures. Without the personal supervision of the overseer, work gangs tended to falter because of a seeming paralysis in decision-making.

The situation was exacerbated when new overseers appointed younger and better educated men to positions of authority within work gangs in an attempt to circumvent this problem. It was important that "outside" gangs (e.g. stockmen, fencers and yard builders) had some degree of independent operation, because they were often scattered

over the reserve in a manner which made daily supervision difficult. When overseers attempted to control outside work groups solely through a system of foremen and leading hands, the results were too often less than satisfactory. At best, foremen and leading hands would only pass on an overseer's actual directives. If situations arose that required an on-the-spot judgement, foremen and leading hands did not exercise it even if they had the technical competence to do so. Whether work went on, or ceased pending the arrival of the "boss", was a matter for agreement by consensus. Should an overseer upbraid his foremen and leading hands for lack of initiative and failure to exert their authority, they replied that the people would not listen to them. To escape the overseer's strictures they usually took the first opportunity they could to resign.

The heaviest pressure, however, was felt by the new overseer. He did belong to a hierarchical organisation and he was responsible to his superiors for reaching targeted goals. The resolution of the conflict was achieved when the overseer adjusted his expectations to meet the situation. The folklore of the staff themselves had it that the Aborigines of Edward River were simply not ready to exercise responsibility over each other. Any attempts to get them to exert authority would inevitably fail for mysterious "tribal" reasons. As a matter of plain observation, Aboriginal work gangs functioned most effectively when overseers gave orders on an individual basis to all their Aboriginal workmen and personally monitored work output and quality, and made all the necessary running decisions. In fact then, the actual structure of Aboriginal work gangs should be diagrammed as in Figure 8.4.

From the Aboriginal point of view, this was the most convenient arrangement, since it kept the "boss" relationship where it should be (i.e. with Europeans) and allowed the Edward River people to maintain their own interactional codes within work groups without imposing incongruent lines of authority over kin-based relationships

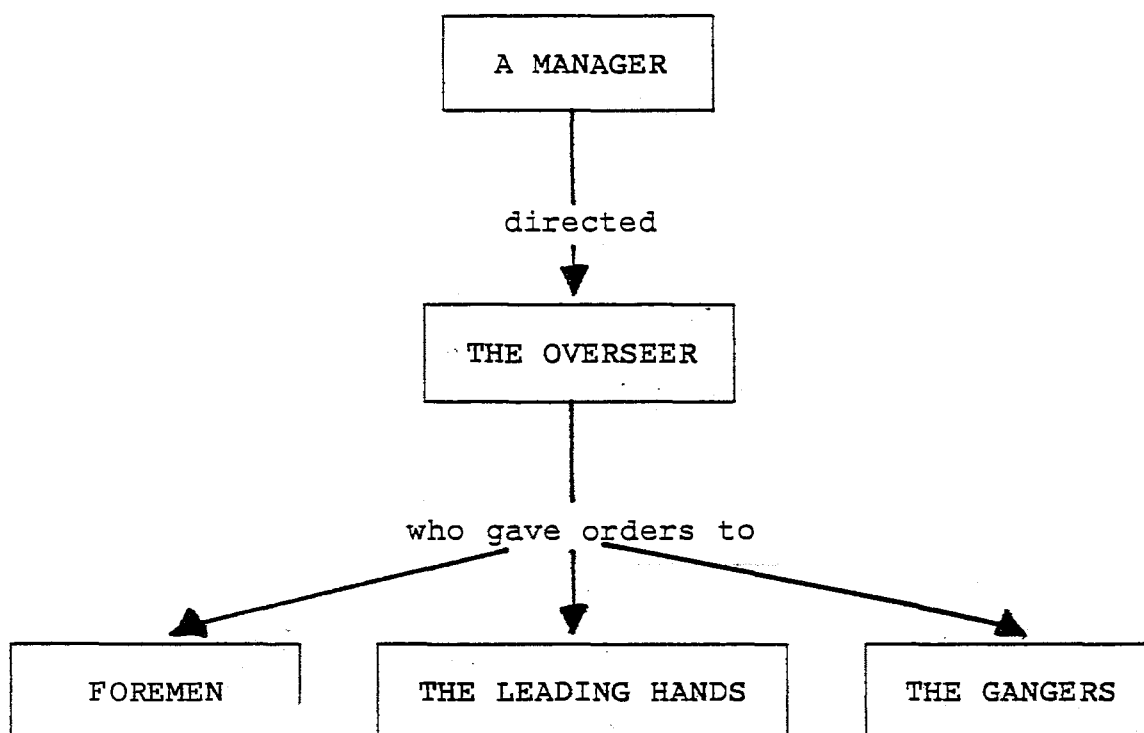


Figure 8.4 The actual authority structure of Edward River work gangs.

8.6.3 Role conflict and the Edward River Council

A council system of sorts was in operation at Edward River as early as 1957. After consultation with the senior males of each village, the mission superintendent of the time appointed three men to form a council that would act as a bridge between mission staff and the people. In the Aborigines Act of 1965, Aboriginal councils were legislatively recognised, and the procedures for the election of councillors and the scope of their responsibilities and powers were formalised. When the first Aboriginal council was installed under the provisions of the new Act just prior the the take-over by the DAIA, the Edward River people already possessed well developed ideas concerning the functions of councillors.

Councillors were seen primarily as mediators or brokers between the community itself and the staff. It was important that councillors had the confidence and verbal ability to interact not only with staff, but also with the

various dignitaries, such as politicians, senior churchmen and government officials, who from time to time visited the settlement. Edward River people had no brief for councillors who avoided such meetings. One important function of the role of councillor was to bring requests and petitions before the staff from individuals and groups within the settlement. A second function was to advise and guide staff on issues, events, personalities and customs, whenever such information was relevant to the running of the community. A third, and no less important, function was to act as a channel of communication between staff and the rest of the community.

Elections to the council were held every three years. Any adult was entitled to stand for election, provided the required nomination fee was paid and provided there were no recent court convictions recorded against the candidate's name. By law, Aboriginal policemen could not stand for election unless they resigned from their position. As I noted in Chapter 6, between 1965 and 1974, council positions were filled partly by popular election and partly by appointment. (After 1974, changes in the Regulations made them fully elected bodies.) The "elected" councillors were those who scored the highest number of votes. Those who were "appointed" to councillor positions were candidates whose voting tallies would have entitled them to fill the positions had the procedure been fully elective. In other words, councils between 1965 and 1974 were de facto democratically elected bodies. I do not know whether this was the case in other Aboriginal communities in that period.

During the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed only one council election, that of 1968. Others were held in 1971 and in 1974. It was clear that the Edward River people took the business of council elections very seriously. Most people who were entitled to vote did so. Those who were unable to read or write were assisted by staff members when recording their choice of candidate. In the 1968 election, two members of the previous council were re-elected and two new members were "appointed". All the councillors were males and representation from each neighbourhood was

evenly divided.

Council meetings were held more or less regularly at the manager's instigation. I attended a number of them. The meetings were usually composed of the councillors, the manager, and an occasional staff member who acted as minute taker. It was also usual for the Aboriginal police force to be present in the council room, or else just outside within earshot.

The issues discussed at meetings varied greatly. The items on a "typical" agenda fell broadly into five sets. These were:

1. Departmental information;
2. Petitions and requests;
3. Community affairs;
4. Councillor's requests and initiatives;
5. Community problems.

In the first category of items, the manager brought to the attention of the councillors various items that were thought to be of relevance to the community. Topics included correspondence from the Director, staff transfers and resignations, the movements of stores and materials destined for Edward River, wage rates and hours of work, progress reports on developmental plans and projects, pastoral activities, visitors and so forth.

In the petitions and requests section, councillors brought matters before the manager on behalf of people who lacked the confidence to pursue them on their own. There was no reason why people could not approach the manager personally, but many, especially women, claimed to be "too frightened", or said that their grasp of English was too limited to make themselves understood (or to understand what was said to them). Hence, they brought their problems to the councillors with the request, "You try and ask him for

me." Such petitions might include claims by individuals for pensions and other entitlements, requests for information concerning the whereabouts and welfare of absent relatives, or applications to hire the community vehicles for weekend trips. Sometimes, the petitions originated with groups of people who wanted some change in existing arrangements such as the trading hours of the retail store or butcher's shop, holidays or hours of work. Other requests brought forward were from people outside the reserve seeking to visit the community. While permission to enter the reserve had to be sought from the Aboriginal council, the council never took independent action in any of these cases. The approval of the manager was always sought.

In the third category of items, the councillors informed the manager of events that would be happening in the near future in which, it was expected, there would be some staff participation. Such events included ceremonies associated with mourning ritual, the festivals, entertainments and sports, usually held on public holidays, and "welcomes" (displays of "old paten" dancing, see Chapter 9) held in honour of departing staff and other Europeans whom the community felt had rendered some valuable service to them.

The fourth category comprised requests for information by the councillors made on their own behalf concerning matters not covered in the managers's reports under the first category. Such items raised included staff appointments to Edward River, the progress of previous petitions, stock mustering activities and so on. Councillors not infrequently made suggestions of their own for improving the community's amenities and for timetabling its activities.

The last category is community problems, which were brought to the councillors' attention by the manager and were issues which, in the words of the Regulations, seemed to threaten "...the wellbeing and progressive development" of the community (The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Regulations of 1966, section 20). They mostly had to do with the behaviour of community residents, which under the Regulations and By-Laws, constituted offences. Most frequently, these problems related to the consumption of liquor, fights and

disturbances of the peace, gambling, village hygiene, houses left vacant by mourning ritual requirements, the "chronic" dog nuisance and delinquent parents.

In bringing issues like these to the councillors' notice, the manager's object was to seek to involve the councillors in the exercise of their responsibilities and their authority. Managers were, of course, well within their rights in asking the councillors to do this, since the legislation covering Aboriginal councillors made them responsible for the conduct, discipline and well-being of the settlement's residents. They were specifically charged with maintaining the good rule and government of the community. Managers not unreasonably assumed that, because councils were popularly elected, even if only in a de facto way, they were thereby endowed by the community with the authority to perform as it was intended they should under the Acts and Regulations. In practical terms this meant that councillors, by example and by personal persuasion, were to see to it that people did not waste their money in gambling and did not illegally consume liquor, that houses and surrounds were kept tidy and clean, that parents sent their children off to school each day and generally adhered to the By-Laws and Regulations and, if necessary, to cause charges to be laid against offenders in the Aboriginal court. In other words, the expectation and intention of the Acts and Regulations concerning councillors was that they should and ought to make decisions in the name of the community and see to their implementation.

In fact, councillors had no such charter from the people of Edward River, Regulations and By-Laws notwithstanding, to intrude in anyone's affairs, if such intrusion was not grounded in kin-based lines of authority. Councillors were seen as mediators and channellers of information, as brokers for the people and advisers to management. They were not "bosses". Thus, whenever a community problem surfaced at a council meeting, councillors were expected to comply with two rival sets of expectations. The councillor's problem was to manage the matter in a way that seemed to meet both sets of expectations. For the most part, the manipulation

of appearances meant the manipulation of the manager rather than the people.

Many of the community problems brought up at council meetings had to do with fights and disturbances. When the manager was simply seeking clarification before laying charges, councillors usually gave unbiased, though superficial, descriptions of any events they had witnessed. Giving instructions for the laying of charges was clearly a staff matter in the council's view. The basic conflict arose when the manager, in bringing forward a problem, began to imply that it was the councillors' duty to see to it.

In my notes of council meetings, I could discern a number of techniques that councillors employed to avoid an unwelcome, and in the community's eyes, illegitimate, assumption of responsibility. One way of attempting to avoid the issue completely was to claim the affair brought to their notice was an "outside" matter, that is, one of "old custom" and therefore not a proper one for the council's consideration. For example, rows and arguments over marriage arrangements could be categorised in this way. So too could delays connected with the re-opening of houses that had been deserted when one of their occupants died. The distinction between those matters that were the legitimate province of staff interest, and those that were not, was first articulated during the mission era, when the missionaries as a matter of policy forbore to interfere if "tribal" custom seemed to be at the heart of an affair. Indeed, the legislation expressly charged councillors to act within the framework of Aboriginal custom and practice (e.g. see The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Regulations of 1966, section 21). Therefore, the councillors were on firm ground if they could persuade the manager that the problem was "tribal" and would be dealt with independently by the village residents concerned.

Most community problems could not be so conveniently classified in this fashion. When pressed by the manager, councillors might undertake to "talk to those people". This usually meant conveying, in the most diplomatic way possible, the manager's opinions and apprehensions to the people whose

behaviour was in question. Councillors performing this were generally careful to dissociate themselves from any expressions that might be interpreted as personally condemnatory in case the recipient of the advice chose to regard the councillor's remarks as an intrusion on his personal rights and thereby precipitate a dispute. People so approached might "agree" to amend their ways, but there was no guarantee that they would do so. When agreement to reform was not forthcoming, a councillor would report back to the manager to the effect that "...those people don't listen to me". Then the councillor would wash his hands of the affair and transfer the responsibility for handling the situation to the manager with a comment such as, "It's all up to you now, Manager". Managers found it distasteful to deal with issues they believed fell properly in the sphere of the councillors' responsibilities. Lecturing to miscreants, or as a last resort pressing charges, did little for the popularity of managers. Still, from the Edward River viewpoint, it was the manager's responsibility and no other's. The manager had no ties of kinship to circumscribe his power to deal with people. As the properly constituted "boss", the manager could relate to all Edward River residents along a single, unfettered dimension of authority.

There were yet other issues which the councillors could neither avoid nor shift the responsibility for their management onto the manager's shoulders. When such cases occurred, the tactic was to seem to meet the expectations of manager and people at the same time. To do this successfully required the councillors to exercise all the skill they could to make muddy waters even murkier, so that their own actions were blurred or at least difficult to discern. The following case is an apt illustration of this kind of situation. It has to do with a perennial problem at Edward River, the dog nuisance.

Towards the end of 1969, it was clear to everyone that the Edward River dog population had grown out of all proportion. There were dogs and whelping bitches everywhere. Many of

the animals were obviously unhealthy, weak and emaciated. They were rarely fed by their owners. Instead, they were mostly left to their own devices to find food in the bush or in the settlement's garbage bins. Each morning saw an unsightly and unhygienic scatter of waste strewn across the settlement's paths and yards as a result of their nightly depredations. They were even beginning to enter people's dwellings in search of food. At night, the greatly enlarged "dog chorus", a feature of the Edward River nocturnal soundscape, was disturbing the sleep of many.

The dog population explosion coincided with a visit from a Queensland University team that was conducting research into child health. The team gathered blood and faecal specimens from the dogs and discovered that they were riddled with a wide variety of parasites, some of which were capable of being transmitted to humans. In order to convey the idea of the level of parasite infestation, the research team invited the councillors and others, to look down their microscope at a fresh canine blood sample. The demonstration made a great impression on the councillors as they observed the free-swimming microfilaria of the dog heartworm (Dirofilaria immitis) wriggling about among the blood cells like so many small snakes.

It was clear that something would have to be done. The stumbling block was that dog owners were as fiercely protective of their dogs as they were of their children. The individual who owned and named a dog had the sole right to its services (all dogs, no matter how poor, were regarded as useful for chasing game) and the sole right to make any decision regarding it. While all people agreed that the dogs were a problem, each dog owner blamed others for the dog nuisance and insisted that his or her animals did not cause any trouble.

The issue was raised at the last council meeting of January in 1970 by the manager. He pointed out that the dog population was out of hand and that the medical team had shown

that they were making people sick. (This latter statement was not really true. The health team had merely pointed out that the dogs were a health hazard.) Many of the dogs, especially the mangy ones, would have to be shot, the manager said. The chairman demurred. He said the reason why there were so many dogs was that people wanted spare dogs to replace the ones that got injured hunting. The manager countered that, by saying that if the dogs were not in such poor shape there would be fewer injuries. Another councillor pointed out that the Aboriginal policemen did not like to shoot people's dogs. It was usually done by the white police from Coen. The councillor wanted to know if they were coming to shoot the dogs. (In fairness to the Coen police, they had requested that they not be asked to shoot Aboriginal dogs, because it did nothing for police-Aboriginal relations.) The manager replied that it was not a problem for the white police nor was it really one for the council. It was the owners' responsibility to destroy sick and surplus dogs. The council, said the manager, should act under the By-Laws and prosecute those who did not control their dogs. This suggestion was not taken up by the councillors, although they agreed that there were too many dogs. They admitted too, on the strength of the health team's demonstration, that they posed a health risk.

The chairman said that if people agreed to shoot their own dogs the problem would be solved, but if they did not then he supposed the manager would have to put all the dog owners in gaol. The manager forbore to comment on the chairman's suggestion. Instead, he tried to get the councillors to nominate an equable number of dogs per household. The manager suggested one good dog was enough. This prompted a good deal of discussion in which the Aboriginal policemen joined (they obviously had an interest if it was decided there was shooting to be done). One of them said that if they shot anyone's dog, then the manager would have to get white police to protect the policemen. Why not get the white police anyway and clear out all the dogs in one go,

suggested another policeman. After much similar debate, the manager said that if the report of the health team specifically implicated the dogs, then they would all have to be shot. "Well manager," said a councillor, "everyone will go bush as soon as you get that letter." The chairman offered a compromise. Perhaps the councillors could sound everybody out about the business and try to get some agreement on the number of dogs that it was reasonable for a household to have. If the people agreed, they would bring back word to the manager. If they did not agree on a reasonable number...the chairman faltered. "Better send them all bush," suggested a policeman sarcastically.

At the next council meeting, the dog issue was raised again. The councillors reported, predictably enough, that no-one could agree on a standard quota of dogs per household. It seemed that everyone wanted the quota to be just the number of dogs that they currently owned. The manager was not surprised at this. He unfolded a plan of his own which he thought would ultimately control dog numbers, involve the councillors in the proper exercise of their authority and, for good measure, add to the community welfare funds. The dogs of Edward River were to be registered. On the payment of \$2.00, each dog would receive a collar. Only healthy dogs were to be registered. After a suitable period had been allowed for the registration process to take place, a day would be set aside for shooting all dogs in both neighbourhoods who were not wearing registration collars. Collarless dogs would be presumed to be dogs that were too unhealthy to be registered or else had no owners. (There was, of course, a third possibility. Collarless dogs might also be animals that people could not afford to register during the period of grace. It was the manager's hope that the licence fees would constitute a financial barrier to the acquisition of many dogs and, hence, would encourage owners to destroy surplus pups.) The manager suggested that two councillors, one from each neighbourhood, be delegated the job of ascertaining the state of health of the animals to be registered, collecting the registration

fees and issuing collars. The manager was gratified to find that the proposal was accepted with little resistance from the councillors or the Aboriginal policemen.

In due course, the councillors began issuing collars. They carefully inquired of owners whether the animals they wished to register were healthy. Naturally, no applicant for a registration collar claimed to have an unhealthy dog. As the manager had privately hoped, those with large numbers of dogs (mostly the older people on pensions) experienced great financial difficulty in purchasing sufficient registration collars for all their animals. However, the bush skills and resources of Edward River stockmen were equal to the task. They counterfeited the official collars with leather purloined from the saddlery store and distributed them to those of their kin who were financially embarrassed by the number of their dogs.

On the day set aside for the dog shooting, a whole morning's work schedule was cancelled and the entire population was assembled in a safe place near the administration building. Most families had ostentatiously brought their registered dogs with them in case the aim of the police was bad. A number of yet unregistered dogs were hidden beneath women's skirts. The Aboriginal police, armed with shotguns and cartridges loaded with game-shot, set out on their patrol of the deserted streets of the settlement in search of collarless dogs. Many warnings were shouted after them to shoot only collarless dogs. Old ladies wept for fear of what might happen to their animals. It took the police several hours to complete their mission. There were only two shots fired, both of them in the Thaayorre neighbourhood. One of the animals killed was in fact dying and the other was one of those rare beasts that had no known owner. The police patrol, which fortuitously happened to be composed of only Thaayorre men, reported seeing no collarless dogs in the Mungkan neighbourhood, which was strange, because as a matter of fact, that was where the greatest number

of sickly animals were concentrated.

The dogs remained as problematic as ever. From the manager's point of view, the whole exercise had to be counted a failure. He never broached the subject of dogs again for the rest of his tenure at Edward River. For the councillors, it was a triumph, because they had managed once more to navigate the tricky narrows of incompatible duties without apparently coming to grief by conforming too much to managerial expectations or to the popular conception of their role.

Steering between conflicting expectations would have been more difficult for the councillors had their languages not provided them with an invaluable asset when dealing with the manager. No manager ever understood any of the Edward River vernaculars. Therefore, whenever councillors had to confer among themselves for the purpose of dealing with the exigencies posed by a manager who raised a community problem, it was a relatively easy matter to isolate him from their discussion by dropping into the vernaculars. They returned to English when they had mapped the shoals they had to navigate.

8.6.4 Summary

At this point it is convenient to make some general observations concerning the consequences of role conflict as it has been discussed so far. Role conflict was clearly a product of change processes, but that does not mean that its presence meant that change was moving in desired and planned directions.

In discussing the acquisition and use of personal property, I argued that the conflict engendered by the availability of competing role models would disappear when a single set of expectations emerged that involved no penalties for the role taker. In this sense then, role conflict might be seen as instrumental in producing socio-cultural change by promoting the development of new role models that were functionally more adaptive in the altered

circumstances. The reader should note, however, that my argument depends more on a change in the distribution of personal property than the need for individuals to resolve role conflict.

In the remaining situations that I discussed, role conflict and the associated patterns of conflict resolution were, in fact, inimical to the ultimate goal of creating a community of Aborigines who would be capable of maintaining Edward River like a normal country town. The conflict over lines of authority in work groups and councillors' responsibilities was the direct result of the lack of fit between the official expectations concerning the roles of councillors and those of the workplace and the expectations of the Edward River people. Central to the problem was a major cultural difference in the conception of the nature and scope of authority. The Edward River people were loth to replace their relatively egalitarian distribution of authority within kindred sets with the more embracing hierarchical model implicit in all the plans for structuring formal and imposed roles at Edward River. From the Edward River point of view, it was not that the people resisted the operation of a hierarchy of command, it was simply that whoever did occupy the upper levels of the chain of authority, it could not be an Edward River resident. It was logical for the staff to be in control because they alone were responsible for the planning of its future. Additionally, the staff authority relationships were not normally compromised by the entailments of kin-based rights and duties.

Up until 1975, the Edward River people had successfully managed to avoid shouldering the unwelcome and vexatious responsibilities that the planners of their future wanted them to assume. Part of their success was due to the fact that the DAIA had instituted no mechanism for accumulating knowledge about the social organisation of the Edward River community and passing it on to incoming staff. The duties of staff were to administer and implement projects and plans which, it was already assumed, would ultimately produce the changes required. Staff were not expected to be social analysts. Newly transferred staff members could

only learn about Edward River and its inhabitants in a piecemeal and individual way. If any staff member did gain some insight into why imposed relationships were not working as they were intended, they never made their knowledge available to others. On the other hand, learning about staff, and devising tactics for dealing with them, was a cumulative process for the people of Edward River. Over the years they had developed a set of strategies for dealing with the transient population of the staff enclave that resolved the issue of authority in their way.

But the success with which the Edward River community managed to conserve cultural boundaries and protect its own patterns of power and authority was purchased at a price. That price was the creation of a permanent niche for staff at Edward River. This was quite contrary to the official plans for the place.

In their own way too, staff tended to aid and abet the emergence of this officially unacceptable consequence. When they were forced into assuming responsibilities that community members would not accept, it was all too easy for the staff to lay the blame for the situation on the Edward River people by claiming that they had not evolved sufficiently in social terms to be able to manage their own affairs or that they were too tribally oriented. Some staff doubted whether the Edward River people would ever be able to run things for themselves. But this simplistic rationalisation, comforting though it might have been in terms of employment prospects for DAIA staff, masked the real state of affairs. The recurring impasse over authority and responsibility was generated out of a dynamic interplay between culturally different role perceptions and values. Failure to recognise this would almost guarantee the perpetuation of the process and frustrate the planners' intentions for Edward River and its community.

CHAPTER 9EDWARD RIVER BELIEF AND RITUAL, 1968-759.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I described the supernatural dimensions of the pre-settlement Edward River cosmos and presented the central themes of a tightly structured and coherent world view. This world view met a number of individual and social needs. At an existential level it offered explanations for the origins of things and for the persistence of the human psyche after death. At a practical level it provided recipes for controlling environmental vagaries and for coping with the untimely demise of kin. In part, it sustained the moral order of Edward River society through the actions of its supernatural entities and powers which were believed to punish those who transgressed the codes of right conduct (see Chapter 5). By stressing the links between mythic beings, places, people and ritual, the pre-settlement belief system of the Edward River people supplied the validating dogma by which primary landholding groups justified their claims to territory.

The presence of Europeans and their products imposed a series of conceptual problems that threatened the integrity of the Edward River ideology. Sharp had already observed some of the mental turmoil and social dilemmas produced by the problems of incorporating Europeans and their material culture within the purview of the pre-settlement cosmology. His observations and hypotheses concerning these effects have already been discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Seden-tism itself brought two additional problems that tested the adaptability of the Edward River beliefs. Firstly, the settlement constituted a new kind of physical and social space. Its human inhabitants lived in more or less permanent neighbourhoods. They depended much less on the natural environment for their subsistence. Secondly, the settlement was initially a Christian mission. Its purpose was not merely to settle people and induct them into a life-style based on the division of labour and the production of surpluses; its purpose was also to convert the people of the

reserve to a belief in a new faith. The major themes of the Christian world view contrasted sharply with those of the pre-settlement system. I will now describe briefly three of those contrasts.

Where Christianity was monotheistic, and stressed the acts of a single creator, the Edward River system stressed the performance of multiple creative acts by a pantheon of mythic beings. A primary theme of the Christian message dealt with the nature of God's love for humankind, and the Church's ritual focused on the means by which sin could be expiated and God's love regained. Sin, guilt and atonement were not major concerns of the Edward River people. When they committed wrong actions, they were punished by other humans or else by supernatural powers in an automatic fashion. There was no angry God from whom redemption could be sought nor were there hell-fires and damnation in the Aboriginal after-life. The toils of the fleshly existence had no bearing on the nature of the spirit's survival after death. Finally, the Christian world view was a universalistic one that had transcended its origins in the Middle East to become the professed religion of a great part of the world's population. God, in the Christian view, was manifest everywhere and "His" marvels and mercy could be attested to by anyone. On the other hand, the powers and supernatural figures of the pre-settlement belief system were intimately associated with, and constrained within, a particular landscape. It was specific to people and places and thus was exclusive rather than inclusive.

In fact, the Edward River world view proved to be remarkably resilient. Before I explore the ways in which the Edward River people met the challenge of a competing ideology and re-fashioned their cosmology to fit their new sedentary life-style, it will be necessary to survey something of the nature of the missionary enterprise at Edward River. An account, drawn largely from missionary sources, is presented in the next section.

9.2 A chronicle of missionary enterprise

Mr Chapman, who now lives permanently in a grass hut a few feet square, at the Edward River, was supposed to be coming to the Synod, but there had been little family difficulties among the Edwardians, and he thought it well, at that particular juncture, not to leave.

With these words in The Carpentarian, Bishop Stephen Davies informed the Diocese of Carpentaria that the Edward River Mission had become a reality (Davies 1939b:211). Part of the Bishop's address to Synod was included in the same edition of The Carpentarian. It was particularly interesting because it outlined the Bishop's understanding of what he took to be the goals of the Anglican missionary enterprise among Aborigines in Northern Australia and his assessment of the Aboriginal psyche (Davies 1939a:195-6):

I am convinced that it is length of service that gives the influence that alone can attain good results in the work amongst our native population. In our aboriginal one finds a mental outlook that is not dissimilar to that found among our farming communities; he has a slow and very cautious mind, and one very unlike that found among town dwellers. He says very little to those he has known only for a short time, and nothing at all, if possible, to strangers. This does not mean that he is not thinking, he is most observant and watches expression very carefully. To those he has known for most of his life he is slow to express his views. This is partly because he thinks in his own language (even in the Torres Strait very few natives think in English), and to translate into another language, and after deciding what answer to give, to translate this into a foreign tongue is necessarily a slow process. It is only after many years, when the white man has either learnt the language, or realises the process that has to be passed through in the native mind, that the patience necessary to lead these people becomes a habit and not a constant source of irritation. Whilst our work amongst

these people is primarily evangelistic -- for without a moral foundation on which to base their life no progress is possible -- we have also to try to lead them away from their nomadic food hunting stage of culture to the stage where they can live happily in village communities and produce their own food supply. At both Lockhart River and at Cowal Creek we see villages very far advanced in this life. This training takes infinite patience, for it is no use trying to advance too quickly by using implements that in his generation the aboriginal will never be able to purchase for himself. We have not yet progressed beyond the stage of tilling the soil with the hoe. To the city bred man this rate of progress is very irksome; he wishes to begin with mechanical implements. This would tend to make a serf population of our natives. Within the villages there would be a great quantity of unskilled labour directed by whites and half-castes, whereas we, with our slower methods, hope to raise up leaders from among the people themselves who will progress towards more advanced agricultural methods... . It is fatally easy to destroy initiative in our backward full blood aboriginal and turn him into a pauper.

Chapman was in his 59th year when he set up his grass hut at the place the Kuuk Thaayorre called Pormpuraaw. At first, things seemed to go splendidly for the infant mission. In June 1940, the government provided funds for a schoolteacher, and when the Bishop visited the mission in February 1941 he was able to report (Davies 1941:66):

Mr Chapman has encouraged 30 families to settle in the villages; they have cultivated over 20 acres of ground and have a fish trap covering about five acres; there is abundant food. A school has been built and Johnny Pau, the teacher, has done excellent work with his 47 children. They said the Lord's prayer and sang a hymn in English. The children live with their parents and attend school regularly and keep themselves and their clothes very clean. We do not propose to establish a dormitory at this Mission. In the three years that we have made a serious effort at this Mission Mr J. W. Chapman has

made wonderful progress, and already the people seem to appreciate the settled village life....

The outbreak of war in the Pacific seriously hampered further mission work for some time to come. The schoolteacher was withdrawn in 1942. From then until the appointment of the Revd C. Brown as chaplain and schoolmaster in November 1950, Edward River children were sent to school at Kowanyama, where they lived for most of the year, returning home for relatively brief spells during the school holidays. Chapman himself laboured unceasingly to implement Bishop Davies' vision for the development of Edward River through the gradual introduction of horticultural techniques. His diaries are full of details of crop plantings and house building. The rations which he gave to the people who worked in the gardens were often in short supply and there was, consequently, a heavy reliance on bush foods. The village was often deserted for days at a time while people went back to their hunting ranges in search of "bush tucker".

Chapman, it seems, was not much of an evangelist. He is credited with building Edward River's first church (Bayton 1965:152), but nowhere does he mention the fact in his diaries. He introduced the people to the major Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, and he set Sundays aside as days of rest. He never mentions that he conducted any religious services, though like other missionaries he must have done so. On the other hand, he kept meticulous notes about the occurrence of initiation ceremonies. He actively encouraged them and sometimes sent rations and tobacco to the participants during the period when the neophytes were undergoing the period of ritual seclusion. "Bush schools" were held on the Edward River reserve in various locations during 1940, 1943, 1946 and finally in 1951.

The Revd Brown's appointment to Edward River meant that formal religious instruction could take place. In September 1951, Bishop Hudson held the first confirmation service at Edward River. The candidates were drawn from the youngsters who had gone to school at Kowanyama. Interestingly, a conscious attempt was made to link the

confirmation service with the initiation ceremony that had been held earlier in the year at a site just outside the settlement. A number of young men who went forward to receive their confirmation were still in ritual isolation.

The records of the ensuing years show an increasing commitment to evangelical work. The Revd W. Rechnitz, who succeeded Brown, busied himself with baptisms and held daily church services. He also translated the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments into Kuuk Thaayorre and, at the request of the people, wrote a hymn in that language (Bayton 1965:181). Chapman began keeping a record of Sunday church attendance (there were three Sunday services) and calculated that between 1 January, 1955 and 27 March, 1955, an average of 8.5 people had attended Sunday services. The next confirmation service was held in 1955. That year also saw the celebration of the first Christian marriage ceremony.

When Chapman, then in his 77th year, retired from his position as mission superintendent in 1957, he had established a firm material base upon which the evangelisation of Edward River could proceed. His successor reported increasing church attendances, 10 more confirmations and claimed that the people's lives were "becoming centred on God" (DNA 1958:55). The report of the next year announced that a permanent church was almost completed. It was hoped that this would induce a greater degree of orderliness and sense of worship in the services. The report (DNA 1958:55) went on to say:

All services during the year have shown increased attendance, both Sunday and week-day. One of the most memorable services of the year was the first Nuptial Mass celebrated in September. The Girl's Club, and the choir and Hymn singing practices have continued through the year with steady progress.

With the DAIA take-over, the apparent dedication of the Edward River people to the Christian faith was put under test. Among other things, the manager at that time announced that church attendance was not compulsory, and that no-one need go to church if they did not want to. I doubt

if there ever was any direct compulsion to attend church during mission times, but nonetheless, attendance at church services fell away markedly. Additionally, most DAIA staff members were not church-going Anglicans. When plans were set in motion in 1969 to construct a more suitable church, using voluntary labour, it took four years to complete. Few people seemed interested in offering help.

It would be difficult to determine all the factors that contributed to the decline in church attendance during 1968-75, but of one thing there can be little doubt. Despite their participation in the rites and ceremonies of the Christian faith, Edward River people remained firmly committed to their own world view. Their Christianity was a veneer thinly laid over a very traditional set of beliefs and values concerning the realm of supernatural powers and entities. That traditional core could manifest itself in startling ways at times. In the second year of my fieldwork, I heard one of the ladies of the Church council (who was a regular church-goer) upbraid the single people of Edward River for using the church as a place to conduct lover's trysts during the wet season. The church was not to be used for that purpose she exclaimed indignantly. "You people," she said in a voice laced with sarcasm, "you people think that when you get sick, somebody has puri-puried (i.e. practised sorcery upon) you. That's not the puri-puri that makes you sick. You see that cross up there? That's Jesus Christ. He sees you. He sees what you do in the church. He puri-puries you." It would appear that something was very amiss with the techniques of Christian instruction then, if a confirmed Christian and leading lay member of the congregation could equate the Son of God with an Aboriginal sorcerer. In fact, it was not that the Christian message fell on deaf ears. Rather, it was that Christian ideas underwent a transmutation in Aboriginal minds and were made to fit in an orderly way into the Edward River cosmology.

9.3 Reconfiguring beliefs

The advent of a permanent European presence on Cape

York Peninsula brought before the people of the Edward River reserve an increasing number of novel phenomena. These phenomena challenged the power of the indigenous world view to deal with fundamental existential questions. The challenges themselves were of various kinds. Firstly, there was the problem simply of accounting for the presence of non-black humans, of new kinds of animals (e.g. horses, cattle, pigs, cats etc.) and of new kinds of material culture. Then there was the challenge posed by the ideologies of the Europeans who were actively proffering alternative theories about the nature of supernatural beings and the place of humankind within the cosmos. Further, the adoption of a sedentary life-style brought to the surface conceptual problems within the pre-settlement belief system that otherwise would have remained latent.

If the Edward River world view was to survive, it had to undergo revision and expansion in order to accommodate the new phenomena and hold back, as it were, the challenge of competing ideologies. The subsections that follow provide an account of how the Edward River people went about the process of revising and expanding their beliefs, whilst at the same time preserving the integrity and central postulates of their pre-settlement cosmos.

9.3.1 Reconciling reality and myth

One way the Edward River people responded to the challenge to their ideology was to adjust the features of the mythic world and make it conform, at least in part, with present realities. This required the re-working of myth. It is no easy matter for a fieldworker to catch myth-makers at work. Nor is it easy, without having sampled the same myth from a series of time frames, to know with certainty what degree of alteration has taken place within a myth. I had no way of sampling Edward River myths across time. I have, however, made the assumption that whenever there are references in myth to Europeans and to things and ideas that are plainly the products of European culture, then those references are comparatively recent additions and the product

of a process of redefinition. Such redefinition, it seems, was achieved in at least three ways:

1. the content of existing myths could be changed to conform to a newly perceived reality;
2. the supernatural entities of competing ideologies could be incorporated into the existing mythology as equivalents of indigenous culture heroes;
3. entirely new myths could be woven to account for present states-of-affairs.

One myth which seemed to show evidence of re-working was the "Big Humpy" story of the Wallaby/Lightning clan which I presented in Chapter 4 (see pp. 199-200). In my presentation of the myth there, I omitted several sentences of the myth as it is presently told. These sentences, duly underlined, have been inserted in their appropriate place below.

When the dances were finished for the night, everyone went inside an enormous humpy that had been built of grass in order to house the participants. When it seemed that all were asleep, the younger brother fanned his glowing coal into a flame, and set the humpy ablaze. The roaring of the fire aroused the sleepers and they all scrambled to get away from the flames. Those who escaped serious burning went from there to make their homes in other places. Those who jumped out of the fire first were white people. They They were not burnt at all. Those who were a little bit burnt were half-castes and Chinese. Others were charred fairly badly, and these became the ancestors of other Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Some, however were badly burnt and jumped into the water to ease the pain. There they sank down into the water and their ashes became the conception spirits of the present Wallaby/Lightning clan members.

We may treat the myth in one of two ways. The underlined section may be a nice interpolation in a traditional account that provides for the origin of the varieties of humankind that were not envisaged in pre-contact versions. Otherwise the whole myth is a recent creation spun out of the need to explain the presence of kinds of humans who, prior to 1850, lay outside the awareness of the people of the Edward River reserve. I tend to favour the first hypothesis, and it was for that reason that I left out what I regarded as recent accretions in a pre-contact myth.

I suspect that altering the content of myths to suit the requirements of reality was not a new phenomenon to the Edward River people. For example, it was sometimes the case that a mythological event was located in one of the relatively fragile features of the Edward River environment (e.g. in a watercourse or in a tree) which was susceptible to the periodic environmental traumas of flood, fire or cyclonic wind, or which through simple aging processes was likely to disappear. For instance, I was shown many of the places that were part of the events of the Dog story (see also pp. 202-5). I visited the mythical dog's burial site at Koporr and was quite impressed by the mound that was said to mark the site where the animal's body was buried. Not far away was the place where The Two Men climbed the tree before killing the dog. The actual tree that they climbed was pointed out to me. It was not very big. I doubted whether it was even as old as my informant, and I could not resist making a comment to this effect. My informant agreed that the tree was too young to be the proper tree. But he said, the real tree, a very big one, had been blown down many years ago in his grandfather's time. He was in no way embarrassed by the disclosure. After all, he had reconciled to his own satisfaction the world of myth with the "real-time" world of events where surface features were perishable.

But the events of the Dog story were themselves undergoing something of a change. I collected many versions of this myth. Some narrators labelled the myth as Kuta-yarraman-woochorrm, which translated literally as "dog-horse-story". The word yarraman has a wide currency in Aboriginal

English and in the vernaculars as the word for horse. Conventionally, the reason for associating the Dog and the horse was the size of the two animals. The Dog was described as being as big as a horse. But some narrators went further than this. They said the animal of the myth might have been a horse and sometimes used the word yarraman rather than kuta in their narration. In any event, the introduced animal had become part of the myth, whether as a point of comparison, or as a kind of changeling creature, part-dog and part-horse.

Syncretic processes were clearly at work when the Edward River people tried to come to terms with the Christian concept of God. For the Aborigines, the problem was to make sense of what it was the missionaries said about this deity. In attempting to do this, they assumed that behind the lessons and biblical stories that were part of their Christian religious instruction, there was a belief system not greatly different from their own. Its features were obscured by communication problems, but deciphering the structure was no different from coming to terms with the mythologies of neighbouring groups of Aborigines. A characteristic of the mythologies of the western side of Cape York Peninsula was the tendency for the same myths to appear in different areas (see Chapter 4, pp. 195-6). Christian mythology could be rendered understandable if part of it at least could be seen as composed of versions of myths that had parallels in the Edward River mythology. The myth of Poonchr, the water rat, existed in several versions on the Edward River and Mitchell River reserves. Its central character, Poonchr, as he is called in the Kuuk Thaayorre version, lived in a sky-world and came to earth occasionally in the form of a man by means of a magical rope. It is not necessary to describe the myth in detail, since it is too long and involved. What is important to note is that the Edward River people made a clear identification between God, who dwelt in heaven, and Poonchr who dwelt in the sky-world and was also a creative figure. In talking about the indigenous culture hero, men often referred to him as "Poonchr-God". It was not simply a matter of making mental equations. "Poonchr-God" intervened actively in people's lives. One old man named

Tamr-rintil who died in early mission times, actually had an encounter with "Poonchr-God". The story was well known. It went like this:

Tamr-rintil went out hunting one day. At Mayakelman he came across a stranger sitting in the shade binding yellow orchid fibre around the handle of a newly made woomera. The man was very large (his genitals being especially so) and dark-skinned. At first Tamr-rintil thought the stranger might be a sorcerer lying in wait for him -- perhaps someone from the Holroyd area. But as he drew closer, he knew he was looking at Poonchr-God, his story and his "mate".

"Where did you come from?" asked Poonchr-God.

"I came from down there," said Tamr-rintil gesturing in the direction of his camping-place. "I am looking for animals to hunt,"

"Is that so," said Poonchr-God.

"Where have you come from?" enquired Tamr-rintil.

"I came from up there," Poonchr-God replied, nodding skywards.

"And now we meet here," he added.

They sat together and talked. Poonchr-God gave Tamr-rintil the woomera he had made in exchange for Tamr-rintil's own. When Tamr-rintil shook it and tested its balance it felt good. (In an aside, my informant, Tamr-rintil's grandson, said he always made his woomeras after the pattern of Poonchr-God's woomera.)

Poonchr-God changed his mind about the exchange.

"You had better give me back my woomera. By and by, another man might see it and ask you for it."

Tamr-rintil returned the woomera and retrieved his own.

They farewelled each other then and went their separate ways, Poonchr-God to his sky-world, Tamr-rintil to his camp.

When Tamr-rintil arrived at his camp it was quite late. Since he had brought no animals back with him for food, the others in the camp were concerned, thinking that he had fallen in with a sorcerer and had been caught (see Chapter 4,

pp. 242-3). When they heard his account of the meeting with Poonchr-God they were frankly incredulous and made him repeat it many times. In the end, it was accepted that events had transpired just as he said.

In conversation people sometimes referred to God simply as God. However, an analysis of what they said showed that it was often the syncretic character "Poonchr-God" they were talking about rather than the Christian deity. For example, consider the following set of informant's opinions about the arguments over the liaisons of the young single people that occasionally disturbed the tenor of the settlement:

Why should people want to fight over girlfriends and boy-friends? Parents should not be jealous of what their children do. It only leads to rows and to puri-puri.

When children are born, parents do not own their children's genitals. Their fathers do not cut their daughters with a knife to make them women. Men can't make the sex of a child the way they make their spears. They can't do that. Genitals come from God. He made a story and genitals belonged to the children. They don't belong to men the way spears do. Therefore, no-one should worry about the way single girls carry on. God gave them genitals. Girls should use them in any way they want to.

On the surface, the reference to God making the genitals of women might be seen as a slightly garbled Aboriginal account of the creation of Adam and Eve. In point of fact, it pertains directly to the Poonchr myth cycle. In that cycle there is an episode where Poonchr, finding that the women in the sky-world had no genitals, obligingly created them by cutting the appropriate areas.

God also appeared as a central character in what are apparently recently created myths. The following myth is an example. It was offered to me just after I had finished recording a version of the Spear story of the

Duck/Spear clan (see also Chapter 4, pp. 200-2):

Before they had that fight at Kirkyoongknakarr, the Old People had gone way up there to the east to learn to be like white people. God was there. He was teaching the people book-learning. One of the Old People said, "No, its too hard. We can't manage these letters and these pencils. It's too hard for us. We have to go back to our own home." "Alright," said God. "You give me back all those pencils and letters. You keep your spears but give me back those guns you have been using."

So the people gave God back the guns, the books and the pencils.

God said "Alright, now you keep those spears. I give them to you. You must kill bush animals for your food, wallabies, goannas and possums, and you must eat bush-tucker like yams, lilies and bulguru. When you want to hunt anything, or kill something, then you must make your own spears and use them."

"Alright," said the Old People.

God gave the Old People some farewell gifts of tobacco, sugar and bread and they went back to their homes where there were no white people. That was when they began to make spears and to use them to fight each other.

9.3.2 Conception theory and clan affiliation

The adoption of an increasingly sedentary life-style brought an intellectual problem of another kind to the Edward River people. It had to do with conception theory.

In pre-settlement conception theory, the place where a baby spirit was found determined the unborn child's clan affiliation. Most women of the settlement's population conceived their children and "found" their spirits within the confines of the settlement rather than on one or other of their husbands' tracts. By the pre-settlement rules, most children then ought to have belonged to the Spear/Duck clan in whose country the mission was first sited. However, when parents were asked to nominate the rule governing the

clan affiliation of their children, they unhesitatingly said that a child must follow the father and inherit his stories and his tracts. Thus, the rule for clan affiliation which, in pre-settlement times, depended on the fortuitous event of being in a particular place when the "baby-finding" experience occurred, was replaced by a thoroughly patrilineal dogma for clan affiliation. A number of other workers have also observed the same thing elsewhere and commented on it (see Elkin 1932a:130, 1932b:331, Shapiro 1979:17).

My informants said that baby spirits now came into the settlement from the baby spirit centres in the various clan estates. There was no consensus on how they managed to travel in this way. There was a variety of theories. The most widespread held that the baby spirits travelled from their clan countries with other women and "jumped" from one woman to another until they found the "right" one. This theory put the onus on the baby spirit for finding its parents rather than making parents responsible for finding their baby spirits. It also had the virtue of explaining why so many Edward River women had no children or very few. The baby spirits either would not jump to them or else jumped from them to another woman. I have referred elsewhere to the comparatively low levels of fertility among Edward River women (see Taylor, 1975).

Despite the puzzle concerning the way in which baby spirits travelled from father's country to mother's womb, and the reorganisation of the rule regarding clan affiliation, the rest of the Edward River conception theory remained firmly intact. Women who had had no luck in conceiving sometimes went out to camp near their husband's baby spirit centre in the hope that they might become pregnant. People could describe their experiences of finding baby spirits within the settlement and the phrase "to find a baby" meant "to become pregnant" in Edward River Aboriginal English. I also believe that the theory did much to predispose childless women to pseudocyesis or false pregnancy. I observed two cases during my fieldwork, both of which reached an advanced stage before being diagnosed as false pregnancies.

The Edward River conception theory was functional

in another way. It could help reconcile parents to the premature deaths of their infants, as the following example shows:

J. E. gave birth prematurely to an infant at the settlement. It was a painful and harrowing delivery for J. E., and the child, which was very premature, was not expected to live. J. E.'s husband, C. E., had been looking forward to the birth of the child and was greatly distressed by how badly things had turned out. He wept and then fell asleep. While he slept, the baby died. When he was informed of the baby's death, he was quite composed. He had been expecting it, he said. While he slept, he had a dream in which his clan's ancestress, the Watersnake "old lady", had come and knocked on the door of his shack with her yamstick. C. E. got up and opened the door and saw the old woman standing there with a retinue of unborn baby spirits behind her. She said she wanted the child back because she had let it go "too soon" to its mother. She promised to replace it with another child shortly.

The information imparted in the dream greatly assisted J. E. and C. E. to come to terms with the death of the child. Their next child was safely carried to term, more or less as the "old lady" had promised.

9.3.3 Sorcery beliefs and native medical systems

In the pre-settlement ideology, sorcerers and native healers both operated, at some risk to themselves, on the fringes of the supernatural domain, and attempted to bring some aspect of it under their personal control. Sorcery beliefs were actively opposed by the missionaries, while the indigenous medical theories that underpinned the practices of the native healer were implicitly opposed by the medical theories that guided the health care services provided in the settlement's dispensary. Despite this opposition, both sets of beliefs remained vital and central for the Edward River people. During 1968-75, sorcerers

were still said to be engaging in the pursuit of magical death and native healers were still offering diagnostic services and cures to the people of the community, despite the availability of Western medical services. In the following discussion I shall outline the reasons for the persistence of both sets of beliefs. I begin with a discussion of sorcery.

As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 10, open accusations over the practice of sorcery gave J. W. Chapman some of his worst moments during the early years of the mission. In his 1947 report to the Director of the DNA (DNA 1947:24) Chapman noted:

Apart from "puri puri" or bone pointing, the natives are free to retain their tribal customs, but bone pointing is definitely harmful to them and has to be suppressed. This is no easy task but I think much headway has been made in stamping it out.

Chapman's method of "suppression" was to take action against those who accused others of procuring a magical death. This, he felt, was the root of the trouble. He made it plain to the Edward River people that spearings and open disputing over sorcery accusations would lead to banishment from the community. Indeed, a number of men were removed for varying lengths of time, because they had accused others of sorcery. The tactic seemed to have been effective and by the time Chapman's successor took over, there were few overt signs of sorcery practice visible to European observers. In effect, however, the reverse had occurred. According to the Edward River perception of things, the procurement of death by ensorcellment had increased rather than diminished. The European response to sorcery accusations effectively eliminated ambush spearings and open disputing as viable alternatives for obtaining redress where deaths were believed to have been brought about by sorcery. In the minds of Edward River people, the only other way to obtain redress for such homicides was through counter-sorcery. Hence, many deaths in the post-Chapman years were seen as magically

procured in reprisal for earlier deaths. However, the Edward River people were careful not to talk about sorcery in front of Europeans. They knew that Europeans did not believe in their theory of magical death and that they tended to mock it or become exasperated by it whenever it came to their attention. But according to the Edward River people, Europeans were "different". They were seen as patently immune to Aboriginal and Islander sorcery, and indeed, to many of the supernatural powers and entities of the Aboriginal cosmos. Therefore, they could afford to ridicule it, but Aborigines certainly could not.

Talk of sorcery then was not bandied carelessly about the community. I had spent well over six months at Edward River before my informants felt sufficiently confident of my response to broach the subject with me. As I discovered, the topic was normally restricted to close kindred. When my informants spoke to me about it, they did so only in privacy and then conversed at whisper level. These conversations led me into a twilight world full of secret allegations, concealed threats, hidden malevolences and fears verging on the paranoid.

There were three kinds of situation which could stimulate talk of sorcery: whenever the dead were discussed, whenever a death occurred in the community, and occasionally as a consequence of someone's suspicions about the behaviour of another person.

To talk of a dead person was to raise the reasons for that person's demise. A single death was hardly ever discussed in isolation. Rather it was seen as part of a recurring cycle of death and counter-death that continued in an unbroken chain from the past to the present. When people talked of men who had died in the "wildtime", they would state whether or not there had been a fight after his death and whether the reputed sorcerer had been speared or killed by counter-sorcery in retaliation. To talk of a recent death within the community was to invite accusations, suspicions and fears about current sorcerers. The following will serve here as an example:

T. B. and I were talking about M. E. whose house opening ceremony was to be held shortly. T. B. confided to me that he had been blamed for M. E.'s death. T. B. and M. E. used to work together in the school yard. One day, T. B. invited M. E. to his house on "Mungkan side" for the morning tea break. M. E., a Kuuk Thaayorre man, went up with T. B. to his house. "It was all open," T. B. stressed. "There were plenty of people around." Nonetheless, "some people" were putting it about that T. B. had put something in M. E.'s drink. T. B. was furious because of these imputations. M. E. was a "relation". How could he have put a magical substance in M. E.'s tea when there were so many people about? Anyway, T. B. demanded, why should he keep some dangerous puri-puri substance in his house where his little granddaughter might get hold of it? "People think too much," he said darkly. "They blame me. But really, it was that D. C. mob that did it, I reckon."

During the time that I was resident at Edward River three adults died. The first death, that of an old lady, was attended by no suspicious circumstances and was, by common agreement, said to be due to extreme old age. The next death was of a married man in his mid-thirties. He left behind a wife and young family. The events surrounding his passing were attended by so much tension and anxiety, that I forbore out of decency to ask any questions about it. The third death, that of C. M., I have referred to elsewhere (see p. 297). The speculation concerning why he had died was rife. C. M. had been one of the "licensed clowns" of Edward River. Everyone had enjoyed his antics and crude behaviour. He seemed not to have an enemy in the world. The question that exercised the minds of the community was why should anyone want to kill such a person except out of pure maliciousness. He could not have died for no reason. Signs had been found on his belly and his neck which seemed to indicate that a magical operation might have been performed. Others recalled that his room had been broken into once. Did this mean that someone had done something to C. M.'s personal possessions? His belt and hatchet had

been found out in the bush. Why? Those who were charged with divining C. M.'s murderer were uncertain. One of the men taking part in the divination procedures kept me posted on the results. It seemed that C. M. might have been attacked by a sorcerer, but on the other hand, there was reason for believing that he had been bitten by the Rainbow Serpent/Cyclone when he was digging a well. The picture was clouded at best. As the diviner said:

There are too many men here (i.e. at Edward River). We just don't know yet. If a man owned up to the murder then we would straightway go and fight him. But we just don't know. People talk about it and guess, that's all. A lot of people have died here, women and old men. We used to be a big mob before. Young people died too. It's no good. And we can't blame just one man for all those deaths.

Sorcerers were said to catch people in their unguarded moments when they were out in the bush and away from the settlement, or when the victims were sleeping. Men who drank themselves insensible were particularly vulnerable. Usually someone watched over a drunken sleeper.

When Edward River men went out into the bush, they invariably carried a weapon of some sort with them even when the expedition had nothing to do with hunting. The most likely place for a sorcerer's attack was considered to be in the scrubs surrounding the settlement. There a person's enemies were close at hand and the bush provided them with cover and opportunity. The perceived threat was quite real as the following instance illustrates:

T. B. took four spears with him on a fishing trip. He saw a shark close inshore and hit it with his first spear. The shark's thrashings broke the spear. He threw a second spear into the shark which seemed to have mortally wounded it, but the second spear was also smashed. When T. B. was recounting the episode to me, he stressed the nature of his quandary. It was likely that if he threw further spears at the shark, these too would be broken. Rather than run the

risk of walking home defenceless, T. B. elected to wrestle the shark ashore. That was no mean feat for a lightly built man getting on into his sixties. But at least he had two spears left to go home with just in case some sorcerer should try to ambush him. "You know who I mean," he said and whispered the name of a Kuuk Thaayorre man who he asserted had been trying to catch him for a long time.

It was still the convention that men were supposed to learn the mysteries of the sorcery operation from their fathers. While most of my informants claimed that their fathers had practised sorcery, they themselves denied ever having employed the techniques because they said their fathers had failed to transmit the essential information necessary to put them into operation. Either a father's early death or missionary influence was cited as the reason for their ignorance of sorcery technique. Each informant, however, believed that other men had learnt the techniques ("Why else had so many young people died?" they would ask), and they were always prepared to speculate about the newer methods of magical assault that they had heard of from other Aborigines either at the settlement or while working on pastoral properties.

Certain foreign sorcery techniques, it was said, had been introduced to Edward River where they augmented the more traditional methods. No-one would admit to using them. The alien modes of sorcery seemed to have one thing in common: by their means, a person could be attacked without the necessity for the sorcerer to waylay and perform physically an operation on the victim. Thus they could be put into effect within the community with less chance of discovery. For example, informants claimed that small poisonous snakes could be bought at the Normanton reserve. The purchaser hid the snake until he could "sing" it and tell it the name of his victim. When this was done the snake was turned loose to seek out its quarry. One could also obtain magical stones, it was rumoured, which, when "sung", could be fired from a catapult into a victim's body where they would lodge and eventually kill the person without any outward sign.

Small pieces of wool could be "sung" and introduced into a victim's drink so as to make him ill. As my informants described it, the stock camps of the Peninsular pastoral properties and the reserves attached to country towns were veritable entrepôts for the buying and selling of ways of dealing in sickness and death by magic. There was a fund of stories concerning men who went out to work on pastoral properties and returned suffering from mysterious ailments. Edward River men greatly feared the secret arts of Aboriginal strangers. Such fears had much to do with the reluctance of men to accept work on stations that were a long way from Edward River and the protective circle of their kindred.

In their daily activities within the settlement, people took much the same precautions against sorcerers as they did in pre-settlement times. Men still carefully burnt their wood shavings after spear-making. The cupboards and drawers built in to some of the bedrooms of Edward River houses mostly went unused because people preferred to lock their clothes away in suitcases to prevent access by any ill-intentioned person who might practise "rag" sorcery on them. If personal articles became lost, there was usually a frenzied search until the item was found just in case it might have fallen into the hands of somebody who might "do something" to it. Should a person find an article left in the bush by some non-kindred member, the item would be left where it was. To restore it to the owner was to invite the suspicion that the thing had been magically converted into an instrument of harm.

Despite the attempts by missionaries to suppress sorcery, the level of preoccupation with it seemed very high. Although open accusations of sorcery were rare, Edward River people were convinced, nonetheless, that the volatility of disputes and the grouping of supporters and "blockers" in fights within the settlement (see also Chapter 10) owed much to the antagonisms and bitterness generated by the ideology of magical death and injury. Sorcery was still believed to be a principal mode of private redress. As one of my informants remarked with some frustration (pp. 297-8), "We still carry on from that old custom".

The Edward River sorcerer of the 1968-75 period was a shadowy figure composed of suspicions and obliquely voiced hints. No-one would claim to being one; no-one would directly accuse another of procuring magical death. It may well be that these sorcerers had no substance except as a powerful figment of the collective imagination. However, the same could not be said of native doctors and other healers. They were public figures. Two factors ensured that the native doctor, or "murri doctor" as he was called in Aboriginal English, would retain a place in Edward River society in spite of the establishment of Western health care facilities. These were the persistence of sorcery beliefs themselves and the role attributed to supernatural agencies in punishing derelict conduct.

Sickness and ill health could never be passed off by Edward River people as some accidental misfortune. "You can't get sick for nothing," they said. At its root, all illness, serious and non-serious, was assumed to have been caused either by a person's behaviour, or indirectly by the actions of another. The medicines and treatments provided by the personnel of the settlement's dispensary offered the relief of symptoms and sometimes effective cures. Those services were fine, in the Edward River view, and people resorted to them because of their undoubted efficacy. But there remained the question of why a particular person became sick in the first place. Nursing sisters and visiting doctors provided explanations in terms of pathogens entering the body. Edward River people understood the notion of invasion well enough from the perspective of their own medical theory. The invading microscopic pathogens were more difficult to understand, partly because of the medical jargon employed. But in the end, the disease-causing entities of Western biomedicine were grouped by Edward River people with the slivers of bone, pieces of wire, magical stones, poisons and operations that constituted the proximal causes of illness in the indigenous belief system. The question that was never answered by Western health care was: who put those things in the body? Hence, it came about that the "murri doctor" could continue to offer a service that the dispensary staff

could not provide.

There was therefore a continuing tradition of "murri doctoring" together with ancillary traditional health care services. In addition to the ministrations of the dispensary staff, well known remedies were still being used, and people with healing powers or particular proprietary cures were still applying them to the sick. From time to time it was necessary to call in a native doctor, a true wangath, to carry out a diagnostic investigation and seek the causes of a person's illness. I never witnessed a "murri doctor" in action in the settlement. The same kind of privacy conventions that surrounded the consultations of the Western medical practitioner, surrounded theirs as well. Informant's descriptions of "murri doctors" in action differed little from their descriptions of pre-settlement practice. The acquisition of "murri doctor" powers also followed traditional patterns. Several men at Edward River were said to have "passed through the Rainbow" after the fashion detailed earlier in Chapter 4 (see pp. 245-6). Probably the most convenient way of acquiring "murri doctor" powers was to lie on the grave of a person who had recently died. This required a great deal of fortitude. Some admitted to having attempted it only to turn back at the last minute because of their fears. One man, D. A. had done it successfully. But the story of his induction into the "murri doctor's" role stood as a cautionary tale to all would-be practitioners. I present it here:

When J. H. died in 1961, T. E. and D. A. decided they would attempt to acquire "murri doctor" powers by lying on his grave. They decided to do it together one night so as to have mutual support and protection. At the last moment, T. E.'s courage failed him and he did not keep the assignation at the cemetery. D. A., on the other hand went through with it.

He lay at full length on the mound and waited for something to happen. The grave opened up and D. A. "fell through" into the country of the dead which lay below the surface of the earth. He wandered about there for some time until he was

shown the way out by a goanna. He emerged from the land of the dead through a hole in the side of the bank of the Edward River some 24 km from the mission.

D. A. returned to the settlement and told his story to T. E. who was much alarmed. He urged D. A. not to try his powers out too soon in case something went wrong, since newly confirmed "murri doctors" needed some time to consolidate their powers before they could be employed without risk to the user. Unfortunately, he was persuaded to try his hand at curing someone. As a consequence his mental functioning became badly impaired and he began to behave oddly. He disrupted church services by standing up at the back of the congregation and haranguing the chaplain in a strange tongue. Sometimes he stood for long periods of time outside the church with his arms spread in crucifix fashion. He would often come into staff houses uninvited and sit down at meals with them. And he began to court the widow of the man whose grave he had lain upon, much to her annoyance. By the time of the DAIA take-over, D. A.'s behaviour had become quite bizarre. The councillors explained it as due to his unsuccessful courtship of J. H.'s widow. They said nothing about the grave-lying incident, although it was common knowledge in both neighbourhoods. Finally, D. A. had to be sent out to Cairns under escort for psychiatric treatment. (He had tried to emulate a scene from a movie shown at Edward River in which the heroine, strapped to a conveyor belt, was being fed into a circular saw. For the heroine, D. A. had substituted a child and his circular saw was the flywheel of a large diesel motor.)

Western therapy proved effective in controlling D. A.'s aberrant behaviour. When he returned to Edward River he seemed quite normal. He began practising as a "murri doctor", this time with no ill effects. He developed quite a reputation, not only at Edward River, but also at Kowanyama and Aurukun.

9.4 Reconfiguring ritual behaviour

The pre-settlement cosmology found specific expression in ritual observances, by which means Edward River people sought to communicate with, and to some degree control, the supernatural powers and beings that inhabited the mythic landscape. The observance of routine rituals offered a protective mantle against the harmful effects of the potent places and the unwelcome attentions of ghosts, demons and unpredictable mythic beings. Increase rites were aimed at conserving the material conditions of the hunter-gatherer life-style. Ritual also served social and individual ends. The linking of clans with particular ritual estates and their attendant ceremonial responsibilities provided a supernatural charter for clans as primary landholding groups. The performance of rites of passage (i.e. initiation ceremonies and mourning rituals) marked important transition points in an individual's progression through this life and on into the next.

I have argued in the previous section that the cosmology which generated this ritual activity successfully met the challenge posed by the competing European material culture and Christian world view. The pre-settlement ideology, in a revised and expanded form, still provided Edward River people with their basic orientation towards the world and its works. There were, however, substantial changes in ritual activity. The following two subsections trace the changes in the performance of pre-settlement ritual activity (Subsection 9.4.1) and the development of new kinds of ceremonies which, generated out of the durable postulates and values of the Edward River cosmology, provided an adaptive response to an altered way of life (Subsection 9.4.2)

9.4.1 Post-settlement changes in ritual activity

If the "calendars" for the performance of routine and ceremonial ritual could be compared for the 1930s and the period between 1968-75, substantial differences would emerge. Firstly, it would be evident that initiation ceremonies and other large-scale ritual activity associated with

particular sites within the reserve were no longer held in the latter period. Further, much routine ritual connected with species increase was neglected. On the other hand, rites of introduction were meticulously observed by Aboriginal travellers in the bush, and people were still said to be manipulating places of malevolence and power in order to produce rain and storms, epidemics and annoying plagues of insects. In the settlement period, there was one set of ritual activities that had no real equivalent in the 1930s. These were funerary ceremonies which combined elements of pre-settlement ritual with customs introduced from the Torres Straits to produce a new kind of ritual focus within the settlement. In short, these ceremonies represented local innovation. They were a response to needs that developed within the context of the settlement. I will discuss the evolution and form of funerary ceremonies in the following subsection. Here it is pertinent to ask why some pre-settlement ritual activity disappeared when the belief system that provided the impetus for their performance remained substantially intact.

It seems clear that in the decade prior to the establishment of the mission on the reserve, large-scale activity was already declining. My informants referred to a number of ceremonies which had never been performed in their lifetimes, but which their parents had described to them. The most likely reason for the beginning of the decline was the establishment of the missions to the north and south of the Edward River reserve and the appearance of pastoral properties on the eastern boundaries. Both mission and cattle properties drew increasing numbers of the reserve's inhabitants within their spheres of influence. Once enmeshed in the activities of the mission or the pastoral property, it became increasingly difficult for individuals to participate in ritual activities in remote parts of the reserve. Even those who resisted the blandishments of the missionary and the pastoralist were still drawn to visiting missions and cattle stations in order to see kin and to obtain metal tools and tobacco. The existence of such attractive alternatives would have disrupted traditional routines that required the

cooperation of many clans. With the establishment of the Edward River mission, all large-scale ceremonies ceased except for the initiation ceremonies.

As I noted earlier, initiation ceremonies continued to be held regularly with Chapman's support in the years between 1940 and 1951. Yet, after the performance of the last "bush school" in 1951, no further ceremonies were held. There is no obvious reason why there should have been such a sudden cessation. Chapman remained in control of the mission until 1957, and mission work schedules during that period were never so demanding that time could not be found to conduct them. Certainly people were still going out into the bush to hunt and forage when mission rations ran low. In the light of the events of the first confirmation ceremony at Edward River, it is tempting to think that the chaplain of the time persuaded the people to accept Christian confirmation as an equivalent rite. There is no evidence to suggest that this did occur. In 1968-75, men regretted the passing of "bush schools". Those young men who had not been put through the ceremony were conscious of having missed something. From time to time, people would suggest that perhaps some kind of short-form initiation ceremony could be devised that would fit in with the community's work schedules. Most suggestions of this sort never got to the stage of an official proposal, because it was acknowledged that to do the thing properly, even in a shortened form, would require the absence of a sizeable section of the work force for at least a week. No-one felt that any manager would agree to that.

The routine ritual associated with the increase of food species had disappeared. Middle-aged men remembered seeing their older kin carry out increase ritual in pre-settlement times, but few had performed the ritual themselves. The sites where increase ritual could be performed were well known. They were, however, uncared for. When some increase sites seemed likely to disappear because of the depredations of feral pigs grubbing about for rootstocks, the owners of the sites were unconcerned. No-one saw the need to perform increase ritual in the 1960s and 1970s. The bush was no longer the source for the bulk of the Edward River people's

food and material needs. Instead of being viewed as a habitat whose food supplies could be assured only through ritual control, the bush was seen as a place of abundance where many kinds of game and fish were waiting to fall to the firearms, spears and fishing tackle of anyone who cared to go out and augment the store-bought diet. Processed flour had entirely replaced native rootstocks and fruits as the staple plant food. The supply of flour was never in doubt.

Other kinds of increase rites were being practised, or were said to be practised. When epidemics and insect plagues assailed the community, these were usually attributed to someone's manipulation of a potent place. I never witnessed anyone deliberately performing ritual to produce malevolent effects in the community. By convention, such acts took place in private. The evidence for their occurrence lay in the results that were imputed to them. Rain-making, normally a benign act, was regularly practised at the onset of the wet season. Individuals often claimed to have made particular storms. I was shown how to make storms and once participated in "making" one.

T. E. and I were returning from one last trip to the "Holroyd" country before the wet weason set in in earnest. On our approach to the crossing at the Edward River, T. E. asked me if I had any soap. When I said that I had, he offered to show me how to make rain. We pulled up while he obtained bark from several trees and then proceeded to the crossing. In the river bed there were a number of depressions filled with water from the early wet season storms. Selecting one of these pools, T. E. wrapped the soap and bark into a compact bundle. He dipped it into the pool, soaking it for a moment or two before lifting it out. Holding the bundle above the pool, he wrung it so that suds cascaded into the water. As he did so, he made a low humming noise in the back of his throat. This procedure was repeated several times until a soapy froth covered the pool. T. E. then stuffed the bundle under a ledge in the pool and announced that we had just made a big storm. (The symbolism of the procedure seemed perfectly obvious to me. The bundle represented a cloud, the suds the

rain and T. E.'s noises were the thunder.) T. E. told a number of people what we had done and it soon became common knowledge about the settlement that we had made a storm that would appear in due course.

T. E. told me that we would recognise our storm among the welter of wet season tempests by noting the direction from which it came. It was not until three days before Christmas that a furious storm rolled in from the direction of the Edward River crossing. T. E. delightedly said our storm had arrived at last. It rained heavily for two days, and it looked set to continue on into Christmas day as well. On the second day, a number of men, fearing that the Christmas festivities would be spoiled by our rainmaking, in all seriousness suggested to me that we go back and stop it. On consulting with T. E., I was informed that the rain would stop if we took the parcel from its hiding place beneath the ledge and threw it away. I did not relish the prospect of attempting to put this into operation since I calculated that the pool must be covered by at least four metres of rapidly flowing water! Happily for us all, the rain stopped on Christmas day. T. E. and I were both greatly relieved.

Since the land still retained its potency, it was necessary to perform rites of introduction to places that contained supernatural hazards. Aborigines who were strangers to the country were most at risk. The following is an illustration of how the Edward River supernatural landscape could affect strangers.

Edward River borrowed Kowanyama's bulldozer to help clear the way for a fence line. D. K., a Kowanyama resident who hailed originally from Normanton, had also been "borrowed" to maintain and operate the bulldozer. The fence line passed close to Malriw, the place where The Wounded Man of the Spear woochorrm had become transformed (see pp. 200-2). It was felt that D. K. would not be in any jeopardy from the place so no special precautions were taken. Nonetheless, while operating the bulldozer near the tract, D. K. began to

feel strange and, in his words, "took a fit". He fell unconscious. W. C., a Spear/Duck clansman and a native healer of some repute, used his arts to restore D. K. to his senses and then performed the appropriate rites of introduction. D. K. continued to work with the bulldozer, albeit, uneasily. He constantly complained about the dangers of the Edward River countryside and looked forward to returning to the comparative safety of Kowanyama.

Europeans were held to be immune from the dangerous effects of raak ngaanch. They could, however, unwittingly trigger off the latent powers of such places by careless behaviour and consequently bring misfortune to themselves or to Aboriginal people. I was constantly warned by my Aboriginal companions in the bush not to use soap in any natural watery place. It was likely to cause storms and unseasonable rains. I was told never to dispose of animal remains in swamps, waterholes or lagoons for the same reason. More often than not, the Edward River people forbore to warn staff members of the consequences of their actions at raak ngaanch either because they feared ridicule or they were too reserved to interfere with staff activities. The following case illustrates an instance of this:

The stock overseer heard that I was making a trip to a waterhole called Bullyard and asked if he could join my party. He had not at that time visited Bullyard and he wanted to assess its potential. Since my guide, N. E., had no objections, we decided to make a picnic of it. The overseer brought his family with him. We set out on a hot, cloudless day in late August. When we arrived at the waterhole, the children were glad to tumble out of the vehicle and rush into the water to cool off. They were having a great time capering about in the water and everyone was enjoying their sky-larking except N. E.. In fact he looked troubled. When I asked him why he was so glum, he said that Bullyard was a "touchy" place and the children's antics would more than likely cause a storm. I went to the overseer and repeated N. E.'s forebodings to him. To his credit, he immediately ordered

his children out of the water. N. E. was obviously relieved. That night it rained, a rare event in August. But as N. E. pointed out, it was only to be expected!

9.4.2 Funerary ritual and secularisation of secret dances

During 1968-75, the only form of publicly organised ritual that had its origins in the Edward River cosmology was that associated with the death of adults. Three separate ceremonies were involved. The first, and the one that had been established the longest, was the "house opening" ceremony. Its principal function was to clear the way for the re-occupation of a deceased person's house or room. The second one was called the "look rubbish" ceremony. It served to show that the family in mourning had recovered from their grief and loss. The third ceremony was the "tombstone opening". This was a ceremony of dedication performed at a grave after a headstone had been set in place. Tombstone openings were a very new phenomenon at Edward River, although they had been held at Kowanyama. Only one took place between 1968 and 1975. Although this particular ceremony was consciously modelled on contemporary Torres Strait Islander burial practices, it had many links with pre-settlement ideology and funerary customs. The rituals themselves were part of a sequence of mortuary activities that were conducted partly in public and partly in private. For the sake of descriptive clarity, I shall present a generalised description of mortuary beliefs and practices at Edward River as they were in 1968-75. My account is based on observations of such practices carried out with respect to the deaths of five adult males and one adult female.

When a person died at Edward River, virtually the whole adult community gathered about the corpse to keen and express sorrow. Those who did not attend the keening would be suspected of complicity in the person's demise. Close kin gave themselves up to uninhibited displays of grief. They lay across the body wailing loudly or distractedly threw themselves on the ground. If the dead person was a married

male, his agnates often roughly handled the widow and accused her of not looking after the deceased properly in his lifetime. The very close kin often had to be restrained in case they injured themselves or others in their grief.

From the moment of death, the dead person's kindred were identified by the appropriate mourning terms. If the deceased was married, his or her partner retired from public gaze and went into seclusion. The pronouncing of the dead person's English names or personal clan names in public was forbidden. Anyone who shared a name with the deceased had to be referred to by some other name. Food taboos were imposed on the appropriate kin (see Chapter 3 for details).

When the keening was finished, the corpse was prepared for burial. Those kin, who in pre-settlement times were responsible for preparing the corpse on its exposure poles, saw to this matter. Only the bodies of people who had died in Cairns and had been returned to the settlement were buried in coffins. People who died in the settlement were wrapped firstly in cabbage-tree leaves and then shrouded in sheets. After a brief service and eulogy in the church, the body was transported to the appropriate cemetery and interred according to Christian rites. Generally, the entire community attended a burial ceremony. There was little grief displayed at it and in contrast to the keening at the time of death it was almost a light-hearted affair.

When the burial was completed, one of two things happened at the house of the deceased. The occupants of the deceased's house could move out and stay with kin, leaving the place empty. A house in this state was said to be "closed". Otherwise, the occupants could elect to stay in the house, but lock up the room the deceased used to occupy. In this case, the room was said to be "closed". In five cases of my sample of six deaths, the house was "closed". At the same time, the tracts within the reserve that were most often associated with the deceased were also declared to be "closed" by the deceased's brothers. People evinced the greatest reluctance to go near tracts under mortuary bans.

The ghost of a dead person was said to remain in

the vicinity of the settlement for at least several weeks after death brought its release from the body. In the first few weeks after its release, a ghost attempted to stay near its kindred. The object of closing houses and rooms was to persuade the ghost to depart the settlement and go to its own favourite tracts, from where it would eventually join other spirits of the dead. Until it left the environs of the settlement, the ghost could be encountered by the living. People feared meeting ghosts because their behaviour was unpredictable and often mischievous. In the weeks immediately following a death, few men or women would go out unaccompanied into the scrubs surrounding the settlement. Neither did people walk about at night unless they had very pressing reasons. Despite such precautions, each death at the settlement brought its quota of brushes and encounters with the ghost of the dead person. It was said that the presence of a ghost could be detected by its own peculiar smell. After several weeks or so, the reports of encounters ceased, and it was assumed that the ghost had retreated to its own tracts (i.e. the ones placed under the mortuary bans) to camp. Sometimes people would corroborate this by reporting sightings of the ghost out in the bush, or that they had seen the smoke from its campfire rising up from the tracts set aside for it. When it was established that the ghost had departed, then people began to move normally about the settlement and the reserve, avoiding only the banned tracts and, of course, the houses or rooms that had been closed.

Shortly after a body had been interred, divination procedures were carried out at the grave site, usually during the night. As might be expected, they were conducted in secret. The fear of encountering the ghost of the dead person virtually guaranteed that there would be no unwanted observers of the proceedings. I have no idea whether divination was actually carried out in respect of each of the deaths in my sample. Rumour and gossip suggested that it was, but I knew of only one case where it had been certainly carried out. For the most part, the secrecy conventions surrounding divinations were strongly adhered to.

The responsibility for raising mortuary restrictions lay primarily with the brothers of the deceased (or their classificatory surrogates). For example, they decided when it was appropriate to lift the food taboos placed on the parents of the deceased. The occasion was marked by a small private ceremony in which the brothers approached those observing the taboos and offered them pieces of the proscribed foods. They also determined when it was time for a widow to come out of seclusion. The lifting of this mortuary observance was also accompanied by a private ceremony. There was no fixed period for the observance of mortuary taboos. The length of their imposition depended on factors such as the hardship they might cause, the willingness of the person to undergo them and the respect the family felt was due to the deceased's memory.

House openings, "look rubbish" ceremonies and tombstone openings furthered the process of lifting the restrictions on people and places that were brought about by a death. Because they were large-scale public activities requiring the cooperation of many people, they were less easy to organise than the simple private ceremonies I described above. There were, however, strong pressures from both staff and community members to hold house openings as soon as practicable to clear the way for the reoccupation of a dwelling or room.

When the deceased's brothers, in consultation with their kindred, decided it was time to open a house, they had first to obtain a commitment from a large number of fellow clansmen and neighbours to participate in the ceremony on the day they nominated. Then they had to set about the preparations. Well before time, a programme of the dances to be performed was selected and dancers chosen and rehearsed in their routines. Good singers were recruited, not only to perform on the day, but also to assist with the drilling of the dancers. Dancing regalia had to be refurbished or created for the occasion and a plentiful supply of body paints gathered together for use by the "old paten" dancers. (I will explain the term "old paten" shortly.) Closer to the day, the kin charged with the duty of supplying the feast that accompanied the house opening bought the provisions

and began preparing them, while other kindred members tidied and swept the yard of the house and hung decorations around it.

House openings were usually held on a Saturday afternoon. They were a matter for the entire settlement. Staff members were particularly invited to attend and observe the proceedings. When everyone was assembled and the performers' preparations complete, a signal was given and the first set of dancers arranged themselves at one end of the neighborhood. They were dressed in the fashion of Torres Strait Island dancers. They wore red laplaps, coconut frond skirts, decorated headbands and white bands about their wrists and ankles. Accompanied by guitar and an "island" drum (a waisted wooden cylinder with a lizard skin stretched over one end), they advanced in a dancing line towards the house singing "island songs", or wuuch warram as they were called in Kuuk Thaayorre. The melodies of wuuch warram were imported from the Torres Strait in post-settlement times, but the verses of the songs were local compositions in one or other of the vernaculars. As the dancers drew near the house, the people fell in behind them and followed them in procession around it. Next the dancers went inside the house. At a given signal, the people of the neighbourhood and others who had close ties with the deceased, rushed into the house to cry for the dead person. The grief display was marked by heavy stamping and much banging of the walls of the dwelling. This part of the ceremony was referred to as the "house bumping". When the "house bumping" was concluded, there was a lull in the performances while those who were invited went to a nearby house to partake in the feast which had been cooked and prepared by the kindred of the deceased.

After the feast, it was time for "old paten" dancers to commence the final segment of the ceremony. The origin of the phrase "old paten" is obscure, but it referred to the performance in dance and song of episodes from the woochorrm. While a few of the dances were post-settlement creations, most of them were reproductions of portions of the pre-settlement dance dramas (wuuch yangkar) that recreated the mythic world of the ancestral supernaturals. In the case

of settlement funerary ritual, the dances performed drew on the store of woochorrm belonging to the deceased or else were special creations performed at the request of the ghosts of dead clansmen. Information concerning these latter dances was received during dreams. The dancers were all men of the deceased's clan.

"Old paten" performances were compellingly dramatic. There was a set format to their presentation which is diagrammed below in Figure 9.1.

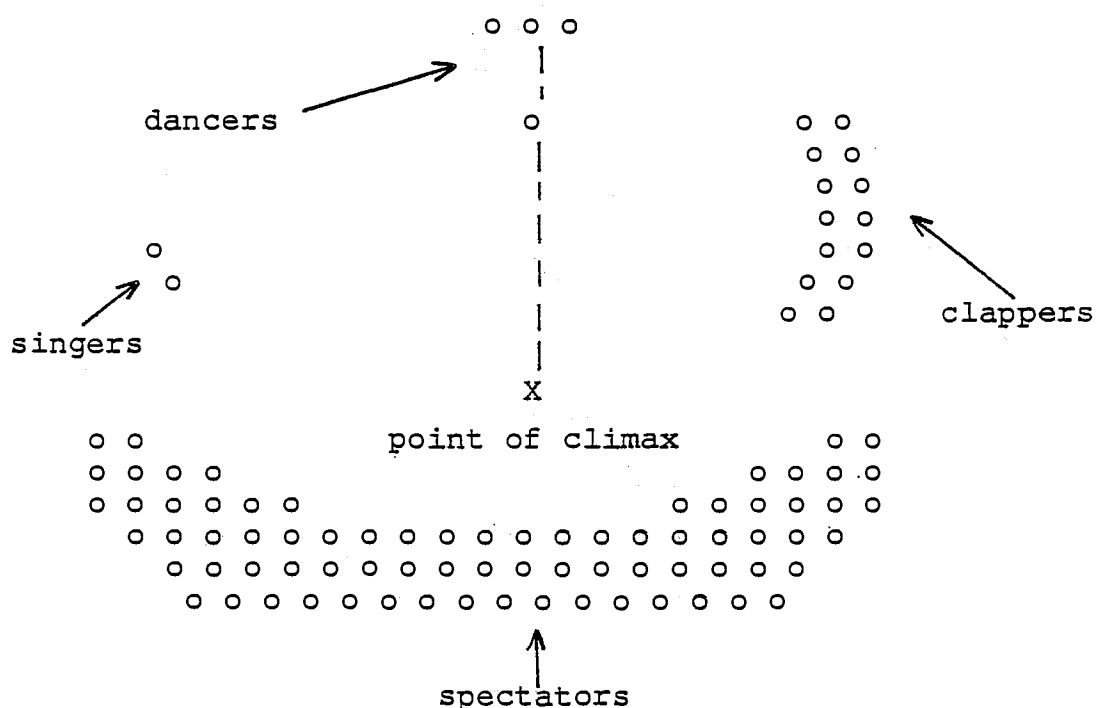


Figure 9.1 The general ground plan for an "old paten" performance. Dotted lines mark the dancers' advance towards the audience.

Those who were not taking part in the performances formed a loose semicircle around a point where the dancers would bring their particular segment to a climax. Stationed in front of the spectators, usually to their right, was a group of men called the clappers. Their function was to provide a rhythmic accompaniment and vocal sound effects for the dancers by clapping their hands, stamping their feet and uttering cries and grunts. Opposite them stood the singers.

They would establish the beat and sing the songs associated with the woochorrm to be performed. Men of all clans assisted as clappers. Singers were chosen not so much because of their clan affiliations but for their vocal stamina and their ability to sing the songs in the proper style. Several singers were required so that the melodic line could be continuously sustained without undue strain.

When all was ready, the singers established the correct beat using a pair of boomerangs as clapsticks, or sometimes a pair of tin cans. The clappers picked the beat up and began to clap and grunt softly in time with the singers. As the singers chanted the opening verse of the song, the dancers, who up to this point had remained hidden, emerged from their place of concealment and commenced their performance. The actual programme of "old paten" dances was usually kept secret, but for most of the adult audience the song and its words immediately identified which mythic segment was about to be presented. The dancers were all men of the deceased's clan, although it was difficult at first to tell who they were, because their body paint and decoration had so altered their appearance. They certainly looked larger than life.

Each "old paten" segment consisted of a number of discrete scenes in which the dancers mimed the actions of the central characters, human, part-human and animal. Each scene was separated from the next by a choreographic flourish characteristic of the dances of western Cape York Peninsula called "shake-a-leg". To perform this, the dancers bent at the knees, spread their feet apart and then vibrated their thighs in time with a rapidly increasing tempo supplied by the clappers. At a given signal the clapping reached a crescendo and then suddenly stopped, leaving the dancers holding a pose that was in some way representative of the mythic character being portrayed. With the performance of each scene the dancers moved closer to the spectators, until they reached the central point where the pageant was brought to its climax. The final scene usually featured a dramatic incident such as the transfiguration of The Wounded Man (see pp. 200-2), the destruction of the two lovers by lightning

(see pp. 205-6) or the fight between the freshwater crocodile and the saltwater crocodile, a high point in a mythic sequence shared by the Spear/Duck and Groper/Barramundi clans (see McConnel 1957:99-100) for an account of this myth. They demonstrated a masterly sense of theatrical effect.

The dances were watched with rapt attention by the audience. Even most of the children knew by heart the events being re-enacted. For the residents of Edward River, the dances gave vivid expression to their world of myth. The dramatic presentation of primal events in song and dance made their cosmology more tangible and therefore more believable. The performers who danced the roles felt very close to the characters they were portraying. They often said as much. The ultimate compliment that one could pay a performer was to say, "By golly, I thought you really were that story".

The staff, who also watched, had little or no access to the multi-layered set of meanings that lay behind the performances. If they received any commentary at all from Aboriginal spectators concerning their content, it was usually some brief phrase like, "This is my lightning story" or "This shark story comes from my home". To the staff it was simply good, if somewhat cryptic, theatre.

When the last "old paten" dance had been brought to a close, the gathering broke up in a state of high euphoria. Because they had been close to the sources of supernatural power, the performers would sleep late the next day. The house (or the room) was now ready for re-occupation. It was not usual for a widow or a widower to go back to a house where a marriage partner had died. The widowed went to live with married children or else set up independent households in the accommodation set aside for pensioners. Most of the re-opened houses were occupied by young married couples a few weeks after the performance of the house-opening ceremony. They were not necessarily closely related to the dead person.

As I noted above, the purpose of the "look rubbish" ceremony was to demonstrate publicly that a bereaved family had reconciled themselves to the loss of their kinsman. It also served to clear the way for family members to inherit

any valuable possessions the dead relative might have left behind. In pre-settlement times, and for much of the post-settlement period, a dead person's private property was either thrown away or left to rot on the person's grave. In rare instances, a valuable or useful item, such as a yamstick or a woomera, might be given to some distant relative or temporary kindred member, provided he or she would not be upset at possessing such a memento. In general, the sight of the personal effects of a departed relative would bring about the same kind of grief that the injudicious uttering of the dead person's name would cause. In the "look rubbish" ceremony, the deceased's belongings were shown to family members and the valuable items divided up between them. A feast was held and there were further public performances of "old paten" dances connected with the deceased's woochorrm. The "look rubbish" ceremony was not as large-scale as a house opening. There was no "Island" dancing and performers and spectators were drawn largely from the neighbourhood rather than the entire settlement. It served notice that the family had officially recovered from their grief and that the dead person's name could be freely used once more.

The first tombstone opening at Edward River came about because a group of siblings wanted to erect a memorial headstone over the grave of a brother who passed away in 1970. They were all members of the Kuuk Thaayorre Wallaby/Lightning clan. Up until that time, the graves in the cemeteries at Edward River did not carry any form of permanent marker other than an iron cemetery peg carrying the number of the grave. It was a sign of the growing affluence of the community that the brothers were able to save the the considerable amount of money required to order and import the headstone from the monumental masons in Cairns. When the headstone arrived, it was duly set in place. The brothers wanted to dedicate the headstone appropriately and in public. They therefore consulted with a Torres Strait Islander, who was resident in the community, concerning the proper way of carrying out such ceremonies. It was quite a lavish affair. Indeed, many people remarked privately that too much money had been spent on the whole business, and that if the first

tombstone opening was to be the precedent for other tombstone openings, then very few families would be dedicating headstones to deceased relatives.

Because the dead man had maintained strong ties with Yir Yoront people, invitations to attend were issued to a large number of Kowanyama residents. Something like 30 people went up from Kowanyama. Prior to the day of the ceremony, the headstone was hidden from view by a decorative arrangement of strings and coloured streamers. The decoration was carried out under the supervision of two Yir Yoront women from Kowanyama who shared a major totemic emblem (Wallaby) with the dead man. A new dance that had been imparted to one of the brothers in a dream by their deceased father was rehearsed, along with others that were drawn from the deceased's person's woochorrm

The ceremony commenced with a graveside eulogy delivered by a Yir Yoront man, a Rough-back Stingaree clansman from Kowanyama. This man had been called kuthn by the deceased in his lifetime, because an older brother of the deceased had been married to the man's sister. After the eulogy, the strings supporting the decorations were cut to reveal the headstone. As the strings were cut, the brothers called aloud the dead man's name, indicating thereby that the relatives could now use that name in public. After the dedication and the revealing of the tombstone a feast was held. The proceedings concluded with the performance of "old paten" dances. The dancers were a mixed group of Kuuk Thaayorre men. When the dancing had ended, certain cult items and effigies used in the dances were lodged for safe-keeping in the church.

It is convenient to pause here to compare the pre-settlement funerary rites with those of the 1968-75 period in terms of the ends they served. The activities that made up the complex of pre-settlement mortuary observances accomplished a number of things. At a practical level, they provided for the treatment and disposal of human remains. On another plane, the imposition of bans on the tracts associated with the dead person assisted the ghost of the deceased to sever itself from the attachments of its former life and

join the spirits of the dead. For the living, occasions were provided for the public exhibition of grief and respect, while appropriate mourning behaviour for a dead person's family was institutionalised through the adoption of roles specified by the bereavement terminology. Finally, the identity of the sorcerer responsible for a person's demise could be determined, and the final obsequies often provided the occasion for exacting revenge upon the sorcerer. It was said that cremations and burials in the "wildtime" often ended in accusations and spear fights.

Except for providing occasions for killing sorcerers, funerary ritual of the 1968-75 period can be said to have fulfilled the same broad functions. However, given the attitudes of Europeans towards the disposal of human remains in the tropics, and the fact that Edward River people were committed to a sedentary life-style, it was inevitable that changes should occur both in the scheduling of activities and in the activities themselves. The overhauling and re-shaping of funerary rites ultimately brought into being a new ritual focus for the community and, to some extent, provided a replacement for the ceremonial rituals of the pre-settlement period. I shall try to trace as well as I can, the sequence of changes that led to development of the 1968-75 funerary rites.

A major reorganisation of funerary activity was necessitated by the European attitude towards corpse exposure. At the outset, Chapman, like the other missionaries of Cape York Peninsula, insisted on a speedy burial for anyone who died within the settlement's precincts. The people of Edward River complied with this new rule, and all who died in the settlement were interred in cemeteries attached to each neighbourhood. On two occasions at least during "Chapman time", bodies were secretly disinterred and reburied in their own clan tracts. Otherwise, quick burial was accepted with little complaint. Divination procedures were still held, but this time over the grave of the dead person rather than over the buried contents of a corpse's abdominal cavity, as had been the practice in former times. Divination in turn led to sorcery accusations and fights in the settlement,

often within days of a person's death. Chapman sturdily opposed fighting over "dead bodies" and eventually suppressed the overt violence that provided one of the ways of securing redress for a death due to sorcery (see Chapter 10 where this topic is pursued in greater detail).

It was the pre-settlement custom to place mortuary bans on both the tract where a person had died and the tract where the corpse exposure had taken place. These were lifted a year or so later. If the person had died in a humpy, then the abandoned shelter became the focus of the ceremony to open that tract. At a pre-arranged time, a large group gathered about it to wail, to stamp on the ground and to shake the structure in a final display of grief, before declaring the place open. This practice became the model upon which the house opening ceremony was based. Obviously, the settlement itself could not be placed under mortuary bans and avoided whenever a death occurred there. Therefore, the Edward River people elected to place mortuary bans on the house where a death occurred and on its immediate surrounds. Houses so abandoned required re-opening eventually, so that the house or the site of the house could be used once more. Hence, they employed an elaborated version of the pre-settlement site-of-death tract opening ceremony to accomplish this purpose. The "house bumping" part of the post-settlement ritual echoed the pre-settlement ceremony. But the post-settlement ceremony was greatly embellished through the introduction of "Island" and "old paten" dances. In pre-settlement times, the only occasion when people danced in funerary rites occurred during cremations. The dances of the post-settlement house opening ceremonies were not modelled on these, however. There was a keen interest in the customs of Torres Strait Islanders, and they were often held up as the precedent for doing new things at Edward River. It was said that Torres Strait Islanders opened their houses with singing and dancing, and this was given as the reason for incorporating "Island" dances into the Edward River house opening ceremonies. It was also said that it gave the younger men who had not learnt "old paten" dances a part to play in the proceedings.

The addition of "old paten" dance segments that dramatised parts of the deceased's woochorrm came about through a thoroughly traditional innovatory process. The first dances that were performed were ones that were created by the spirits of the dead themselves (see p. 238). They were passed on to their kin in dreams with the request that they be performed in their memory at house openings. When it was realised that the performance of "old paten" was pleasing to the ghosts of dead kin, it was a small but significant step to include sections from the repertoire of the initiation dances and dramatisations as well. This in turn has meant the gradual secularisation of a set of dances the performance of which, up until well after the establishment of the mission, had been restricted to initiated men and those undergoing initiation. The secularisation of the initiation repertoire was a consciously controlled process. Many initiation dance segments, in the period between 1968 and 1975, still could not be performed before mixed audiences, because they were held to be too powerful and they would have therefore had adverse effects on those watching. "We've got plenty more bora (i.e. initiation) dances," men would say. "But we still keep them out there in the bush because they're too strong yet." Occasionally, a powerful dance would be introduced into funeral ritual. If men were uncertain about its effects, women and children would be required to turn their backs on the performers to avoid dangerous consequences.

The "look rubbish" ceremony had its origins in a part of the pre-settlement ritual that accompanied the final disposal of a body. Prior to burial or cremation, the kindred viewed the dead person's possessions and wept over them. The items of value were given away to classificatory kin who normally lived at some distance from, but who had ties of friendship with, the deceased. In the refurbished "look rubbish" ceremony, there was no crying over the dead person's possessions. The valuable items were distributed among the close kin, not the distant kin. The major intent of the ceremony was to validate ritually the inheritance of the dead person's effects by members of the kindred. This was

a new need that had arisen in the wake of the growing affluence of the Edward River people and their accumulation of consumer durables. The importance of the occasion was underscored by "old paten" dancing.

Finally, the tombstone opening ceremony, although frankly based on a Torres Strait Islander custom with which the Edward River people were already familiar, still owed much of its content to the indigenous cosmology and traditional practice. The tombstone was, after all, simply a more durable (and, to the Europeans, a more acceptable) version of the up-ended trees that marked pre-settlement graves. The performance of "old paten" identified the ritual as no mere copy, but instead, as something intimately linked with the Edward River supernatural landscape and the people who belonged to it. Even the cutting of the decorative strings reflected the pre-settlement custom of pulling open the strings that held the wrappings of the bones of the dead as they were placed on the pyre (see p. 235).

9.5 Summary

In brief, the Edward River cosmology survived the challenge to its relevance and continued to function powerfully in the everyday life of the community. It had responded to changed needs and altered contexts by renovating beliefs and generating new rituals. It had done this in a way that maintained clear links with the past so that the Edward River people could truly say, as they often did, "We follow on from old custom".

Even when "old paten" dances were performed in non-ritual contexts, as for example in the displays for visiting or for departing staff, they were more than simply exhibitions of an innate talent for providing good entertainment. They were also statements about an Aboriginal universe and the mythic threads that tied people to a ritual estate.

CHAPTER 10SETTLEMENT LAW AND ORDER AND SOCIAL CONTROL10.1 Introduction

In terms of the white Australian legal system, law and order at Edward River was maintained through a two-tiered structure. The lower tier was a community court system established by various acts and regulations to deal with breaches of the community By-Laws and certain limited kinds of civil complaints. Only the Aboriginal residents of the reserve could be dealt with in the community system. Offences committed by Aborigines that were judged to be serious and all charges brought against Europeans for offences committed within the reserve had to be referred through the upper tier of the structure, which was the normal Queensland court system. Referral through the regular Queensland courts was relatively rare. Most disputes and their resolutions were carried out within the community in a very distinctive way that involved both the community court system and a set of redressive procedures that owed more to the pre-settlement system of law and order than to the Western legal system. I shall concentrate my discussion therefore on dispute resolution procedures within the community. I will begin with an account of the formal constitution of the community court system and its powers.

Aboriginal courts in Queensland were established as entities in their own right by Section 44 of The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act 1965 and continued by Section 32 (1) of the Aborigines Act 1971-79. The formal constitution of the Aboriginal courts is set out in the 1972 regulations accompanying the last-named Act:

Aboriginal Courts....shall be constituted by two or more Aborigines who are Justices of the Peace, provided that if a Court cannot be constituted by two or more such Aborigines, the Aboriginal Council established in respect of such Reserve or community may constitute itself into an Aboriginal Court which shall be constituted by at least three members of such Council. A person shall not sit as a member of an Aboriginal Court for

the purpose of hearing and determining any matter in which he has an interest.

The jurisdiction and powers of the courts were, as I noted above, limited to Aborigines living in the reserve. The court could hear, determine and impose penalties for offences under the Regulations and the By-Laws of the community. The Regulations, which gave administrative enactment to the provisions of The Aborigines Act 1971-79, dealt with a broad range of things including the administration of welfare funds, trust funds, deceased or missing Aborigines, the control of reserves and communities, council elections, community funds, Aboriginal courts, gaols and policemen, visiting justices, employment, penalties, sale of beer on reserves, inspections and the management of property by officers of the DAIA. Although communities on Aboriginal reserves were empowered under the regulations to make their own By-Laws (with the approval of the appropriate Minister), the Edward River Council had never done so. Instead they used a set of DAIA model By-Laws which set out in 23 chapters a large number of rules concerning what might be termed local government requirements. Among other things, they dealt with aerodromes, bathing places, boats and vessels, cemeteries, dogs, employment, eradication and destruction of noxious weeds, firearms, hygiene and sanitation, hospitals and institutions as well as general provisions concerning conduct and behaviour including the practice of sorcery.

Many of the By-Laws were similar to the Regulations, and Nettheim (1979) has criticised both By-Laws and Regulations for their triviality, for the excessive supervisory power invested in authority and for their general breadth and vagueness. Nevertheless, the Regulations and the By-Laws provided the major legal code within which the community court system operated. The Edward River court could also hear and determine actions concerning the recovery of debts and property, provided the amount involved did not exceed the sum of \$200. Most complaints dealt with under this provision had to do with actions instituted at the behest of DAIA staff seeking recompense for the damage or destruction of government

property.

During the period covered by my fieldwork, Edward River had no Justices of the Peace and members of the council heard cases brought before the community court. Generally, courts were convened shortly (usually one day) after charges were laid. On most occasions they were held in public under the shade of a large fig tree. Community managers usually did not attend them unless they were required to give evidence. The Clerk of Court was generally a staff member since no Aboriginal person at that time was sufficiently literate to discharge the duties properly. Most charges were laid by the Aboriginal policemen (I shall discuss the duties and powers of councillors and policemen in later subsections) and prosecuted by the senior Aboriginal policeman. Those charged usually conducted their own defence. The courts could impose fines not exceeding \$40 or gaol sentences not exceeding 14 days. The regulations provided for a system of appeal to the normal courts and for a Visiting Justice to inspect court records and hear any complaints that might arise of the court's determinations. To my knowledge no appeal had ever been lodged nor had anyone complained to a Visiting Justice.

Between 6 June, 1967 and 16 January, 1970, 93 people (86 men and 7 women) appeared before the Edward River court on a total of 106 charges. In all, 19 "not guilty" pleas were entered, but only 4 charges were dismissed. Fines totalling \$728 were imposed for 90 of the offences committed. Most defendants paid \$2, \$4 or \$6 in fines. The average value of fines paid was \$8, but this value was inflated by a small number of large fines exceeding \$20. The fines collected went into the community welfare fund. Imprisonment was rare. Only two young men were given gaol sentences without the option of paying a fine. Ten people were found guilty, but released with warnings only.

Table 10.1 shows the nature of the offences committed and the number of times they were committed. An examination of Table 10.1 indicates that the offences committed at Edward River fell largely into two categories. Some 41 (38%) of the charges laid were directly associated with verbal or physical assault, while 54 (51%) of the charges laid were

(a)	Obscene language	1
(b)	Causing a disturbance	9
(c)	Disorderly conduct	20
(d)	Assault	3
(e)	Behaving violently	2
(f)	Threatening	3
(g)	Assaulting a policeman	2
(h)	Causing bodily harm	1
(i)	Drunk and disorderly	39
(j)	Bringing liquor onto the reserve	13
(k)	Drinking alcohol on the reserve	2
(l)	Burning grass without authorisation	1
(m)	Not attending hospital for treatment	1
(n)	Failure to obey the instruction of the manager	1
(o)	Damaging government property	3
(p)	Failing to exercise parental care	2
(q)	Obstructing the manager	1
(r)	Illegal entry	<u>2</u>
Total		106

Table 10.1 The nature of offences and the number
of times they were committed, Edward
River, 6/6/67 to 16/1/70.

related either to the importation of alcohol onto the reserve or its consumption there. A large proportion of alcohol-related offences also involved displays of aggression and violence. In Edward River terms "disorderly" usually meant "fighting with others". However, it would be unwarranted simply to conclude from the figures that Edward River was a physically dangerous place in which to live. The figures were generated by patterns for behaviour more complex than the categories of committal would indicate. In many instances the charges themselves arose out of an indigenous system of dispute resolution. The true causes for these disputes

lay elsewhere and the appearance of people before the court was oftentimes just a trivial annexe to a process that perforce had to function independently of the introduced court system. This state of affairs evolved gradually from the inception of the settlement, and the character of Edward River disputation in 1968-75 clearly bore the marks of its history of development. In the next section I shall survey that history.

10.2 The mission era

When the Edward River mission was set up neither the missionaries nor the officials of the Department of Native Affairs (as the body in charge of Aboriginal matters in Queensland was then styled -- hereafter DNA) believed that the transition from life in the bush to life in a settlement could be accomplished without some problems arising out of tribal custom and traditional ways of resolving disputes. As far as I can gather, the missionaries as a whole had little real understanding of why Aborigines disputed. Certainly there was no formal recognition of customary codes of behaviour. Perhaps the missionaries felt that by recognising Aboriginal customary law and providing avenues for its expression they would have been codifying and prolonging something which they thought ought to be changed. At any rate, the mission provided no alternative forum for the settling of disputes originating in breaches of "murri law".

Disputes between Aborigines came to the attention of the missionaries when they erupted into violence. The levels of violence displayed by Aborigines in their quarrels were distressing and frightening to the missionaries. They were rightly concerned at the injuries and the fatalities that followed as a consequence of disputing. During the 14 year period between 1939 and 1953, Chapman noted 41 serious disputes at the settlement. The deaths of 6 people (5 men and 1 woman) were directly attributable to injuries received in the course of disputes and these accounted for 22.7% of the deaths of all people over 20 years of age on the settlement during that period. During the same period, 16 men, together

with the wives and families of the men who were married, were taken from the reserve on removal orders and detained for varying lengths of time at the Palm Island Aboriginal Reserve.

The removal of people from the Edward River Aboriginal Reserve seems to have come about in two ways. Firstly, people were removed as a consequence of complicity in a fatal spearing. Men so involved were usually arrested and charged with murder and sent up for trial in the State's courts. None of the trials were proceeded with, because the issues were judged to be tribal in nature and outside the jurisdiction of the courts. Instead the cases were referred to the Director of the DNA who had the power to order the removal of such persons from their own communities to be detained elsewhere for periods determined at the Director's discretion. Thus, in an informal way the operation of "murri law" was recognised and taken into account. The second way in which removal orders were invoked came about when the missionaries attempted to forestall threatened trouble by requesting the banishment of people who seemed to be at the centre of quarrels and unrest. It may be that some people designated as "troublemakers" were unjustly removed. Officially, removal was not regarded as imprisonment but rather as a "re-education" process and as an expedient way of forestalling pay-back deaths. At Palm Island, the Edward River people had as much liberty as any other reserve resident there, and it could be argued that banishment on a removal order was the most practical and humane way of dealing with very difficult situations.

While missionaries and DNA officials had to come to terms with Aboriginal disputing behaviour, Aborigines, by the same token, had to make their own adjustments and accommodations to the processes of white Australian law and order. The early years of the Edward River settlement, "Chapman time", stand out as an especially troubled period in the minds of informants. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see why this should have been so. The residents of the newly-formed mission not only brought with them processes for resolving disputes that contrasted sharply with white Australian processes, but they also brought with them

long-standing antipathies formed in the wake of past disputes. Within the confines of the three neighbourhoods that comprised the first settlement, those traditional antagonisms combined with the dynamics of Aboriginal disputation served to create explosive situations. The Chapman diaries, together with the commentaries provided by informants on fights and disputes during this period provide a unique perspective on the evolution of the processes of law and order at Edward River.

The most direct manifestation of white Australian law took the form of the officers of the Queensland police force. Officers from Normanton or Coen made regular annual patrols through the reserves of western Cape York Peninsula. In the course of such patrols they undertook inquiries into serious charges (mostly homicides), made arrests, rounded up runaway wives and Aborigines suffering from venereal diseases and occasionally gave lectures to Edward River men on the evils of throwing spears at others. During their first patrol on the Edward River reserve the police officers arrested a number of men who had been involved in two disputes that had had fatal consequences (see Chapter 5, Cases No. 4 and 6). The visit made a profound impression. As one informant described it:

Chapman tried to stop the fighting but he couldn't do it. So he let the people fight. He sent for the police but he did not tell the people he had done so. They came and for the first time we saw a policeman. "What's this one?" everyone asked. At first the people thought it was a stockman from Strathgordon. But he looked different. He had a different hat -- and stripes. The old people asked Chapman who the man was. Chapman said it was a policeman. Chapman said, "You fellows started fighting, alright, now you see a policeman. Next time, when you fight, you might see another policeman." The people said they would stop fighting. "Oh yeah," they said, "we know now about policemen." But that was gammon. They had more fights and more police came. When the policemen went back they just went on fighting again. They just couldn't satisfy.

During this first visit by the police to Edward River they gave one of the Aboriginal men a uniform and made him a "policeman". The man they chose was Chapman's principal Aboriginal assistant, a Yir Yoront man of the Brown Crane clan. In the eyes of the Edward River people the choice could hardly have been worse. Not only was the man unable to keep the peace in any form, but he was also active in promoting a great deal of factional feuding among the Kuuk Thaayorre, the Wik Nganchera and the Koko Mindjena peoples.

Chapman only rarely called for police intervention in the affairs of the settlement. He preferred things to be resolved without their help and there appear to have been occasions when he deliberately did not report instances of serious injury and even deaths resulting from disputation. It is equally clear from the laconic entries in the diaries that there were times when Chapman had only the merest vestige of control especially during large-scale disputes. On a number of occasions, he was in great personal danger. He was certainly assaulted a number of times, and but for the intervention of natives who were "blocking" for him, he might have been seriously injured. Chapman seems to have concentrated on stopping the fighting rather than eliminating the causes for fighting. When he was unable to stop a fight he often collected up the weapons of litigation the next day and destroyed them. Sometimes he punished "all hands" by not giving out rations for a day or so. He frequently sent disputants out into the bush to cool off. The following two entries from the diaries are illustrative (The original punctuation is maintained, but initials of people are used to preserve anonymity.):

1939

June 13 The people hunting. A quarrel arose while hunting and continued in the village. Boomerangs and sticks taken...

June 14 Quarrel again this morning in village more boomerangs and sticks taken. Again this afternoon row was renewed with increasing force threatened

to fire on crowd if they did not disperse this had the desired effect. More sticks taken.

In only 12 of the 41 disputes Chapman recorded in his diaries did he mention anything about the cause of the dispute. His attribution of causes was often pretty meagre as it turns out. Consider the following example:

1940

January 31 Quarrel in village over J. F. offering tobacco to H. N.'s wife during his absence. Many people took part in the quarrel. Quite a serious affair. Have punished all hands.

The cause of the fight was J. F.'s attempt to seduce H. N.'s wife by offering her tobacco while H. N. was away working as a stockman on the neighbouring station of Strathgordon. My informants produced another version of the fight. My own commentary is added in parentheses thus []:

We had a big fight up there where the Mungkan houses are. H. N. [a Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear clansman] and N. N. [same clan and a "son" of H. N.] started to fight because J. F. [a Kuuk Thaayorre Brolga clansman] broke the arm of H. N.'s sister with a boomerang. She was accusing J. F. of trying to seduce H. N.'s wife. H. N., N. N., J. F. and his brother M. F. [Kuuk Thaayorre Brolga clan] as well as K. C. and his son W. C. [both Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear clansmen] all started to fight with spears. They were fighting "fair go" [i.e. formally duelling]. M. F. got a spear in the leg and it had to be cut out. Later C. D. [a Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear clansman] when he saw M. F. wanted to know, "Who hurt my brother?". That night C. D. threw more spears.

On comparing the two accounts we can sketch the course of the dispute. It had its origins in the attempt of J. F. to lure H. N.'s wife into infidelity. It escalated when J. F. injured H. N.'s sister and then became a formal duel which concluded with the spearing of M. F., J. F.'s brother. This apparently settled the matter, and C. D.'s performance

can be regarded as a demonstration only, since it appears that no-one answered his challenge or took any action when he threw his spears.

The most frequently mentioned cause for fights in Chapman's diary had to do with sorcery or puri-puri accusations (9 cases out of the 12). The entries in Chapman's diary afford a rare glimpse into the processes of sorcery accusation in the early days of the settlement:

1941

February 22 Word arrives that F. T.'s mother taken by Alligator near Chillago...

March 9 A fight over the woman being taken by alligator on Feb 21st. Two or three boys wounded slightly.

1942

December 26 A quarrel this afternoon and some fighting over dead body.

December 27 Quarrel continues this morning...

1944

February 13 S. W., son of N. C. and B. C. was drowned in well this morning. Some boys running around with spears J. R., J. C., J. F. and M. F. the latter threw a spear...

February 14 Warned all and sundry against trouble making in the way of finding out who by magic caused the drowning yesterday.

Once Chapman recorded what appears to have been the settling of a set of sorcery accusations:

1947

January 17 K. C. died last night and was buried this afternoon much wailing.

- February 25 W. C., J. F. and W. E. troublesome over K. C.'s death.
- March 12 A quarrel in village over dead person. M. E. concerned....people restless.
- April 17 J. W. died today. He was speared in the thigh during the quarrel on 12th March.
- April 18 J. W. buried.
- April 19 Big gathering of natives and peace proclaimed over present quarrels.

Later in the year of 1947, the M. E. of the March 12 diary entry was banished (together with his wife and child) on a removal order because of his role in sorcery accusations. When the next death occurred in that year Chapman was ready:

1947

- December 24 C. D. died during the early hours of this morning and was buried this afternoon.
- December 25 Xmas cheer given to all natives. Much dancing and merrymaking. Held meeting this morning Pouri Pouri practices of which C. D. was the chief offender backed by N. N., J. C., C. C., J. R., L. N. and to a lesser extent big H. C. and T. R. issued a warning to these boys. They brought in some fighting spears which were destroyed.

It is worth observing that of all the men named in the last entry above, only one of them was not Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear clansman. H. C. was a Kuuk Thaayorre Wallaby/Lightning clansman whose wife was a Duck/Spear woman. C. D. was H. C.'s mother's brother. Looking back on the period, informants clearly conceptualised sorcery allegations and

subsequent redressive action in terms of regional alliances. As one Kuuk Thaayorre informant expressed it:

Koko Mindjena, Thaayorre and Mungkan people all blamed one another for deaths in Chapman time. When a Mungkan person died, the Mungkan oldtimers would think someone from here [i.e. Kuuk Thaayorre country] had caused the death. They would go for one man then...

Sometimes two of the regional groupings would form alliances against the third as in the following case from Chapman:

1949

- March 31 R. D. [Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear] died this morning buried this afternoon.
- April 1 Trouble over R. D.'s death. The following boys waylaid M. H. [Wik Nganchera Snake] and gave him a rough handling, H.C. [Kuuk Thaayorre Wallaby/Lightning], D. N., J. N. [both Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear], M. C. [Kuuk Thaayorre Wallaby/Lightning and H. K. [Koko Mindjena Rainbow/Cyclone]. M. H.'s father being blamed for R. D.'s death.

The last fatal spearing to occur during "Chapman time" had its origins in a set of Kuuk Thaayorre-Koko Mindjena sorcery accusations. The events are described in bare detail in the diaries.

1950

- February 25 E. C. [Koko Mindjena Rainbow/Cyclone] speared L. J. [Kuuk Thaayorre Jewfish] in the right thigh this evening.
- February 26 L. J. in much pain.
- March 16 At 9.30 last night H. K. [Koko Mindjena Rainbow/Cyclone and brother of E. C.] was speared

fatally through the chest supposedly by W. C. [Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear]. Much wailing in the village. W. C., J. R., J. C. and C. C. [all siblings and fellow clansmen] left during the night. Telegraphed particulars to DNA this morning.

March 18 Catalina flying boat arrived this morning at 10 a.m. with senior sergeant Denning detective sergeant Heffernan, Dr Richardson (lady) constables Millar Linthwaite and Engler. Enquiries being made. H. K. buried this afternoon.

W. C., C. C. and J. C. had been involved in a dispute earlier in the afternoon revolving around the spearing of L. J. by E. C.. E. C.'s brother, H. K., was a community policeman at the time and he had broken most of the fighting spears belonging to W. C., D. C. and J. C.. H. K. then maintained a watch over the three men to make sure they did not renew the fight. W. C. managed to obtain a heavy hunting spear from somewhere, but he kept it out of H. K.'s sight by dragging it through the grass with his foot. When H. K. inadvertently dropped his pipe and bent down to retrieve it, W. C. seized the opportunity to pick up the spear. When H. K. straightened up, W. C. hit him squarely in the chest with the spear and pierced his heart, killing him instantly. The three men together with their remaining brother J. C. prudently fled the settlement and travelled on foot to Coen, where they gave themselves up to the police. H. K.'s body was later secretly disinterred from its grave in the village cemetery and reburied in a tract in his clan estate at Chillago Pocket.

Meanwhile, the speedy appearance of a large body of policemen all wearing side-arms made a profound impression on the Edward River people. In the words of one informant "they made a man frightened so he can't do nothing". The case came before the circuit court in Cairns in late July. A number of Edward River men went to Cairns to give evidence before the court. It was decided not to proceed with the

case, because the affair was patently a "tribal" matter. W. C. and C. C. were exiled to Palm Island for several years. When the brothers returned to the settlement W. C. offered his thigh to H. K.'s close kin, but the offer "to make level" was not taken up and there the matter rested. By then it seems that the community had learned that it could not continue to resolve disputes with spears according to "old custom" without at the same time attracting intervention by white authorities.

Chapman's problems were not at an end, however. During the next couple of years a great deal of trouble began to centre on H. J., Chapman's lieutenant. From the point of view of the community, H. J. was, under Chapman's patronage, asserting more authority than he had any right to and was abusing his powers. Using Chapman's influence and protection he had acquired at least four wives and had imported a number of his own close kin to support him against others. Not only that, but the Wik Nganchera and the Kuuk Thaayorre were convinced he and his relatives were using sorcery to kill them. They began to unite against H. J..

1950

November 11 Some of the boys quarrelsome especially S. H. [Wik Nganchera Groper/Barramundi] who caused some trouble. P. R. [Wik Nganchera Groper/Barramundi] pushed me over and attacked H. J..

1952

September 22 A good deal of trouble over "Puri Puri" directed against H. J. the main actors being R. H. [Wik Nganchera Shark], D. N. [Kuuk Thaayorre Duck/Spear] and to some extent F. C. [Kuuk Thaayorre Wallaby/Lightning] and M. J. [Kuuk Thaayorre Watersnake].

September 23 Have issued a warning to all over Puri Puri trouble.

It was a sad state of affairs. Chapman was urged many times

to send H. J. back to Kowanyama. One informant, V. M., recalls addressing Chapman in the following terms:

H. J. had about six or seven wives I think [an exaggeration]. All there in the compound where Chapman lived. I told Chapman what was going on, but Chapman wouldn't send him back [to Kowanyama]. He was sort of frightened you know. I said to him, "You don't want to be frightened. You know you've got somebody else behind your back and I'll help you along." I told him that. "You see how many women he has? Nearly seven! That's why he fights with the people. The Mungkan and Thaayorre people want to chase him back over that puri puri business as well. He is always with puri puri business."

Despite such earnest advice, Chapman's support for his aide was unwavering. Some of the people decided on the novel expedient of going over Chapman's head. They complained to the Bishop of Carpentaria.

1952

September 24 R. H. admitted approaching the bishop about H. J. and J. J. [H. J.'s half-brother, Kuuk Thaayorre Spear/Yuuchup] his statements are quite false.

The whole affair came to a head in November of 1952:

1952

November 25 Again had to speak firmly over Puri-Puri. H. J. very distressed over it all as he fears he may lose his life.

November 27 R. H. very troublesome he threw bread into the school yesterday afternoon and this morning he attempted to attack me in the store this is the second time he attempted to "knock me" but it was prevented by other boys.

Finally a Sergeant Chambers arrived from Cairns and conducted

a week-long inquiry into what became known in the Cairns Police files as the "Edward River Puri Puri War". R. H. was "removed" for his role in the business and the general consensus in the community was that the removal was the result of a trumped-up charge and was totally undeserved. The memory of H. J. (who died in 1961) is cherished by the Diocese of Carpentaria. He was seen as a loyal and devoted assistant to Chapman. When Chapman died three years later he was buried beside H. J. in the Kowanyama cemetery. At Edward River H. J.'s memory is execrated. They saw him as a bully and a sorcerer.

The community's inability to deal with H. J. had several effects. One was that the people ceased openly disputing about sorcery for fear of invoking more police interference. They learned, too, that because of their entrenched power, mission staff and white people generally would always be difficult to dispute with on equal terms. By the time Chapman resigned from his position as superintendent of the Edward River mission in April 1957, Edward River people had gone some way in accommodating to the processes of white Australian law and order.

Unfortunately, there is no record comparable with Chapman's diaries for the remaining years of mission control of the Edward River settlement. Chapman was succeeded by I. Piddsley in 1957. Piddsley disbanded the community police force which, at that time was composed of several men under H. J.. This effectively put an end to H. J.'s hegemony in the settlement and most of the Koko Mindjena began to drift back to Kowanyama. Piddsley decided to keep law and order through a three-man councillor system. He nominated three men from each of the three villages and he asked the men to choose three of the nine nominees to represent their affairs. Although his stay at Edward River was short (6 months), Piddsley had a relatively peaceful time. There were occasions when people sought to involve him in some matters. One example Piddsley cited occurred when a girl kept running away from her husband and sought sanctuary with the missionaries. Her father took her away each time saying that it had nothing to do with the mission. Regarding it as

a "tribal" matter, Piddsley did not interfere.

However, it was not always possible for the missionaries to keep "tribal" and mission affairs separate. The following case of betrothal breaking was one such situation. The case is presented from the view-point of one of the chief participants, V. M., who was the mother's brother of the girl concerned. The events took place during the time of Piddsley's successor, G. Green. It is noteworthy firstly, because mission affairs were being put forward as a reason for betrothal breaking, and secondly, because the mission superintendent and the councillors were supplying an alternative forum for the resolution of what might otherwise have been a fairly bloody business.

Case No. 9

W. E. and his wife had promised their daughter, E. W., to D. C.. D. C., who was working on the mission lugger, had been sending a substantial part of his wages to his prospective parents-in-law for some time. E. W. was attracted to the Church and did not want to marry D. C.. She said he was not a good Christian because he did not attend church regularly. The problem was laid before the councillors and the superintendent of the time. A meeting was held under an old fig tree. The matter was complicated somewhat because E. W.'s mother had died and her brother, V. M., was making a determined stand as one of the girl's marriage bosses to ensure that the betrothal was honoured according to "old custom".

V. M.'s argument was that the betrothal should not be annulled, because D. C. had supplied large amounts of yuurthongkn (i.e. betrothal gifts) especially to E. W.'s mother. V. M. warned that violence would result, perhaps even a death, if young people flouted marriage arrangements in that fashion. He pointed out that if her father didn't kill the girl, then D. C. might. V. M.'s general argument received strong backing from the councillors. However, V. M.'s spirited defence of the marriage arrangement was to no avail. W. E. did not share V. M.'s sentiments and D. C., noting E. W.'s aversion to

the match said to V.M., "Don't force me. That girl doesn't want me, old man. There's no need for you to worry about this. I don't want E. W.." In this fashion the promise was publicly annulled and E. W. went to Sydney to join the Anglican Church Army for a time. When she returned she married one of D. C.'s half-brothers.

One last case from the mission era is worth mentioning, partly because it was widely reported in the press at the time, causing the matter to be raised on the floor of the State's Legislative Assembly, and partly because the basic reason for the dispute, the illegal importation of liquor, was to provide a continuing source of conflict between Aborigine and Aborigine, and Aborigine and European, during the ensuing years.

Case No. 10

P. R. and three others had been sent to Thursday Island for medical treatment. When they were ready to return on the mission lugger, their luggage was searched and the liquor they were going to smuggle back onto the reserve was confiscated. The men were told that their grog would be sold and the money forwarded on to them at Edward River. The superintendent at the time, not realising that their luggage had been searched, added (in his words) "insult to injury" by once more searching their bags when they arrived at Edward River. The men concerned were upset and resentful. The next afternoon the matter came to a head. Accounts vary concerning what actually took place. The men went to the superintendent to ask for the money realised from the sale of their liquor. One of the men "touched" the superintendent who thought he was being attacked. He knocked his assailant over and a general scuffle broke out between the men, and the superintendent and the staff member who went his aid. The Aboriginal police made no attempt to interfere. The matter was reported to the police at Coen and not long after they appeared at the settlement and arrested two of the men who were alleged to have been involved, J. P. and T. R.. On the way to Coen,

J. P. managed to escape from custody. When the police fired a warning shot over his head, J. P. assumed that the police had shot T. R.. J. P. made his way back to the settlement and communicated his fears to the people. A party of men asked the superintendent if they could go and look for the body and they set off in a tractor. On the way they met with police reinforcements from Cooktown. It also happened that the Director of DNA was on his annual inspection tour of Aboriginal reserves and he too called in. As a result of the fracas, three men were removed to Palm Island, P. R., T. R. and J. P.. A highly coloured version of the affair appeared in the press which led a member of the Legislative Assembly to address a question to the Minister for Education (at that time in charge of the DNA) in the following terms: "In view of the report that several Edward River Aborigines, recently sentenced to five day's imprisonment, have been sent to Palm Island, will he indicate why this was necessary, and when it is intended to return the men to their homes." The Minister replied: "Transfer was considered necessary to ensure and promote the well-being of the entire Edward River community and the persons themselves. This decision was made only after personal consultation with the Aboriginal Councilors of Edward River community by the Director, who visited there at the time. Return of the men will be determined in the light of future developments and is subject to regular review" (Queensland 1966:161).

As far as I can tell, these appear to be the last instances of removals made during the mission era.

10.3 The disputing arenas of Edward River, 1968-75

During 1968-75 there were no cases of dispute or wrongdoing at Edward River that were serious enough to warrant being referred to the normal court systems of Queensland. The analysis of disputing within the settlement suggested that there were four main kinds of "trouble cases". Such cases were distinguishable on the basis of whether an Aborigine or a staff member perceived the breach

and sought redress and whether the perceived wrongdoer was an Aborigine or a staff member. Each category of dispute was associated with its own code, in terms of which, wrong actions were defined. As well, each had its own characteristic style for obtaining redress, remedy or resolution.

The code by which Aborigines assessed the behaviour of other Aborigines was basically the "old custom" or "murri law" which Edward River people had brought with them into the settlement at its inception. The same three choices faced people who saw themselves wronged by other community residents. They could seek public redress, they could seek private redress, or they could forgo redress and do nothing. The most visible form of disputing between Aborigines occurred when they set in motion the procedures for obtaining public redress. Public redressive action in the settlement was little different from its pre-settlement counterpart except for modifications that had been introduced to take account of the physical structure of the settlement itself and the responses of European staff members. The weapons of "old custom" litigation could be seen in virtually every non-staff house. All adults possessed or had access to an armoury of yamsticks, fighting sticks, shields, boomerangs and many kinds of spears which had no other purpose than to be used in disputing with other Aborigines. For the most part, European staff had only the vaguest intimations of the dynamics of Aboriginal disputation. I shall deal at length with settlement "old custom" disputing in Subsection 10.3.1.

Staff perceptions of Aboriginal wrongdoing were guided by the legal codes established for Aboriginal communities and reserves by the set of Acts, Regulations and By-Laws described in the introduction to this chapter. These codes were developed for the purpose of ensuring "the development, assimilation, integration, education, training and preservation of Aborigines" and "the peace, order and proper discipline of reserves" (Aborigines Act 1971, Section 56, paras. 3 and 7). In spirit they were meant to give effect to the policies of the Queensland State Government and the DAIA for the Aborigines under their care and protection. Implicit in their construction was the notion that Aborigines could

be penalised for not adhering to the rules of conduct to which other Australians conformed, and that were seen as necessary for the successful assimilation and integration of Aborigines into the wider Australian society.

There was little consultation with Aborigines concerning the content and adoption of the legal codes, except for discussion that took place in camera between the Director of the DAIA, his senior officers and the Aboriginal Advisory Council. The latter was composed of the elected chairmen of each Aboriginal council. At Edward River the codes had meaning only for the staff. They alone could successfully interpret them and cause charges to be laid when breaches occurred. In essence, the imposed codes defined wrong actions in terms of a set of white Australian preconceptions and values that were intimately bound up with policies and goals designed for the "benefit" of Aboriginal communities. The people of Edward River were as ignorant of them and their application as the staff were of "old custom".

Breaches of the codes were pursued publicly in the Aboriginal court which was modelled, somewhat imperfectly, on the judicial processes of Australian courts of law. The functioning of the Aboriginal breaches of externally imposed codes, will be taken up in Subsection 10.3.2.

While the Acts, Regulations and By-Laws spelt out in great detail white expectations concerning Aboriginal behaviour, there was no explicit charter categorising staff derelictions from the Aboriginal view-point. Nonetheless, there was in the minds of Aborigines an implicit code that set out their expectations concerning appropriate staff behaviour. The code was contained in the multi-dimensioned "good helper for the people" concept discussed in Chapter 8. Breaches of the code gave cause for complaint and for redress. Between 1968 and 1975, the Edward River community proved surprisingly adept at negotiating the appropriate channels to secure the resignation or transfer of staff who were seen to be high-handed, unfair or incompetent. I shall discuss these processes in Subsection 10.3.3.

Finally, white staff disputed among themselves. Their disputes were generated within the context of the

bureaucratic framework of the DAIA and reflected some of the cultural characteristics peculiar to the staff enclave. It is more appropriate to defer discussion of these until Chapter 11.

10.3.1 The "old custom" way

Between August 1968 and February 1970, I recorded 27 public dispute situations that had their origins in "old custom". The sample is non-random and opportunistic. It by no means exhausts all the "old custom" disputes that occurred then, but it represents, in my judgement, a valid picture of the character of such disputing in that period. Table 10.2 sets out the nature of the wrong actions that triggered off the disputes. The categories employed are those singled out in Section 5.3 of Chapter 5. The table is set out to display the kindred/non-kindred and neighbourhood affiliations of the disputants.

It should be noted that several of the categories of "old custom" wrong actions are empty in Table 10.2. There are a variety of reasons for this. Breaches of ceremonial and ritual codes could not occur, because the major ceremonies of the pre-settlement period to which the secrecy conventions applied were no longer performed. Similarly, it could be argued that there were fewer opportunities for trespass, since not so many people went out into the bush to exploit its resources. Mistreatment was probably rare in pre-settlement times (see p. 267). In the settlement it was probably even less likely to happen, because of the continual proximity of close kin who could support a mistreated person. The lack of open disputes over homicides does not mean that no deaths occurred during that period, nor does it mean that Edward River people had abandoned their ideology concerning the procurement of death by magic. What it does reflect is that redress for deaths caused by sorcery was either being sought through counter-sorcery (which was the commonly expressed Edward River view or it was being abandoned altogether (which I suspect was the real state of affairs). Certainly the experience accumulated during the

	Same neighbourhood		Different neighbourhood
	kindred disputes	non- kindred disputes	non- kindred disputes
Omission of kinship duties	15	-	-
Mistreatment	-	-	-
Infidelity	1	1	-
Bestowal breaches	1	1	1
Insult	-	1	2
Threatening injury	-	2	1
Failure to consult	1	-	-
Breaches of ceremonial	-	-	-

Table 10.2 "Old custom" disputes, Edward River, August 1968 to February 1970.

mission era left the Edward River people with no uncertainty about European responses to open disputing over sorcery practice. I shall return to the topic of sorcery later in this section.

In the majority of the disputes recorded (18 or 66.6%) the principals involved were kindred. In only 3 of the cases were the disputes between people from different neighbourhoods. More than half of the disputes (15 or 55.5%) could be categorised as omissions of kinship duties. Of these, arguments between married partners accounted for 8 of the cases, and arguments between brothers for a further 5 cases. A dispute between a young man and his father's brothers and another between household members made up the remaining intra-kindred disputes. The cases presented below have been selected for their illustrative value.

Case No. 11

A domestic dispute

E. C. was one of a number of men who were on their way back

to the settlement when their vehicle broke down. The men decided to walk home. When E. C. arrived home late that night his wife, A. E., was not at home and, since she was not expecting him, had no supper prepared. E. C. complained and A. E. retorted. There was a row and during its course, E. C. hit his wife on the shoulder with his woomera. A. E. was taken to hospital, more for show than for treatment, by a sympathetic Aboriginal policeman who was her "cousin-brother". The couple were reconciled several days later.

Case No. 12

Another domestic dispute

L. F. had been drinking some illicitly imported liquor with E. N., a "cousin-brother". When L. F.'s wife learned that her husband was becoming very drunk she became very apprehensive. Fearing his uncertain temper she left her children with L. F.'s mother and went to the house of T. F., L. F.'s brother. When L. F. found his wife there, he complained that there was no supper. Without warning he hit his wife before his brother could block the blow. M. F. ran away and took shelter in the house of a clanswoman, B. M., in the other neighbourhood. L. F. was enraged. He set off in pursuit of his wife and tracked her to her refuge. There he accused her of hiding his children and deserting him. He attacked her and M. F. being no match for her burly husband fell to the ground under a rain of punches and bites despite the efforts of B. M. and her husband to protect her. She received several kicks before she managed to pick herself up and, with the aid of B. M., flee to the manager's residence. She was taken to the hospital for treatment and protection while the manager sent the Aboriginal police to apprehend L. F.. L. F. eluded the police and went home where he stood at bay in his own backyard. Because he was in his own "reserve", the police did not attempt to arrest L. F.. Instead, they told him that his wife was at the hospital and then went away. They were hoping to arrest him as soon

as he left his yard. However, L. F. stayed where he was and then, to an unusually quiet and darkened street, began a tirade of abuse in English that lasted for several hours.

At first he addressed his wife, cajoling her and begging her to bring his children home and cook his supper. Then he threatened her: "M., you bloody fuckin' bastard cunt of a woman, I'll kill you when you come home. You won't see daylight M.. You're my tucker. I'll eat you in the morning." L. F. then turned his attention towards the Aboriginal police. He said they had entered his "reserve" [i.e. house yard] and he challenged them to come onto it again and face his spears. He accused the sergeant of the police force, who was a Torres Strait Islander, of having procured the death of the wife of an Edward River man. She was also a Torres Strait Islander. He then asserted the policemen and the community's manager were ignoring his complaints and instead were copulating with his wife in the hospital. "You can fuck him [i.e. her]," he shouted. "You can have a good go. But tomorrow morning M. will be my tucker. I'll eat her skin. My brothers will help me. I'll crucify her." He then directed his abuse at a number of staff claiming that they were putting people out of jobs unnecessarily and that they were appropriating community resources for their own uses and, finally, sleeping with single black girls.

All through the tirade no-one answered any of his challenges. At one point he tried to enter his older brother's house, but he was angrily ejected and locked out. At intervals he broke into his stream of abuse to croon songs or to weep. At another point he ran down the street and threw spears at each of the houses of his father, his older brother and his "full" uncle. Nobody attempted to touch the spears or return them.

Suddenly L. F. was silent. It was thought that he had passed out and his wife went back to her clanswoman's house. L. F. had not collapsed. He followed his wife to her sanctuary and mildly asked her to go home with him. She agreed to go.

The police sergeant, mistrusting L. F.'s sudden change of demeanour, went to L. F.'s house to check on things and found L. F. was contrite and reasonable, although he denied that he had assaulted his wife. He claimed someone else must have done it.

The following morning people appeared scandalised by L. F.'s conduct of the previous night. The general opinion was that the liquor he had consumed had affected his sanity. Later L. F. was told that he would be charged on three counts: assaulting his wife, being drunk and disorderly and using obscene language.

Case No. 13

A fight between brothers

B. M and his half-brother, C. W., had returned to Edward River from Cairns after attending the funeral of the woman mentioned in Case No. 12 above. By mid-afternoon B. M. was drunk on the liquor he had smuggled back into the settlement. He began blaming his younger brother for failing to take proper care of a bag he had left with him in Cairns, but which had not arrived at Edward River. He said he was going to fight his younger brother. His drinking companions were his wife's brothers and they tried to quieten him down. B. M. would not be quietened. He loudly exclaimed that he was a married man with children, who knew how to work and to drink and that the bag contained toys for his child and dresses for his wife. (I was told by B. M.'s step-father that the bag also contained more liquor.)

Later that evening, B. M. began to provoke his half-brother by taunting him and swearing at him. The two started to wrestle and when it seemed that C. W. was getting the worst of it, C. W.'s father, M. E. [B. M.'s stepfather], intervened on behalf of C. W.. B. M.'s wife's brothers, B. F. and L. F., regarded M. E.'s blocking efforts as "double banking" and went to the aid of their sister's husband. In turn, A. C. and

D. C. picked up their fighting sticks and shields and went to assist M. E. who, because of attrition within A. C.'s and D. C.'s own kindreds, was their "real" father. At this point the dispute erupted into the street as all those involved seized weapons, stripped off their shirts, rolled their trousers up and prepared to fight it out. The whole Thaayorre neighbourhood then organised itself to deal with the situation and contain the dispute. A number of women and children took sanctuary in staff houses or the hospital while the chaplain and I were requested to come down and "help". Not quite knowing what we were supposed to do, the chaplain and I went anyway.

At the bottom end of the street where the fight was taking place, it seemed that every torch and lantern in the neighbourhood had been pressed into service in order to provide illumination for what was going on. The street itself was full of milling figures. There was a large number of bare-chested men all carrying weapons of some kind. The atmosphere was frighteningly tense and full of din and noise and dust as men thumped the ground, logs, their shields or rubbish tins with their sticks and pranced about with a kind of high-stepping strutting action (which I later learned was the footwork characteristic of fighting with club and shield). They shook their sticks or woomeras in the air and uttered long high-pitched cries. Little knots of women hovered on the out-skirts of the men surging about in the centre of the street. Some were holding lights while others were armed with digging sticks and broken spears. This latter group literally buzzed with fury. They hurled insults at their adversaries and from time to time broke into a shuffling dance during which they advanced towards their opponents, slapping their elbows vigorously against their sides.

It did not take long for the apparent confusion to resolve itself into a more or less orderly spectacle. The two sets of disputants were clearly defined and they were separated by an amorphous group of men and women who made up the "blockers". The disputants kept attempting to force their way

through the press of "blockers" to get at each other and deliver blows. As the disputants rushed at each other, "blockers" snatched away their weapons or physically restrained them. Sometimes the disputants managed to trade a few blows, but these were often deflected by the weapons of the "blockers" who pressed in to separate the fighters once more.

All of the main disputants came up to the chaplain and me at one time or another to justify their participation in the affair before rushing off to attempt to answer a taunt from an adversary. Several times spears were fitted to woomeras. One of B. M.'s brothers exclaimed as he shook his spear, "White people can shoot anyone, but my father and my grandfather they used this [spear]". His older brother, who had remained out of the affair, snatched the spear and broke it. Challenges to fight in the "old custom" way were frequent. The "blockers" collected and broke many weapons that night and took not a few painful blows as well.

The arrival of the chaplain and myself had a slight sobering effect on the situation. There was an attempt by one of the disputants to formally apologise and shake hands, but the suggestion was not taken up. The real damping down commenced when the community chairman and the two neighbourhood policemen arrived. They were upset at having been disturbed while keening for the woman whose funeral B. M. and C. E. had attended. Armed with their official authority and their justifiable indignation, they moved through the crowd confronting each of the trouble-makers face to face and exhorted them to break off, to return to their homes and go to bed. At first they seemed to be making no headway for as they argued with one person, a fresh group of challenges would break out elsewhere and another rush made and halted by "blockers". Many times the main disputants asserted that they were going to bed with the promise that: "I'll get you bastards in the morning," or, "I'll take you to court in the morning". Eventually threats began to replace rushes. The chaplain and I were discreetly told that our presence was no

longer required and, as the chill night air began to stiffen muscles, people drifted back to their own homes. A few insults were hurled from backyard to backyard and then, finally, quiet descended on the place. It seemed amazing that there was only one split head. No court action resulted from the affair.

Case No. 14

A case of infidelity

A. F. had been told that her husband, B. M. had miscondacted himself with one of the single girls. She went to where B. M. was working at that time at a house construction site and publicly taxed him with his reported infidelity. At first B. M. ignored his wife until she picked up a piece of wood and started hitting him with it. B. M. was incensed. he seized another piece of timber and returned his wife's blows. Several men working on the site, including the staff member supervising the job, intervened and tried to separate the disputants. A. F. came out of it very badly. One of B. M.'s blows had felled her to the ground and he had punched her hard in the mouth. At one point he was prevented just in time from belaying her with a heavy "G" cramp. A. F. was taken to hospital where she received 11 stitches in her scalp. T. F., A. F.'s brother, had also been working in the same gang. Throughout the fight he did not attempt to interfere, although his workmates said that he barely kept himself under control and at one point they thought he was going to attack B. M. with a hammer.

Later that afternoon there was a confrontation between B. M., T. F. and A. F.'s parents. Each party had weapons in their hands. Earlier, B. M. had struck one of his "small mothers" (his mother's younger sister) when she tried to prevent him from picking up his spears. B. M. was in a highly agitated state and a number of men distributed themselves at convenient places in the street so that they could act quickly if the arguing escalated into violence. This did not happen, but

B. M. left his in-laws' house where he had been living with his wife and, taking his young son with him, went to stay with his own mother. Four days later A. F. sought the return of her son, but B. M.'s mother refused to give him up and there was a scuffle. During the scuffle B. M. went to hit A. F. again, but B. M.'s stepfather, as he said, was "shamed", and prevented B. M. from striking her. Despite this unfortunate episode, reconciliation was in the air and that afternoon B. M.'s stepfather confided to me that B. M. would move back to his parents-in-law's house the next day.

The plans for reconciliation received a terrible jolt when B. M.'s half-brother, C. E., returned from a holiday spree after being laid off from Strathgordon station. C. E. gave B. M. three bottles of wine. Two of them were quickly consumed that afternoon as B. M. shared them with a number of "cousin-brothers". B. M. then decided to go fishing, but before he did so, he invited P. M., a classificatory father and fellow clansman, to come around near supper time for a drink. P. M. turned up while B. M. was still fishing. He was also accompanied by B. M.'s wife's brothers, T. F. and L. F.. P. M. had mistakenly thought that B. M. had promised him a whole bottle and he asked for it. B. M.'s stepfather felt "sorry" for P. M. and he asked C. E. what they should do. They decided to give P. M. the bottle and the trio departed with it.

When B. M. returned from fishing he discovered his liquor missing and his personal belongings disturbed. Someone told him that his wife's brothers had been there, and B. M. armed with a fighting stick then rushed up to their house. B. M. attempted to close with his brothers-in-law, but was prevented by others, so he hurled his fighting stick at them, narrowly missing a woman. The Aboriginal police quickly arrived on the scene and T. F. invited the police sergeant into his house yard and gave him a half-empty bottle of wine. T. F. insisted that was how it was when they got it and that no-one had taken a drink. T. F. loudly voiced his great indignation that B. M., who had only lately come to manhood,

should want to come and fight him. Especially since he, T. F., had stood to one side when B. M. was fighting with his sister only days earlier. T. F. asserted that the real reason for B. M.'s aggressive stance was to be found in that dispute and not in the liquor. T. F. and his supporters all loudly demanded B. M.'s removal from the community. Not that it really mattered anyway, added T. F., because in the morning he and his brothers were going to "kill" B. M. anyhow. Bystanders watching the interchanges were all very much of the opinion that trips to Cairns for the purpose of bringing back grog should be banned.

B. M. retired to his stepfather's house, but not before he had promised to give his wife's brothers their chance to "kill" him next morning. Back on his own ground, B. M. denied that his dispute with his wife had anything to do with the present argument. He still declared that his bottle had been stolen. (It was at this point that M. E. took me aside and sadly told me the true story of how the bottle had come into the possession of B. M.'s brothers-in-law.)

Next morning when the settlement bell signalled the start of the working day, B. M., true to his promise of the night before, set off with a knife to confront T. F.. The knife was quickly taken from him by one of his older "cousin-brothers" and B. M. and T. F. attempted to fight each other with bare fists. This was difficult, however, because they were continually distracted by a large number of "blockers". B. M. returned to his stepfather's house followed by T. F. and several "blockers". B. M. emerged with a woomera. The "blockers" closed in and the woomera was broken in the ensuing scuffle. Finally, upon the urging of the bystanders the police, who all this time had been hovering on the outskirts of the action, moved in and B. M. allowed himself to be handcuffed, but not before he managed to fell K. J., his wife's half-sister who had been standing nearby shouting abuse at him. B. M. was gaoled and the matter came before the court later that morning. That evening B. M. and his wife were reconciled and they shifted their belongings to P. M.'s house where they

stayed until the bad feelings generated by the whole complicated tangle had been dissipated.

Case No. 15

A betrothal dispute

In 1968 P. B. and his girlfriend P. E. were persisting in a relationship that neither sets of marriage bosses approved. P. B. told me that he and P. E. had loved each other since their early teenage years and they wanted to marry. Of all the females at Edward River, P. B. called some 17 of them by the term rorko. Of these 17 females, 10 were already married and 3 were too young to be considered seriously as marriage partners. P. E. was one of the 4 remaining "straight" partners. The other three single women were P. T. who was already promised to A. M., M. E., P. E.'s younger sister whose marriage had been arranged with H. N., and T. H., the youngest of P. M.'s mother's older brother's daughters. Everyone knew that an understanding, if not a formal arrangement, existed between T. H. and C. M., P. B.'s "cousin-brother". At the time, C. M. was exiled to Thursday Island for unruly behaviour in the community. From P. B.'s point of view, the major hurdle in realising his marriage plans was P. E.'s father N. E.. (The actual relationships of some of the main actors in the dispute are diagrammed below in Figure 10.1.)

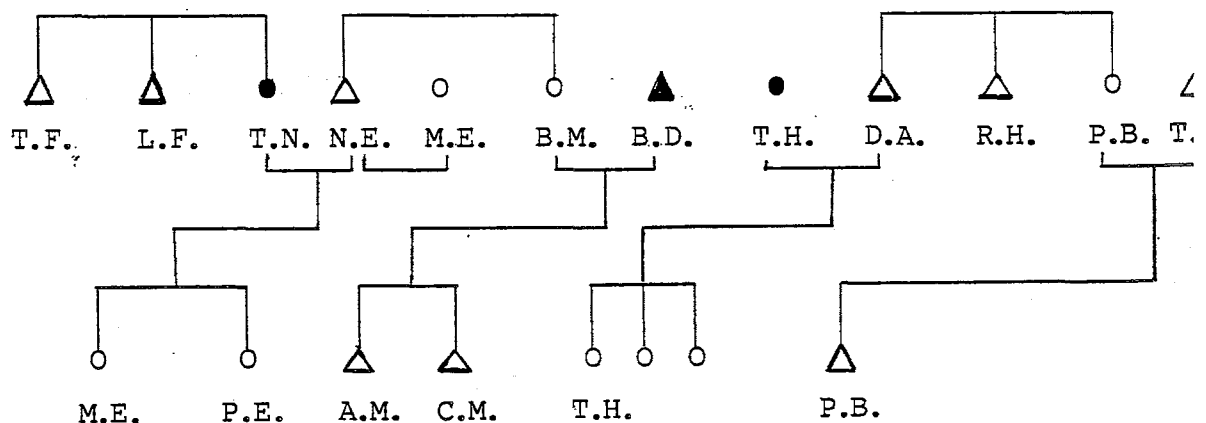


Figure 10.1 Genealogical details of some of the principals concerned in Case No. 15.

N.E., for reasons which I felt stemmed mainly from his dislike of T. B.'s family, would not assent to the match on two grounds. Firstly, he said he had to give C. M., as his sister's son and P. E.'s ideal spouse, the right of first refusal. This was a specious reason, for while C. M. had never publicly stated that he did not want to marry P. E., people well knew that he had no interests there. This legal technicality, as it were, and C. M.'s absence from the settlement bought N. E. some time to discourage the liaison between his daughter and P. B.. N. E.'s second objection to the marriage was couched in terms of marrying "too far away". As he put it, he did not want his daughter marrying a "Mungkan" boy. P. B.'s parents were Wik Nganchera.

Among P. B.'s marriage bosses his mother was the dominant personality. She wanted whatever her son wanted. Both of P. B.'s mother's brothers were living in Cairns and were too far away to be effectively concerned. T. B., P. B.'s father, would settle for anything that promised peace and quiet. P. B.'s mother refuted N. E.'s statement that her son was a "Mungkan" boy, since his maternal grandmother had hailed from Kuuk Thaayorre country and was a Wallaby/Lightning clanswoman. However, N. E.'s stubborn opposition to the match prompted P. B.'s parents to try to get P. B. settled in marriage elsewhere. They tried to arrange a marriage with a girl living at Aurukun who was also one of P. B.'s "straight" women there and whose child, it was rumoured, was P. B.'s. A trial cohabitation of a number of weeks soon revealed that neither had any long term interest in the other and the girl went back to Aurukun.

P. B. and P. E. persisted in their relationship. Several times N. E. together with P. E.'s mother's brothers (P. E.'s mother had died some years earlier) had gone to P. B.'s family home armed with fighting sticks to remonstrate about the state of affairs. P. B.'s family carefully avoided coming into open conflict with N. E., although there were a number of fights within P. B.'s kindred over the affair.

Meanwhile, at P. E.'s instigation and with her help, P. B.

began, whenever the opportunity presented itself, to behave like a son-in-law towards his prospective in-laws. He sent food to N.E.'s wife, M. E., when N. E. was away on his crocodile shooting trips. Wherever possible P. B. would ostentatiously assist N. E.. For example, I well remember passing the time of day with P. B. when P. E. came up and informed us that N. E. had arrived back from a crocodile shooting expedition. She told P. B. to go down and help her father. P. B. in turn asked me to lend a hand and I complied. I could not help smiling at N. E.'s discomfiture as P. B. bustled about hauling the motor, oars, provisions and crocodile skins single-handed into my vehicle.

Additionally, P. B. and his father took the opportunity of travelling to Cairns with me in order to obtain the consent of his two mother's brothers to the proposed marriage. P. B. also lobbied P. E.'s two mother's brothers and obtained a generally neutral stance from them. For in truth, community opinion was beginning to swing in favour of the young couple. "You shouldn't cut them down," one outspoken woman had urged. "They have a strong love." Still N. E.'s trump card in the situation was the absence of his sister's son, C. M.. Until he had publicly refused to marry P. E., N. E. said he could not permit the match.

Then one night the DAIA lugger that operated out of Thursday Island hove to off Edward River and C. M. disembarked. As soon as P. B. heard that his "rival" was back in the settlement he was violently ill. He vomited in the street and staggered home to collapse spectacularly in the front yard of his parent's house. My vehicle was pressed into service as an ambulance and we conveyed a seemingly inert P. B. to the hospital accompanied by a very concerned cluster of immediate family and close relatives. Examination showed that there was nothing organically wrong with P. B.. I interpreted P. B.'s "fit" as a ploy to gain further support for his cause in case C. M. decided he should do something about the "cousin-brother" that was playing about with a woman to whom he could expect to be betrothed. It cannot be denied that P. B. was very concerned

and that C. M.'s reputation as a fighter contributed in no small way to that concern.

In the event, P. B. need not have worried. C. M. announced that he had no interest in P. E.. He said he wanted to marry T. H.. N. E. finally relented and gave his consent to the match about a year afterwards. In 1971 P. E. and P. B. were married. Their active defiance of the marriage bosses had spanned a period of four years.

Case No. 16

A slight case of injury

T. R.'s eldest daughter J. R., aged 10 years, made faces at P. E. (aged 22, and the young woman concerned in the previous case). Goaded by the child's antics, P. E. slapped her. J. R. went off crying to her home and told T. R.. T. R. took off his shirt, picked up his spears and fitting one of them to his woomera strode up and down outside his house and delivered a tirade in the general direction of P. E.'s father's house. A neighbourhood policeman came up and stood gravely by, watching the flow of events. He took some of T. R.'s spears away from him. T. R.'s chief complaint was that P. E. had no right to strike his daughter. P. E. should have come and told him and he, T. R., would have chastised his daughter "...just like Island people do." There was no reply from P. E.'s household and, satisfied that he had made his point, T. R. put his spears away and his shirt on. (T. R.'s reference to "Island people" was in connection with the Edward River belief that Islander parents both physically chastised their children. Normally an Edward River father would not hit his children, preferring to leave physical punishment to the children's mother.

Case No. 17

Failure to consult

The house opening ceremony was under way for M. P., an old

lady who had passed away two months earlier. During the interval between the second and third "old paten" dances, B. H., who had been in Kowanyama when the arrangements were made, interrupted the proceedings. He marched over to the spectators and performers and angrily shouted, "Hey you fellows... that's my grandmother too! You should have waited for me... 'til I agreed. You've got no right to bump that house without permission from me." B. H. threatened the entire assembly with a knife and demanded that someone answer him. "I'm a man myself," he said. "You should have waited for me. Now you fellows answer me... somebody answer me!"

No-one took up B. H.'s challenge. With one accord the dancers and singers went on with the next stage of the ceremony and the whole gathering, completely and elaborately, ignored B. H. and left him swearing helplessly on the fringe of the onlookers. B. H. it appeared had committed an even greater breach by causing a disturbance during a ceremony which should not be marred by discord among the participants.

The illustrations provided above range over a broad spectrum of disputing behaviour and represent various levels of seriousness in terms of the physical conflict they generated. Not all disputes went through every stage of the "old custom" disputing sequence. For example, two of the cases above (Cases No. 16 and 17) did not go beyond the declaration stage. In many disputes at Edward River, the principals separated without coming into physical conflict after sufficient argument had taken place. My recorded cases show a bias in favour of disputes that had a violent outcome largely because they tended to attract the attention of both my informants and myself.

Nonetheless, the threat of violence lay under every dispute. And this was typically manifested in the demeanour of the disputants by the time they had reached the stage of arguing. By that time, disputing males had spears and spear-throwers in their hands which they brandished to underscore points in their discourse and with which they made threatening gestures. Women employed digging sticks with the same effect.

When the community was alerted that a dispute was under way, a set of territorial codes came into force. As I noted in Chapter 7 (pp. 347-50), Edward River people referred to their houses and house precincts as their "reserves". During a dispute each household's "reserve" became a sanctuary for household members. Disputants would march up and down in front of their "reserves" and argue. If, and when, the matter came to blows they could retire into their "reserves" without fear of pursuit. In fact they could do so without fear of arrest, for no Aboriginal policeman would enter a person's "reserve" before seeking permission. Further, I only once saw this rule breached by a policeman. The policeman in question was the Torres Strait Islander sergeant referred to in Case No. 12. He pursued a disputant into his yard in an attempt to arrest him. With one accord the disputants, "blockers" and the non-involved turned on the sergeant and unceremoniously hustled him out of the neighbourhood. For the non-involved, the "reserve" meant that the fight would not intrude on their household environs and they could watch the proceedings in relative safety. Whenever a disputant or a disputant's weapon, entered the "reserve" of a non-involved person, great indignation was expressed and the breach could be treated as an attempt to injure a household member. The street was the legitimate zone for combat when disputes occurred between members of different households. Members of the same household usually disputed and fought inside their shared "reserve". People drew into their "reserves" when the shouting and demeanour of the disputants indicated that an argument was under way leaving the street empty of all except those who felt they had a role to play. Supporters of the disputants would join them on their "reserves", while those whose kin affiliations or general concern made them potential "blockers" would move onto the street and station themselves at strategic points between those arguing.

It was also during the argument stage that the Aboriginal police arrived on the scene. They were in an invidious position, since not infrequently they were related to one or other, or even both, disputants. While kin-based

loyalties prescribed one set of roles, official duties under the By-Laws and Regulations prescribed another set, namely the arrest of people using abusive language and making threats with offensive weapons. However, arrests were never made by policemen during the argument stage, since walking up and down in front of one's "reserve" armed with a spear or digging stick did not constitute an intention to use the weapons, in the Edward River view. Such demeanour was merely appropriate "old custom" disputing behaviour. Violence did not automatically follow such displays. It was reasonable for Aboriginal policemen not to interfere at this point, since disputants might put their weapons away after a display of wrath and outrage.

The transition from argument to the stage of insult and physical combat was marked by several things. Firstly, the male disputants clearly signalled their intention to prepare for conflict by stripping to the waist. All disputants then took up the weapons they were to fight with. These were usually fighting clubs for men and digging sticks for women. Only Kuuk Thaayorre men used shields. Men hailing from country north of the Edward River used only their fighting sticks to deflect blows. This was a custom which they said belonged to pre-settlement times. Spears were often brought out during combat and poised for throwing, but they were usually snatched away and broken by "blocking" relatives before they could be launched. The general feeling was that whatever role spears played as an adjunct to arguing with others, they should not be thrown within the close confines of the settlement. When a spear was thrown it invariably caused a furore. "Blockers" then had to move quickly to prevent further spears from being thrown in return. the fighting sticks themselves caused injuries enough. In 1973, as the aftermath of one monumental melée, a total of 170 stitches were required to suture 7 head wounds. Some fights were conducted with bare fists. There was a general opinion that Europeans approved of this mode of combat (an opinion fostered, I suspect, by the cowboy movies shown in the settlement's open-air cinema and the kind of summary justice often meted out on pastoral properties). My

impression was that it was difficult to restrict a dispute simply to bare knuckles. One or other of the combatants usually produced a weapon which required the others to arm themselves similarly. "Blockers" often carried their own weapons as well, using them to deflect the blows of combatants.

Another sign that marked the transition from argument to insult and combat was the adoption of English. The argument phase of an "old custom" dispute was usually conducted in the vernacular appropriate to the neighbourhood. The use of English served two functions. It increased the range and variety of epithets and taunts that could be hurled between opposing factions, and it served warning to the staff that the dispute had reached a serious level. The women of a neighbourhood who were neither supporting a disputant nor "blocking" between disputants were especially vocal in drawing the attention of the staff to the state of affairs. In addition to admonishing the disputants loudly and abusing the Aboriginal police for letting the dispute get out of hand, they called for the manager to come up and settle things, or else send for the European police to come and remove the trouble-makers. When disputes appeared to be developing into uncontrollable melées and the territorial canons surrounding houseyards seemed likely to be breached, women concerned for their own safety and that of their children would seek refuge in the houses of staff members. Occasionally staff members would be explicitly invited to go to a dispute and "help".

As the reader may have guessed, Case No. 13 was my own personal baptism into the "old custom" disputing scene. From then on, I was frequently asked to participate in disputes that involved those who were regarded as part of my close family. Occasionally I acted as a "blocker", but more often I felt that my presence simply served as a tangible reminder of the limits imposed on the "old custom" disputing process by the fabric of European law and order. On most occasions staff did not take up the invitation to attend fights. They regarded them as displays of the kind of "primitive", even "barbaric", behaviour that the DAIA was

labouring to eradicate.

The majority of combats took place within one neighbourhood or the other and were principally between members of the same neighbourhood. During such times, members of the other neighbourhood would cross over from their area to witness and comment on the spectacle taking place. Given neighbourhood rivalries, it was to be expected that the comments of such visitors were disparaging and critical.

Once a dispute had boiled over into combat it was almost impossible for the Aboriginal police to intervene effectively. In general they only arrested combatants when community sentiment sided with them and a disputant was willing to be arrested. At most times, the best they could manage during an exchange of blows was to "block". Attempts to arrest fighters could lead to the policemen themselves being mobbed by the supporters of those arrested. Certainly, in attempting to perform their official duties, they were frequently taunted with deserting their kindred. Such taunts often caused the instant resignation of a policeman who, smarting under accusations of kindred disloyalty, threw off his uniform and took up his weapons and waded into the battle.

The separation of disputants in combat was achieved in a variety of ways. Within kindred disputes it occurred automatically when a disputant was severely injured and had to be taken to hospital or when one of the parties fled to another house. Sometimes "blockers" managed to drive adversaries apart after a few blows had been exchanged and keep them separated and under watch until tempers had cooled and the disputants disposed to listen to reconciling overtures. In large-scale fights, things could be wound down by the persuasive efforts of influential men intervening at the appropriate time (see Case No. 13). Intervention by influentials was generally only effective when people were beginning to tire and the efforts of "blockers" continued to counter successfully the attempts of the disputants to close with each other. Very rarely separation was achieved by arrest. When people consented to their arrest, it seemed to me that it was usually because it extricated them from

situations of weakness and helped mobilise some sympathy for them among their own kindred and other community members. It was clear in Case No. 14 that B. M.'s arrest materially advanced his reconciliation with his wife.

During the separation period it was common for disputants to complain of lack of support from their kindred. "I'm going to move away from this place. Nobody here takes my part or helps me". Such declarations were a kind of standard refrain from disputants. They were quite independent of the level of support received. The separation period was a time during which the people involved took stock of the state of affairs. The non-involved commented on the behaviour of the disputants and worried about any repercussions that might flow from the reactions of the staff. They rarely commented on the rights and wrongs of the issue disputed. "Blockers" displayed their bruises and wounds and drew attention to their ability or inability to affect the outcome. People ruefully gathered up the broken weapons and generally tried to set in motion the processes of reconciliation.

Usually, the most disconsolate group at Edward River after a fight was the Aboriginal policemen. In truth, their very title spelled out the role conflict intrinsic to their position when disputes flared up within the community. As policemen, they were expected to maintain law and order by staff and by Aborigines who were not party to the dispute. As Aborigines, they were duty-bound to respect "old custom" and "murri law" and honour kin-based loyalties. Disputes threw these inconsistent demands into a sharp and personally uncomfortable focus. During a fight, Aboriginal policemen were subject to pointed comment and heckling from bystanders when they did not arrest battling disputants. At the same time, those who were fighting made repeated calls on any Aboriginal policemen who were members of their kindreds to join with them and help them. Under such pressure they often resigned their official position on the spot, as I noted above, or else stood by watching helplessly. However, the next day was usually worse for the policemen. For it was then that they had to explain their failure to maintain

control to the manager. There were sometimes wholesale resignations from the Edward River police force as a result of managerial reproof.

But for disputes, the role of the Aboriginal policeman at Edward River was a sinecure. Nonetheless, there was a high turnover of men in the force simply because so many of them resolved the problems of incompatible duties by resigning. They felt it was better to resign than continually suffer the public and managerial censure that accrued to them in the wake of their non-performance of either conflicting set of duties. A few men endured several years in the Edward River police force. As they saw it, the source of their dilemma lay in the fact that they were not true policemen. Their powers of arrest were circumscribed by Act and Regulation to Aborigines only. They argued that people knew that the law they carried was something less than "white law" and therefore not backed up by the authority and legal sanctions ordinarily available to members of the Queensland Police.

Except for marriage disputes which tended to drag on through a series of episodes (e.g. see Case No. 15), reconciliations were achieved in a relatively short time. Kindreds, which might have seemed during an argument and fight to have been irrevocably split asunder by the level of violence and the promises of further mayhem on separation, would often be functioning normally again within a day or two, the principals shrugging off their participation with a wry grin and an offhand comment: "Oh, we just had a fight, that's all". If charges were subsequently laid as an outcome of the fight, it was not uncommon for former antagonists to stand together, affably sharing cigarettes, while waiting for their pleas to be heard by the court.

There were two other factors that complicated the operation of "old custom" dispute settlement in the community. One of them was alcohol. In all arguments between brothers and in half of the domestic disputes in my recorded sample, alcohol was involved. Sometimes the sharing (or non-sharing) of alcohol was the cause of an argument (e.g. see Case No. 14). More importantly, however, it affected the tendency of people

to dispute aggressively over matters which might otherwise have been forgotten. Case No. 13 aptly illustrates people's heightened sensitivity to wrong action while under the influence of alcohol. All the principals in that fight had been drinking. The relationship between alcohol and people's increased irritability was clearly recognised. Edward River people referred to it in a variety of stock phrases such as: "When they drink they get silly you know. That's when they start to fight". Indeed, I was told of one instance at least, where a row had been postponed until a shipment of grog had been smuggled in. "They'll drink and then they'll fight", said my informant. Because of the relationship between fights and alcohol, Edward River women looked forward to the introduction of a beer canteen in the settlement with a good deal of apprehension.

The second factor that complicated "old custom" disputing was sorcery. In this and other chapters, I have discussed at some length the Edward River preoccupation with sorcery as a mode of redress. Edward River people themselves were convinced that the participation of others in particular disputes was a consequence of the bitter antagonisms created by the presumed infliction of magical death in earlier days. One of my informants put it in the following way:

In Chapman time a lot of people died. Not just old people, but young people too -- young men and single girls. Some died from fighting sticks and spears. Some people just died. But people can't die from no reason. They died because some "murri" [i.e. Aboriginal person] caught them [with sorcery]. All through Chapman time people kept on fighting with spears over dead bodies and puri-puri. White people might be different, but at Edward River they always carried on from old custom. Even now, today, when people talk, argue and fight, well there now -- puri-puri [is the real reason underlying their disputes].

How much of this preoccupation contributed to the volatility of disputes and to the grouping of supporters and "blockers"

in particular situations was simply too difficult for an outsider to determine.

Gambling was one settlement activity that frequently gave rise to heated feelings, charges of improper behaviour and demands for satisfaction. "Old custom" law provided no guidelines when losers complained and accused others of cheating or using some kind of charm to secure an unfair advantage. Mostly, such charges were ignored by the other players as simply the expressions of the disgruntled. Quite often frustrated losers would go to their homes and reappear with several spears and launch them in the general direction of the players. Then the game would end in good-natured chaos as laughing gamblers scattered to avoid the spears. Other losers' displays included picking up the gambling blanket and scattering cards and players' money in the sand before stalking off. One man even went so far as to chop down the tree that shaded the Kuuk Thaayorre gambling ring. Such displays were tolerated with a great deal of forbearance by the other players. Only occasionally did another gambler answer the charges levelled at him. When that happened the matter then took on the form of an "old custom" dispute, even if the accusation was not one that belonged to an "old custom" category.

10.3.2 The court

I have already discussed the legal framework that established an Aboriginal court at Edward River, and I have briefly described its composition, its location and the kinds of offences it dealt with, as well as the nature of the penalties it imposed. It is useful to divide the cases that came before the Aboriginal court into three kinds. Firstly, there were the charges invoked under the community By-Laws which represented, as it were, offences against "the system". These charges were usually instigated by staff members who sought through them to enforce things such as health regulations, the official authority structure and respect for government property. Charges of this sort are represented by categories (1) to (r) inclusive in Table 10.1 (see p. 507).

They comprised 10.4% of all charges laid between June, 1967 and February, 1970.

Secondly, there were those charges that were laid as a result of "old custom" disputing. When people took to the streets to settle their differences in some form of trial-at-arms, then clearly they were in breach of the By-Laws that dealt with orderly behaviour within the community. All the same, a good deal of "old custom" disputing did not give rise to charges. Officially, the charges were laid by the senior Aboriginal policeman, but they did so only on the advice of the white staff. There were many disputes that escaped the attention of the staff and the Aboriginal policemen had no reason to institute charges on their own responsibility. Categories (a) to (h) in Table 10.1 represent the kind of charges that followed in the wake of public "old custom" dispute settling.

Thirdly, there was the category of charges related to fights and disturbances that arose out of the consumption of liquor. Although it was an offence for an Aborigine to bring liquor onto a reserve, most managers and staff turned a blind eye to people who drank their smuggled liquor quietly. This third category is represented by items (i) to (k) in Table 10.1.

The second and third categories were not mutually exclusive as the reader will realise from perusing the previous cases of "old custom" disputing. Not a few of the "disorderly drunks" of item (i) were in fact people disputing in the "old custom" way. But it has to be added that disputing where alcohol was involved was likely to be more unpredictable in its outcomes and reach higher levels of injury, because of the way in which alcohol seemed to magnify the sense of grievance and irritability of individuals and to lower their threshold of self-control.

In the majority of cases, people who were charged under the By-Laws and Regulations pleaded guilty. Thus, for the 106 charges of Table 10.1, 87 pleas of guilty were entered. When a defendant pleaded guilty, the court followed a relatively straightforward procedure. There was a brief hearing of the circumstances attending the charge. Usually there

was little dispute over the evidence tendered by the police and other witnesses, since by the time a matter came before the court, virtually the whole community was in possession of the "facts". Penalties were imposed having regard to the defendants' previous record of convictions and the circumstances of each case. Fines were paid without complaint and usually promptly. They were seen not so much as penalties for unseemly or wrong behaviour, but rather as a kind of cost associated with conducting an "old custom" dispute. The councillors themselves often referred to the paying of fines as "making level with the staff". By that phrase they seemed to mean that the staff members of the Edward River community should in some way be recompensed for the disruption caused by a dispute.

When not-guilty pleas were entered, the matter was much less cut and dried. Such pleas were indicative at times of tension points in staff-Aboriginal relationships, at other times they reflected basic differences between staff values and Aboriginal values, or they simply arose out of misperceptions concerning the dynamics of "old custom" disputing.

The following 5 cases from my field notes came from a sitting of the Edward River court in December, 1968. The sitting was instructive, because not-guilty pleas were entered in 4 of the 5 cases. The police prosecutor at that time was a man who was on loan from a Torres Strait Island reserve to help train and direct Edward River's Aboriginal policemen. He was relatively new to the community and had been responsible for laying 4 of the charges relating to fighting and disorderly conduct. The court was presided over by J. K., one of the few Wik Mungkan men resident in the settlement and an older brother of one of the men charged. The other two members of the court were J. C., a man in his late twenties, and E. C., a married woman who was an older sister of another of the men appearing on charges. Both J. C. and E. C. were Kuuk Thaayorre. The storekeeper was pressed into service as the clerk of court, and the community's manager participated both as a witness and as an advisor to the councillors making up the court.

Court Case No.1

Edward River versus D. K.

D. K. was charged by the police sergeant with behaving in a disorderly manner and fighting in the street. D. K. pleaded not guilty. One of the Aboriginal policemen came forward and stated quite positively that D. K. had not been seen fighting in the town area at all on the night in question. D. K. had been "blocking" and trying to separate people who were fighting. The case was quickly dismissed.

Clearly the police sergeant had erred in grouping those who were fighting with those who were "blocking". For a stranger such errors were easily made, because the the vigorous efforts of "blockers" in restraining their kin often looked very like fighting.

Court Case No. 2

Edward River versus M. H.

M. H. was charged with (1) being drunk in the town area and (2) with causing a disturbance. M. H. pleaded guilty to both charges. When asked if he had any comments to make M. H. said that he had been too drunk to really know what he was doing. He said he was only fighting with his wife on his own "reserve". She wanted him to come inside and settle down, he had been arguing with someone else at the time, and he began to argue with her. The manager interjected at this stage and pointed out that the charges arose out of M. H.'s subsequent fighting in the street. M. H. fell silent. The councillors conferred with the clerk of court over M. H.'s court record. He had a previous conviction that had brought a \$2.00 fine, so it was decided he should pay \$4.00 on the first charge and \$6.00 on the second. M.H. with a great grin produced a handful of notes and offered to pay on the spot.

The third case to come before the court was similar

to the first. C. W. had been charged with street fighting. He pleaded not guilty and two of the Aboriginal policemen came forward to state that C. W. (who had something of a reputation as a fighter) this time had not been fighting, but "blocking". Again it was a case of the newly arrived police sergeant being unable to distinguish between "blockers" and real disputants. In the fourth case, J. C. M. had been brought before the court at the behest of the stock overseer for indiscriminately burning off stock feed when he was cook for the stock gang. J. C. M. had already lost his job as camp cook over the incident.

Court Case No. 4

Edward River versus J. C. M.

J. C. M. was charged with burning grass without the permission of the stock overseer. J. C. M. pleaded not guilty. He argued that his intention was to burn off a patch of worthless dry grass, but the wind changed and the fire got out of control. Two witnesses were called and one of them testified that he had seen J. C. M. light the fire. J. K., the councillor presiding over the court and a man with great experience in the pastoral industry, was inclined to take a lenient view. He argued that since this was J. C. M.'s first offence, the councillors should impose only the minimum fine of \$2.00. The manager intervened to advise the councillors that the stock overseer regarded the "wanton" lighting of fires as a great threat to the community's livestock, and because this was the first offence of its kind to come before the court, then the court should consider a higher penalty in order to deter similar incidents. After some deliberation the court settled for a \$10.00 fine with 14 days to pay or, alternatively, 10 days in gaol.

Both J. C. M. and the stock overseer were dissatisfied with the outcome, although for different reasons. The stock overseer felt that the penalty was too small to

prevent future occurrences. J. C. M. felt that the penalty was manifestly unfair, coming as it did on top of the loss of his job. He nursed a bitter grievance against the stock overseer and eventually managed to obtain redress in a way he found eminently satisfying (see Subsection 10.3.3).

The final case arose out of the incidents related in Case No. 12 in the previous subsection.

Court Case No. 5

Edward River versus L. F.

L. F. was charged with (1) assaulting his wife, M. F., (2) with being drunk and disorderly and (3) with using obscene language. L. F. pleaded guilty to the last two charges, but pleaded not guilty to the first.

M. F. was sent for as a witness for the prosecution. She flatly refused to testify against her husband. Others who had been present at the time of the alleged assault, such as M. F.'s fellow clanswoman and her husband, had already refused to give evidence. The only other possible witness was the storekeeper who had seen L. F.'s second attack on his wife from his own house. The storekeeper was persuaded by the manager to step down from his position as clerk of court to give evidence. The storekeeper was a reluctant witness. He voiced concern at being asked to give evidence in a matter that he felt was none of the staff's business, and he gave a very truncated version of what he had actually seen (and which he had related to me on the night of the incident). L. F. agreed that the storekeeper's account was correct. But L. F. went on to maintain that he had done nothing really bad. He put it to the court: how could he have harmed his wife when someone was there "blocking"? He pointed out that he was justifiably angry, because his wife had run away from home leaving him supperless and his children with someone else. He had not beaten his wife with a stick, although he might have bitten her in his rage. Even when he took his wife home he might have been pushing her, but

he was not hurting her. The police sergeant agreed that this was the case.

The court was then formally declared adjourned while the subject of the penalty to be imposed was discussed. The discussion took place quite publicly at the court's table. The manager joined the councillors in their deliberations. He advised them that the charge of assault was serious and if L. F. desired it, he could elect to be tried in the court at Thursday Island. Both J. K. and E. C. (who was L. F.'s older sister) became very agitated at this possibility. J. K. said that people should be sent "outside" only for really serious things like killing someone with a spear. Everything else, he said, could be handled within the community. E. C. urged that L. F. should be fined heavily for being drunk, but that the thrashing he gave his wife was a minor thing that was only the business of L. F. and M. F.. E. C. added that if the manager did not like to see L. F.'s face around the settlement, then he should be sent out into the bush just as Chapman used to do.

At this point L. F. himself began to join noisily in the councillors deliberations. He had only used his fist to hit his wife, he emphasized, not some "longway relation". He turned on his wife, M. F., sitting meekly by the court's table, and threatened to "kill" her when he got her home for causing him all this trouble. He pointed out that he was not an "ordinary murri", but that he could read and write and he knew what was going on. He insisted that the manager be evenhanded ("make things equal") in dealing with the people. He had not used axe or a knife in his fight as those in the opposing neighbourhood did. J. K. and E. C. approved of L. F.'s argument, but the manager again referred to the seriousness of L. F.'s assault and drew the councillors' attention to M. F.'s bandaged arm.

One councillor, J. C., had taken little part in the discussions up to that point. The manager turned to him and asked his opinion. J. C. said L. F. should receive 7 days gaol without

option and cited a previous case of wife assault in which such a sentence was passed. The manager urged that a fine would be more appropriate. "A hundred dollars then," said J. C.. The manager then had to point out that the Aboriginal court could not impose fines that high. J. C. settled for the maximum fine of \$40.00. By now, however, the discussion was becoming heated and confused. E. C. maintained that her brother should only receive a heavy fine for drinking, but not for wife beating. He had only used his fists whereas any day one could walk up "Mungkan" side and see people pointing rifles and running about threatening each other with axes and tomahawks. L. F. again interposed and noted that "someone" had hit him with a stick while he was drunk, and he could have been killed. It was easy to take advantage of a drunk man he said. The manager insisted the assault was serious. E. C. blamed M. F. for causing all the trouble by running away. J. K. asserted that it was any man's right to hit his wife, especially when there were such extenuating circumstances. E. C. again reiterated that L. F. could not have done his wife any harm, because there were so many people standing by when L. F. first hit his wife in his brother's house. "We control our brothers," she said and there was no need for M. F. to have run away. Her own husband would beat her if she ran away like that. The atmosphere was becoming charged. L. F. went off while the councillors were arguing and came back with his brother, T. F. and the rest of his family. Now suitably backed up he began to maintain that he had never hit his wife at all and that the storekeeper was lying. He began once more to threaten his wife and others as well. J. K., sensing trouble, got up from the table and stood to one side of L. F. in case he should make any untoward move. There was some confused shouting and L. F. was advised to go for a walk with the police sergeant and settle down while the court went back to determining his fine.

L. F. returned shortly afterwards and announced that he wanted to make it easy for everyone, and he said he would go to gaol. He apologised for "getting stirred up". L. F. was fined \$40.00 in total for all three charges, and it was deliberately

left unclear as to how the penalty imposed was apportioned between the original charges.

Between 1968 and 1975, Aborigines and the DAIA staff had differing perceptions of the role played by the Edward River court. In the view of the Aboriginal residents, the court's most important function lay in the avenue it provided for reconciling the consequences of "old custom" dispute settling with European notions of law and order. Since the legal codes over which the court was empowered to act did not include customary law, except for a strongly worded paragraph on sorcery (see p. 569), the only way Edward River people could obtain redress for breaches of their traditional codes was to engage in "old custom" disputing. But "old custom" disputing, as people well knew, evoked negative reactions from the Europeans. Hence, the processes of the court provided a way of "making level with the staff". The court did more than simply propitiate European sensibilities concerning the incidence of abusive language, threatening behaviour and physical assault. It also helped to control the degree to which individuals sought redress through "old custom" disputing. The court's application of a scale of penalties related to the number of court appearances provided an easily understood system for calculating the "cost" of being a disputant. Several men remarked to me that the risk of incurring successively higher fines made them think very seriously about initiating an "old custom" dispute or taking part in one as a disputant. The community generally kept track of people's court appearances and their fines. People began to talk about those men who were constantly before the court, especially concerning disputes that were aggravated by alcohol. The opinion was that such people would have to be "removed" from the community for a time if the heavier fines did not inhibit their tendency to argue and fight while drunk. It never became necessary for anyone to seek the removal of such individuals. Typically, after a sequence of court appearances men took stock of their behaviour and, as the community put it, "settled down".

For the DAIA the court represented an instrumentality

through which the staff could realise Departmental policies. In the DAIA view, the Aboriginal court was both a training device intended to give Aborigines experience of the legal processes of the wider Australian community and a means of enforcing behaviours thought to be necessary and desirable in a group that, officially, was supposed to be assimilating to the way of life of the donor culture.

Most settlement managers that I encountered seemed satisfied that the Aboriginal court was fulfilling its role in imitating the orthodox courts of the world beyond the settlement. Nonetheless, the Aboriginal court differed in several important respects from the operation of Queensland's other courts. The Aboriginal court was heavily dependent in its operation on direction by Europeans who themselves had no special expertise in law. It is doubtful whether any charge concerning fighting in the settlement would have been laid at all if they had not come to the attention of Europeans. Certainly, as I observed earlier, there were a number of fights at which Aboriginal policemen were present, but from which no charges emerged because senior white staff knew nothing of them. The court frequently deviated from the usual requirement that those judging a case should be impartial and uninfluenced by any personal ties to the defendant. It was often the case that councillors and defendants were related (e.g. see Court Cases Nos. 1 and 5). Finally, as Court Case No. 5 illustrates, the form of the court's deliberations and the participation of the principals including the manager could deviate markedly from what would be considered as acceptable behaviour in regular Western court procedures.

Few problems arose in the functioning of the court when the defendants pleaded guilty to behaviour that resulted from "old custom" disputing. It was otherwise when the court was used by managers and staff to impose negative sanctions on behaviours they sought to suppress. Court Cases Nos. 4 and 5 provide two examples of the court being used in this fashion. In each situation the defendants pleaded not guilty. Councillors and defendants found themselves allied against the manager in an attempt to uphold traditional values, while the manager was intent on penalising their

expression in order to highlight, in his view, a more important set of Western values. In the first case, the imposition of the penalty had the desired community effect. It brought about a new awareness concerning the lighting of fires. In the second case, the heavy penalty did nothing to discourage the levels of injury sustained by wives in domestic arguments. It is worth examining the reasons for the success of the one and the failure of the other.

In Court Case No. 4, the stock overseer was quite right in asserting that the indiscriminate use of fire to clear the countryside was incompatible with good pasture management as well as posing a threat to fencing and to stockyards. He was wrong in asserting that Aboriginal burning techniques were wantonly employed. Large areas of the countryside were burnt off each year by Edward River stockmen at the request of the stewards of the tracts in the area. People regularly fired tracts for themselves when they went on bush holidays. They were well-versed in the art of controlled burning and in the consequences of firing. In this court case, the councillors were unwilling to intrude on the rights of stewards and penalise something that everyone engaged in for the good of their tracts. It had to be admitted, however, that J. C. M. had been careless in allowing the fire to burn out of control. The upshot was that it made the community aware of another set of variables to be taken into account when firing the countryside, namely, the community's cattle and their pastures. The lesson in fact was well learned, and as far as I am aware, there never was a need to lay a similar charge in subsequent years. People were careful to keep local burning under control and to seek the agreement of the stock overseer before firing large areas.

In the second court case, the defendant and the councillors disputed the interpretation the manager was seeking to impose on the affair (i.e., that it was a case of assault). They tried to make it clear that the issue was one of a domestic dispute in which the violence that might be displayed would be controlled by "blockers". It was not assault, but controlled disputation. The manager's interpretation struck

deep at the principles of "old custom" disputing. At best, the case could be said to have resulted in a compromise. It had little subsequent effect on the level of violence in domestic disputing. The manager's private fear that fatal consequences could result from such affairs was confirmed 10 years later. In 1980, an Edward River man battered his young wife so badly about the head during a domestic squabble after the canteen had closed, that she died during the night in her bed. The man received a gaol sentence.

The majority of situations that brought people before the Aboriginal court were those which, in the eyes of the staff, threatened the peace and good order of the settlement. Because such situations involved Aborigines only, the staff had minimal influence and control over them. In those settlement activities that required the joint participation of staff and Aborigines, the staff had a great deal of scope for inducing compliant behaviour from Aborigines. In the first place, the Edward River people accepted the staff as legitimate preceptors whose role it was to induct them into a new way of life. In the second place, the staff were powerful, not only by reason of the specific powers conferred on them by the Act, they were crucial to the running of the settlement. They had control over the disposition of the settlement's material resources and its employment opportunities. They also possessed a monopoly over the knowledge and skills necessary to run and maintain the settlement's essential services and communications. Thus, when individual Aborigines failed to meet staff expectations, their "deviant" or "regressive" behaviour could usually be brought into line through informal explanation and advice, together with a judicial threat or two. Of course there were times when informal pressure failed to produce the desired result. It was then that the staff fell back on the comprehensive By-Laws and Regulations to bring people before the Aboriginal court and in a public fashion attempt to remedy the situation. The following case illustrates one such instance:

Case No. 18

A dispute with the nursing sister

B. W. was an old widower who had contracted tuberculosis. He was sent to Cairns Base Hospital for treatment. When tests showed that he was no longer infective he was returned to the settlement to complete his treatment. This required the old man to take 12 tablets twice a day. He would only consent to accepting the treatment regimen provided the community's only nursing sister personally took the tablets to him in his house at the bottom of "Thaayorre side" each day. To humour B. W., the nursing sister at first complied with his demand. But then other patients on treatment programmes began to complain of B. W.'s favoured treatment, and they requested that the nursing sister visit them at their homes also instead of requiring them to present themselves at the dispensary.

Obviously B. W.'s home treatment was setting an undesirable precedent in view of the shortage of nursing staff. Reluctantly, the nursing sister decided that B. W. would have to come to the dispensary for treatment like everyone else. Then began a battle of wills that was watched with great interest by much of the community. The old man complained mightily. He brushed aside the nursing sister's entreaties and explanations. His attendance at the dispensary was irregular at best and when he came he had to be watched vigilantly to ensure that he swallowed all 12 pills (he often tried to get rid of them by sleight-of-hand). It meant nothing to the old man to have it pointed out to him that he might become an active tuberculosis case once more and thereby become a threat to the community's health. He said he felt fine and there was no need for the pills at all. The nursing sister exhausted her powers of persuasion and her patience. She decided the old man should be brought before the court for his derelictions. He pleaded guilty and was given a stern talking to by the council chairman. B. W. still did not attend regularly for treatment. Finally, he had to be

sent to the hospital at Thursday Island where his treatment regimen was completed after which he was allowed to return home.

10.3.3 Aboriginal perceptions of staff wrongdoing

Aborigines came into dispute with staff when they disagreed with some staff action, edict or interpretation. Sometimes these disputes surfaced in the Aboriginal court when defendants entered not guilty pleas (e.g. see Court Cases Nos. 4 and 5). Mostly such disagreements never got as far as the court. Many were transitory affairs arising out of misperceptions of individual intentions and motivations which were easily induced in the cross-cultural interface between the staff and the Edward River people. The following case is one of the more serious examples:

Case No. 19

Another dispute over medical treatment

Two year old N. L. was brought to hospital suffering from diarrhoea and acute dehydration. Her condition called for prompt action from the nursing sister to restore the child's lost body fluids. She inserted a nasal drip to take fluid through the nose and throat into her stomach and subcutaneous drips into her thighs and abdomen to take fluid directly into the child's tissues. The nursing sister tied N. L.'s arms to the cot sides to restrict her movements and to prevent her from accidentally dislodging the tubes.

G. L., N. L.'s father, came to the hospital to see how she was faring. When he saw her tied to the cot with tapes, and tubes running into her body, he attempted to release her. The nursing sister remonstrated and G. L. flew into a rage. He said he objected strongly to seeing his daughter "tied up like a dog". A heated exchange occurred between G. L. and the nursing sister. G. L. spoke wildly about "what the old people were saying" while the nursing sister pointed out that

what she was doing was necessary to save the child's life and that if he removed N. L. from the hospital she would surely die. The sister terminated the distressing scene by leaving the ward.

Several minutes later G. L. sought out the nursing sister and contritely apologised. As it turned out, much of G. L.'s anger had its origin in the rumour that N. L.'s illness was caused by sorcery that "misfired". The real victim was intended to be G. L. himself. Worried by the rumours and the fact that he himself had indirectly caused his daughter's sickness, G. L. vented his tension on the nursing sister.

For a variety of reasons the hospital was often the setting for such confrontations. In the next chapter, I shall explore in some depth, the role of the nursing sister to illustrate the dynamics and consequences of cross-cultural misperceptions. Here, it is sufficient to point out that nursing sisters were more likely than any other category of staff to suffer the disquieting experience of being threatened with violence or even being assaulted by an Edward River resident. When an Aborigine abused or physically attacked a member of staff, and the cause was located in some individual misunderstanding, then the community at large was greatly disturbed. From past experience they knew that staff not infrequently reacted to threats and assaults by resigning or requesting transfer. The community usually exerted strong social pressure on people in dispute with staff to settle their differences by apologising.

There were, however, situations in which the community became united in its view of staff wrongdoing and sought redress. Such situations occurred when staff members continually breached "the good helper for the people" code.

As I pointed out in Chapter 8 (p. 413), the ideals embodied in the notion of the "good helper for the people" were really no more than a reasonable set of expectations based on the norms of past staff behaviour. Most staff, albeit unwittingly, honoured the code to a greater or lesser

degree. When staff members persistently breached the code, there was no way Aboriginal people could enforce compliance with it. The best they could do was to seek the resignation or transfer of a staff member who constantly gave offence. During 1968-75, Edward River People managed to secure the removal of three staff members, including a manager. Two of the staff members were "removed" in a single concerted community action, the third by an individual pursuing a stated course of revenge. In both instances the removals were secured by laying complaints before influential others. Both of these cases are interesting as well in that they demonstrate the Edward River people's awareness of the practical hierarchies operating within the DAIA.

Case No. 20

The removal of two staff members

G. H. was sent to Edward River as a temporary replacement to fill the void between the resignation of the preceding manager who had steered Edward River through the period of the DAIA take-over and the appointment of the next permanent manager. He was told by senior DAIA officers that the previous manager had allowed things to run down administratively and that he should "smarteen the place up a bit". Believing that he would only be at Edward River for several months before he was relieved, G. H. left his wife and family in Cairns and embarked on a series of rapid reforms of staff and community procedures. To the Edward River people his personal style seemed brash and aggressive, and the people soon began to refer to him as a "hard" man. The councillors were among the first to feel the pressure of his forceful personality, as he attempted to mould them into a body more capable of exercising its powers and duties under the Act, By-Laws and Regulations. He tried to persuade the councillors to lay charges against people who repeatedly stood in breach of the By-Laws, and additionally, he wanted them to act in a number of matters on behalf of the community's residents where, in traditional terms, the councillors had no authority whatever. Further, G. H. gave up holding public meetings that

had been a regular feature of the previous incumbent's term and left it to the councillors to transmit to the people the decisions taken at council meetings.

The people too began to experience the new manager's "hardness". In an attempt to reduce the number of vehicle breakdowns, G. H. placed very strict limits on the use of community vehicles during weekends, thus denying many people the opportunity to engage in weekend hunting and camping trips. People thought this unfair. They argued that the real reason for the frequent breakdowns lay not in the weekend trips, but in the mechanic's inability to effect long-lasting repairs.

To make matters worse, it began to appear that the manager was not only "hard", but that he was "not straight". He was very ambivalent in his attitude towards smuggled liquor. On the one hand, he had said that he did not mind if people returning from Cairns brought some liquor back with them and drank it quietly. On the other hand, he instituted a number of searches of suitcases of people returning from Cairns. The liquor that was discovered in these searches was confiscated so that it could be returned to the point of sale for refund. How could people drink quietly, Edward River people asked, when their liquor was confiscated? The searching of the suitcases aroused tremendous resentment, especially because of the invasion of privacy it represented. Additionally, it was observed that the manager was providing certain policemen and councillors with liquor in his house. This was interpreted as favouritism and as an attempt to influence community affairs through bribery. It was rumoured too that on at least one occasion he had supplied married women with liquor. Concerning the occasion referred to in the rumour, G. H. assured me that he had served tea and I have no reason to doubt him. Nonetheless, he was very indiscreet in his dealings with the women of the community. He conducted what he thought was a light-hearted mock romance with one of the community's widows. Unfortunately, the lady herself took the manager's attentions seriously and was greatly upset when he appeared to switch his affections to a Torres Strait Island

nursing aide. The rest of the male community was perfectly convinced that G. H. was conducting a whole range of secret liaisons with the women of the place. It was even rumoured that his girlfriends were the secret recipients of the confiscated liquor, which was an outright calumny.

Unfortunately for G. H., his tenure at Edward River coincided with a period of understaffing and a lack of visible physical development. This apparent standstill and lack of progress was also laid at his door.

Things came to a head with an unsavoury episode involving the manager, the community's mechanic, a clerk and a number of the community's women. Those who took part in the episode asserted that it was a harmless social card game in which some beer was drunk. Community rumour asserted that a veritable orgy had taken place. The people at Edward River determined on appropriate action. Each neighbourhood appointed a mediator to write a letter to their elected representative in the State's Legislative Assembly. In it they made accusations of grave misconduct. The letters set in train a Departmental Inquiry. While no firm conclusion was reached regarding many of the community's assertions, nonetheless, both the manager and the mechanic subsequently resigned from DAIA service. Edward River people were well pleased with the result. Community action had rid them of a "hard" manager and an "incompetent" mechanic in one stroke.

Case No. 21

A case of private revenge

At the conclusion of his court case (see Court Case No. 4) J. C. M. was left nursing a strong grievance against the stock overseer. He told me how unfair the whole episode had been and he vowed he would get even with the stock overseer in some way and get him removed. His chance came when the DAIA stock inspector made a routine visit to the settlement. The stock inspector, rightly or wrongly, was dissatisfied with the

general standard of the stock overseer's work and was publicly critical of an episode in which, through some miscommunication or other, several cattle had died in the yards through lack of water and feed. While the stock inspector conducted an investigation into the incident, J. C. M. seized the opportunity to insinuate to the stock inspector that the stock overseer was "playing about" with the single girls of the settlement. My personal feeling was that there was no truth in the accusation, but as I learned later it helped to confirm in the mind of the stock inspector the unsuitability of the stock overseer. An adverse report from the stock inspector led to the overseer's resignation. When the resignation became public, a jubilant J. C. M. called on me to remind me that he had carried out his promise to exact revenge.

10.4 Summary and discussion

This chapter began with a discussion of the Edward River Aboriginal court, and its powers and its mode of operation as it was officially constituted. In looking at the kinds and numbers of cases heard before it, I drew attention to the fact that the majority of cases involved verbal or physical assault. I suggested that this pattern of conflict was not accidental, but in fact was intimately bound up with the interface between Aboriginal customary law and the legal codes of the state of Queensland.

Customary law or "old custom" had operated at Edward River since its inception. The missionaries were broadly aware that there were "tribal" matters that resulted in disputes, but they made little attempt to come to terms with the nature of Aboriginal codes or to provide alternative avenues for their resolution, except in an ad hoc kind of way. They were more concerned with the practical problem of managing the end products of "quarrels" between Aborigines and with stamping out sorcery accusations which seemed to provoke the most disturbing breaches of community harmony. When Aboriginal disputation resulted in serious injuries and deaths, matters typically were referred to the ordinary courts of Queensland. However, all cases so referred appear

to have been interpreted by the State legal system as "tribal" matters lying outside the courts' jurisdictions and they were consequently referred to the Director of the DNA. The DNA solution was to remove such Aboriginal offenders from their home community for a time. Thus, in a kind of roundabout way, some allowance was made within the State's legal framework for the recognition of the imperatives of Aboriginal customary law, although they imposed an external cost on those who sought redress under such customary law.

The 1965 Act which established the Aboriginal courts as legal entities introduced the Edward River people to an alternative style of dispute resolution based on codes, sanctions and procedures employed in the wider Queensland society. The Aboriginal court gave Aboriginal councillors and policemen significant roles to play in its operation. However, except for sorcery, the codes over which the Edward River court was empowered to act did not speak directly to "old custom" breaches. It should be noted here that the Aboriginal council was empowered to enact By-Laws that reflected customary law and thus bring them within the purview of the Aboriginal court (e.g. see The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Regulations of 1966, Reg. 2 D). This option was never pursued at Edward River during 1968-75, nor has it been since that time. Towards the end of this discussion, I canvass some of the possible reasons why this did not happen. In one significant and crucial respect the operation of the Aboriginal court was dependent on the input of DAIA staff. Their interpretation of what constituted breaches of the codes were vital to the system's functioning. All complaints and charges that came before the Aboriginal court at Edward River were instituted on the advice and prompting of senior DAIA staff. Their main concern was to maintain good order and discipline within the community, and hence they wished to penalise breaches of the peace in all their various forms. As it turned out, most of the breaches of the peace that were prosecuted had to do with "old custom" disputing.

So far, I have summarised the missionary and DAIA attitudes to Aboriginal disputation at Edward River. In turn those responses materially shaped the nature of "old"

custom" disputing. Edward River people learnt that injuries and deaths caused during disputes drew sharp reactions from Europeans and sometimes led to the removal from the community of those involved. Sorcery accusations alone could bring about removal, therefore, Edward River people ceased attempting publicly to secure redress for deaths imputed to sorcery. In deference to European sensibilities regarding violence they attempted to tone down the level of the violence manifested in disputes and created territorial canons (such as house "reserves") to suit the settlement's physical structure and to lessen the likelihood of the non-involved being injured. As well, they accepted the fact that they would have to pay a penalty whenever "old custom" disputation took a violent turn.

"Old custom" disputing was based on the postulate that every adult Aboriginal person had the right to take up arms and use them in the pursuit of a plaint or in response to a public accusation of wrongdoing. The introduction of the Aboriginal court provided a formal way for reconciling the staff's perceptions of order and discipline with the consequences of that postulate. It allowed staff to penalise what they saw as unruly and objectionable behaviour. In reality then, much of the work of the Aboriginal court had to do with settling disputes about Aboriginal disputing.

Disputes between Aborigines and staff ranged from disagreements between individuals to situations where either the Aboriginal community or the staff sought redress for some perceived dereliction or wrong action. Individual disagreements occurred most often in the work place and wherever services were provided by staff members (as in the hospital, the "office" or the retail store). Mostly they arose because Aborigines were required by the staff to change or modify their behaviour or to conform to some new routine. In the course of such arguments, Aborigines sometimes threatened violence and occasionally assaulted a staff member. In the main, however, such disagreements were resolved informally and usually in favour of the staff, who, in Aboriginal eyes, were the legitimate arbiters on ways of organising the community and introducing changes.

Rarely was it necessary for a staff member to invoke the very inclusive provisions of the Regulations and By-Laws in order to penalise delinquent actions.

Sometimes staff behaviour was seen to be at fault by the Edward River people. There were occasions when a staff-imposed resolution to a dispute gave rise to resentment and a sense of grievance in individuals. There were times as well, when the whole community became disturbed and oppressed by a particular staff member's persistent breaching of the "good helper for the people" code. In such situations the Aboriginal community sought to procure the removal of the offending staff member by influencing those in the upper hierarchies of the DAIA or in important positions in government.

During 1968-75, this multi-layered system for the resolution of disputes seemed relatively stable. This is not to say that the state of affairs was seen as desirable by either Aborigines or staff. In a variety of ways the Edward River people expressed their concern about "old custom" disputing. People not connected with particular disputes deplored the violence and the injuries and complained of the inability of the Aboriginal police to act. Aboriginal policemen, for their part, bemoaned the fact that they could not separate disputants without themselves being attacked either verbally or physically. Everyone was apprehensive about the way alcohol seemed to aggravate the propensity for people to engage in violent confrontations. "Old custom" disputing, although it was not recognised by the staff as a formal or legitimate arena for dispute resolution, gave rise to much dissatisfaction from their viewpoint as well, and sometimes to fear. A large "old custom" fight could seriously disrupt community schedules for several days before the members of work teams were sufficiently reconciled to work together. Injuries often took key men out of the work force. A number of staff resignations or self-requested transfers came about because the staff members were threatened with, or were even subjected to, physical assault.

It is curious that "old custom" disputing gave rise to high levels of dissatisfaction among both Aborigines and

staff, yet at the same time, it seemed to show so little predisposition to change -- at least between the years 1968 and 1975. It is still more curious that this should have been so when it is realised that Aboriginal customary law was explicitly recognised in certain sections of the By-Laws and Regulations, and that two of those sections offered the prospect of dealing with disputes arising out of customary law before the Aboriginal court. For example, the Edward River By-Laws make the following provision with respect to sorcery:

A community resident shall not practice (sic) or pretend to practice any form of sorcery which for the purposes of these By-Laws includes bone-pointing, pourri-pourri or any other custom or practice which interferes with the harmony or well-being of residents, nor shall a person threaten any other person with sorcery or act as an agent for a person who commits or pretends to commit sorcery.

A person found guilty of offending against this By-Law may be refused permission to remain in and may be removed from the Reserve/Community for such period as may further be determined.

(By-Laws of the Edward River Aboriginal Community, Chapter 24 [1]).

The Edward River court records show that no charges were ever made under this By-Law. I am certain that few, if any, Aborigines were even aware of such a By-Law. It seems likely that had people known of it they would still not have laid charges, even though as I noted earlier, sorcery practice was said to be rife and rumours about people's complicity in it were widely disseminated throughout the community. Ironically, the sum of the Edward River experience was that those who were removed for sorcery practice were those who complained about it. There were of course other problems standing in the way of successfully laying a charge of sorcery. One of them was to persuade the staff to take a sorcery allegation seriously. To Western minds in general, the modus operandi of magical killing lay outside

the realms of the possible. This implied that the alleged sorcery could not have occurred in the first place. To further confuse matters, evidence of sorcery could only be obtained by divination which in the Western empirical tradition was a suspect form of knowledge. Rather than risk staff ridicule or be thought to be trouble makers, Edward River people never aired their sorcery accusations in public.

It was also theoretically possible for the Edward River Council to attempt to change or augment the By-Laws to make them more compatible with customary law. In doing this it was possible to bring customary law within the ambit of the Aboriginal court. Thus, Regulation 21 of the Aborigines' and Torres Straits Islanders' Regulations of 1966 provided that:

A council shall have and may exercise the functions of local government of the Reserve or community and shall be charged with the good rule and government of the Reserve or community, in accordance with Aboriginal customs and practices and shall have power to make By-Laws for such good rule and government and to cause all such By-Laws to be observed and carried out.
(Underlining added)

The Edward River Council never made any By-Laws on its own account. Instead it used the set of model By-Laws provided by the DAIA. To make alterations would certainly have required the assistance of the manager together with his espousal and support for any proposed changes. All By-Laws, resolutions and orders promulgated by Aboriginal councils had to be approved by the Director of the DAIA. He in turn relied on the opinions of his managers in making determinations on local affairs. To make alterations regarding customary law would have been especially difficult. Few managers were even aware of the extent to which "old custom" permeated settlement life and the extent to which it lay behind Aboriginal fights and arguments. Some managers asserted that Aboriginal customary law did not exist at all. I well remember the council meeting where the newly arrived manager thought he would acquaint the councillors with their

duties under the Regulations. After reading Regulation 21, the manager commented: "Of course all that custom business is gone and finished. It is only Queensland law from outside that matters now."

There were then, substantial problems standing in the way of incorporating traditional law within the community By-Laws. Perhaps the greatest problem was finding someone who was sufficiently attuned to customary law to be able to articulate it satisfactorily for both Aborigines and staff. Managers, by virtue of their heavy burden of duties as well as their background and training, did not seem well suited for a task that required patient study, much cross-cultural sensitivity and the competence to translate one legal code into another. Perhaps too, Edward River people wanted to keep the policing of customary law in their own hands. Bringing it into the By-Laws, as things then stood, was to invite staff control in one area of their lives where the staff were relatively powerless to intrude.

The final reference to traditional codes was contained in Regulation 16 of the 1966 Regulations. This Regulation set out the categories of persons authorised to be on an Aboriginal reserve, and sections (2) and (3) stated

(2) Every person so authorised to enter and remain on a Reserve or community shall conduct himself properly and to the satisfaction of the District Officer or Manager or other officer in charge for the time being of such Reserve or community. He shall not interfere with the normal duties or activities of any assisted person nor attempt in any way to cause any interference with Aboriginal or Island customs.

(3) Any person committing a breach of this Regulation shall be guilty of an offence and may be summarily ejected from the Reserve or community by or by order of the District Office or Manager.

(Underlining added)

To the best of my knowledge there never was an instance at Edward River between 1968 and 1975 where the above

Regulation was invoked. Though seemingly broad with regard to Aboriginal and Islander customs, I suspect the true purpose of the Regulation was to prevent visitors from disrupting the settlement's scheduled routines. Certainly the Regulation could not have been meant to apply to the staff of the DAIA, otherwise their roles as change agents consciously promoting socio-cultural change could have rendered them all culpable under this Regulation of "interfering" with native custom.

In summary then, the legal framework that enveloped the Edward River community seemed to provide the possibility of establishing alternative arenas for the operation of facets of customary law. The reality was that there were substantial practical difficulties standing in the way of realising those possibilities. Instead, Edward River "muddled through" with its unsatisfactory multi-layered system for dispute resolution. It seemed likely to continue to do so for some time in the future.

There was, I felt, a sad consequence to this. When DAIA staff failed to recognise "old custom" disputing for what it was and instead interpreted it as "lawless" or even "primitive" behaviour, then every instance of an "old custom" dispute coming before the Aboriginal court as a breach of the peace provided verification for a strongly held though unofficial view, namely, that the Edward River people were not yet ready for independence and responsible self-management. While this misperception existed and while no alternative forum was provided for the resolution of "old custom" disputes, it would have seemed that Edward River people would never be trusted with the management of their own affairs which was one of the ultimate goals of government policy.

CHAPTER 11 THE STAFF ENCLAVE

11.1 The staff enclave and living conditions

By far the largest recruiter of the outsiders who made up the non-Aboriginal or staff section of the Edward River community was the DAIA. For example, in 1972 approximately two thirds of the staff positions were filled by the personnel of that department. The DAIA staff included at that time, a manager, two administrative clerks, a stock overseer, a mechanic, a carpenter, a general overseer, a retail store manager and two nursing sisters. Job categories such as stock overseer, mechanic, carpenter or nursing sister were specialist positions requiring professional or trade qualifications. When the positions fell vacant, they were advertised and replacements were appointed to specific Aboriginal communities. They were not subject to departmental transfer, but they could, however, apply for similar positions on other Aboriginal communities, if they so desired.

The positions of clerk, storekeeper and manager were filled by transfer of staff from the permanent public service resources of the DAIA. These positions provided the career opportunities within that organisation. Clerks usually entered at the bottom of a system of administrative appointments that were classified in terms of their responsibility and managerial expertise. They could then be promoted through the various levels of the hierarchy. They could also transfer to other Queensland public service departments as administrative officers. Retail storekeepers were usually recruited directly into their positions from the world of commerce. Theoretically, promotion to the status of assistant manager and manager was possible for clerks and storekeepers. None of the seven managers who were appointed to Edward River during my time in the field had worked their way up through the lower ranks. Five of them had experience in community development or labour relations in underdeveloped areas of the world. One had managed a tea plantation in Sri Lanka, another had spent many years in the British colonial service in Borneo and a third had been a police officer in

Kenya where he had been responsible for the maintenance of law and order in native labour compounds. The remaining two had had experience in Papua New Guinea. One of these had been a patrol officer, whilst the other was the son of a New Guinea missionary and had a degree in education. The DAIA policy was not to leave any career officer on an Aboriginal settlement for longer than three years before effecting a transfer. During 1968-75, only one manager ever completed his full term of service there. All the rest resigned. Among DAIA officers Edward River had the reputation of making or breaking managers. Mostly, it was said to break them. However, resignations amongst other levels of staff at Edward River, especially tradesmen, nursing sisters and stock overseers, were no less infrequent according to my records.

The other major employer of staff at Edward River was the Queensland Department of Education which took over the responsibility for the schooling of the reserve's children from the DAIA after 1970. During the years between 1971 and 1975, there was a small contingent of primary school teachers in the settlement. Because a general shortage of accommodation necessitated the sharing of the available houses, the teachers were all single males. Many of them were only recently graduated from their training colleges. It was rumoured that at least one of them had been transferred to Edward River "under punishment". Few of the teachers had elected to go there voluntarily. Most stayed one year only, and none had been trained specifically to teach in an Aboriginal community.

There were two other bodies that recruited staff to serve at Edward River. One was the Diocese of Carpentaria which appointed Edward River's chaplains. By contrast with other staff members, chaplains tended to be long-term appointees. For most of the time during 1968-75, the position of chaplain at Edward River was held by the same person. The second employer was the Commonwealth-funded instrumentality, Applied Ecology Limited, that had the responsibility for the management of the crocodile farm. By 1975, they supported two full-time staff members at Edward River to develop the project and train Aboriginal workers in the routines necessary

to maintain and run the enterprise on their own. The staff members of the Applied Ecology unit were appointed on a contract basis.

As I have noted elsewhere (see p. 352.), the staff of Edward River seldom reached its full complement because of gaps created by transfers and resignations. August 1972, for instance, presented a typical staff profile. There were 15 staff positions filled. DAIA employees occupied 10, teachers 3, while the chaplain and Applied Ecology personnel accounted for the other 2. Only 5 of the 15 staff members were married. The total European population including staff families numbered 25. Throughout the period 1968-75, the staff population was heavily biased towards single males.

Most staff members were drawn from the urban centres of Queensland's eastern seaboard. For them, Edward River was not an easy place in which to live and work. There were two major sources of strain that staff members recognised and talked about. One had to do with the management of interpersonal relations among staff members themselves and I shall present a broad description of some of the relevant aspects of staff relationships in the following section. The other had to do with the isolation of the settlement and its lack of amenities.

Perhaps more than anything else, it was the flight from Cairns that impressed upon newcomers just how remote Edward River was from the rest of urban Australia. The 500 km journey from Cairns by small plane took two and a half to three hours to make. The drab olive-grey country beneath the plane rolled by in a monotonous patchwork of grassland, forest, swamp and eroded watercourses. There were few major rivers. There were even fewer roads to be seen and only very rarely would the galvanised roofing of a station homestead gleam up and serve notice that somewhere down there in those vast spaces, other humans lived. Even when the Gulf of Carpentaria came into view, and the plane began its descent towards the Edward River airstrip, it took some time before a little cluster of buildings disengaged itself from the surrounding landscape to be identified as a human settlement. Perched on the edge of a deserted coastline,

Edward River was visibly a very lonely place. Newcomers experienced an overwhelming sense of isolation.

The remoteness was intensified by Edward River's lack of facilities for communicating with the wider Australian community. Mails and newspapers were delivered once a week by plane. There were no telephones. Telegrams arrived via the DAIA radio network, which was then controlled from Thursday Island. There was at that time no television, and during the day ordinary radio reception was generally poor. The bulk of the settlement's supplies were trucked in during the dry season. During the wet season, when floodwaters and high tides inundated the saltpans surrounding the settlement, access to Edward River by road was closed for periods of five months or more. The Flying Doctor came once a month to conduct a clinic. Otherwise, when a doctor's advice was required, the settlement's nursing sisters had to contact Thursday Island hospital 500 kms to the north by radio. Urgent medical cases had to be evacuated by aerial ambulance to Cairns, which at the very least meant a delay of between seven and eight hours before a patient could be examined by a doctor. There was, of course, no secondary school, so that staff with children of high school age, like other parents in remote Australia, had to suffer long periods of separation from their children.

In 1968, living conditions for the staff were spartan indeed. There was no electricity apart from a few improvised generator systems serving several houses. While gas stoves and kerosene refrigerators amply took care of cooking and food storage needs, the lack of electricity meant that many other kinds of domestic appliances (e.g. washing machines, fans, irons, radios, vacuum cleaners) usually taken for granted in ordinary households could not be used. Clothes washing, for example, had to be done in old-fashioned coppers. It was not until late 1974 that a reliable, community-wide, 240 volt generating system was established.

Similarly, the water supply was intermittent and inadequate. For most of the period between 1968 and 1975, household water supplies were pumped from an open well in the centre of the settlement. The well tapped the ground-

waters stored in the shell ridges upon which the community was sited, and because of its association with the shell beds, contained a great deal of dissolved calcium. It was almost impossible to obtain a lather with it when washing clothes. An adequate water supply based on artesian bores was not functional until 1974. There was no sewerage system in the community and most staff houses had earth closets rather than septic systems.

The Edward River retail store was only capable of meeting the staff's basic subsistence needs. It carried little else besides foodstuffs, namely, a limited range of domestic hardware and some clothing and softgoods. The supply of tinned and dried foods was generally adequate. However, the lack of refrigeration and freezer space, together with the distances over which food stores had to be transported, meant that the range and variety of the fresh and frozen foods, which were commonplace in urban Australian stores, were severely restricted at Edward River. The locally killed beef was obtainable through the butcher's shop on alternate days only. At best the lean and stringy cuts produced by the community's Aboriginal butchers only vaguely corresponded to the standard cuts of an ordinary butcher's shop elsewhere. If staff wanted to eat fresh bread, they had to make it themselves.

In short, new staff members always had to undergo a period of adjustment while they adapted to the limitations of Edward River's amenities. Most had to learn new skills, such as bread-baking or how to iron clothes without an electric iron. Routine tasks such as clothes washing and house cleaning always took longer than they would have in urban Australia because of the lack of domestic aids. The monotonous beef diet could be supplemented by fishing and hunting wild game, but few staff had the expertise necessary to do this successfully from the outset without the help of Aboriginal "mates". Maintaining the ordinary standards of Australian domestic life was always something of a challenge to staff members, both single and married. All met that challenge more or less well. But when other stresses were added to the demands of day to day living, it was then that staff

members began to calculate that the effort required to maintain an acceptable standard of living at Edward River was scarcely worth the cost. Consequently, they began to consider seriously the possibility of resignation.

11.2 Staff-staff relationships

All Edward River staff felt themselves to be, and in fact were, members of a minority enclave. The layout of the community's dwellings (see Map 7.1, p. 348) in which the staff houses were grouped together in a central neighbourhood of their own was a physical expression of the separateness of the staff world from the rest of the Edward River community. The sense of "we" (the staff) versus "them" (the people of Edward River) was quite strong and always evident in conversations held out of earshot of Aboriginal people. For most staff members, the Aboriginal world was puzzling, and because of the frequent fights and disputes, unpredictable and somewhat menacing. Apart from the informal friendships set up between individual staff members and Aboriginal people (see pp. 428-38), the majority of their interactions occurred within their own circle.

In social terms, the staff world was small. As a minority enclave, one might have expected the staff as a whole to be highly supportive of each other. As a matter of fact, the staff enclave was often riven by personal animosities so intense that people cited them as among their principal reasons for resigning. Visiting outsiders, such as researchers for example, who had no departmental affiliations, were often deluged with a barrage of personal frustrations, innuendoes and suspicions from staff members as they divested themselves of their pent-up grievances concerning other staff members. People complained about "obstruction" in the job, the inexperience and ineptitude of managers, managerial favouritism in the allocation of resources, and the scandalous sexual or drinking behaviour of others.

Sometimes the interpersonal hostilities were generated by disagreements in the workplace from whence they spread to off-duty relationships. For example, a fertile

field for disagreement came about as a result of the discrepant goals of the stock overseer and the manager. Most of Edward River's stock overseers saw their job as comparable with that of the manager of a normal cattle property. The planning of Edward River's pastoral activities, and the assessment of them, did not lie with the manager, but rather with a senior Departmental officer with broad experience in the cattle industry. Stock overseers tended to feel that as Edward River's only income earner pastoral activities should be given the highest priority when it came to the allocation of human and physical resources. However, these latter were controlled by the manager, and he was normally more concerned to develop the amenities of the settlement itself and had, therefore, a different set of priorities from the stock overseer. When disputes arose over the allocation of resources, they tended to become heated, with the issue usually resolved in favour of the manager. Disputing staff members generally addressed each other with icy politeness and indulged in subtle tactics to obstruct each other during work hours. They interacted not at all during non-work hours. The feelings of animosity generated by inter-staff disputes in the work place were rarely contained there. In fact, any dispute between staff members, whether it arose in the context of work or not, tended to amplify to the point where the settlement's European population was divided into factions. There were, in any case, natural "departmental" nuclei within the settlement around which such factions formed. Each nucleus was united in terms of its allegiance to its respective employer and its employer's goals. Career officers in the DAIA formed one such nucleus, the teachers the second and the Applied Ecology personnel, the third.

Several managers said to me that the most difficult problems Edward River presented them with had to do with prevention of factionalism and the maintenance of staff morale. Staff mythology held that climate was responsible in part for the generation of staff tensions. They were said to be worst during the months immediately preceding the wet season and towards the end of the wet season. The

judicious application of isolation leave and the holding of staff parties often did much to defuse discord and division within the settlement's staff.

The manager's role was a difficult one. In part, this was because he was responsible for making invidious decisions about the allocation of the resources under his control. These always had the potential to fuel an inter-staff dispute. It was also difficult, because he was legislatively responsible for ensuring that the public and private behaviour of his staff and their families was "satisfactory" and did not in any way interfere with the normal activities or customary behaviour of the community's residents (for example, see The Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Regulations of 1966, paragraph 16:2,3 which were in force until December 1972). Any staff member whose behaviour, in the manager's opinion, was unsatisfactory could be summarily ejected from the reserve. I only ever saw these powers of ejection used once. The member of staff, a nursing sister, had a drug problem. She was using the dispensary's drugs to supply her own addiction. Her behaviour was quite erratic and unacceptable, given the responsible position she held. Despite the fact that summary ejection seemed to be invoked only in the most serious situations, all staff were nevertheless aware that the manager had such powers. Not a few of them felt oppressed by the existence of a regulation that gave sole authority to a manager to judge whether their conduct was proper and satisfactory. Managers, therefore, tended to remain aloof, especially from the young single members of staff, because they did not want to be thought of as constantly scrutinising the private behaviour of others.

From time to time, the behaviour of staff members was seen to be setting something less than a "good example". For instance, managerial reproof was sometimes expressed when staff conspicuously indulged in alcohol in their own houses. Indeed, before the establishment of the community canteen, the drinking of alcohol in staff houses was almost a secret affair. This was not because it was illegal. Staff houses, for the purposes of the legislation, were

excised from the reserve. It was because most staff members were only too aware of how much the Edward River people resented the legal provisions that denied reserve residents the right to drink alcohol in their own homes while allowing staff to consume it in theirs. In their turn, staff resented the provisions that converted a widespread social usage in the mainstream society into a clandestine activity on the reserve, especially when it came to offering a friendly drink to an Aboriginal mate (see p. 431).

As I noted elsewhere (p. 435), sexual liaisons between staff members and Edward River people nearly always met with staff disapproval. It was not then an offence for a European to cohabit with an Aborigine, although such provisions had been part of the Queensland State Legislation in the past (see Chapter 6, p. 307). Staff were not concerned about miscegenation as such. Rather, they saw liaisons that had no aim other than sexual gratification as setting a poor example and creating false (and it was sometimes felt, dangerous) notions about European sexuality. Single male staff especially were likely to receive offers of sexual favours from unattached Edward River women as part of the pre-marital adventuring that went on "secret way" among Edward River's own young singles. When it came to light that a staff member was taking advantage of such offers, he would usually be quietly warned of the dangers he might encounter from jealous Edward River males. Those who persisted in such furtive sexual encounters were generally avoided by other staff members, left out of staff social activities and privately stigmatised as "gin jockeys", a derogatory term for anyone who sexually exploited Aboriginal women.

Attitudes were somewhat softer towards staff who, with apparent community approval, openly courted or consorted with an Edward River resident. Such staff were neither stigmatised nor socially isolated, but their Aboriginal partners never participated in the round of mutual visiting, dinners, parties, and joint outings that constituted the core of staff social life. By a kind of common consent, invitations to such activities were rarely offered because it was felt that the Aboriginal partner would feel out of place and

ill at ease in staff social settings. There may have been more than a grain of truth in this. I suspect that participation in the social rituals of the staff was as mystifying and uncomfortable to an Aboriginal person, as it was for staff to take part, even marginally, in the etiquette, duties and obligations of Edward River's kin-based set. But perhaps it is even more to the point to note that the chief topics of many staff conversations were the Edward River people themselves. Clearly, an Aboriginal presence at a staff function would have been dampening.

For the staff then, Edward River was not an easy place in which to live and conduct social relationships. The kinds of physical and interpersonal difficulties I have described above were often cited by staff members as contributing to the Edward River resignation rate.

There was yet a third kind of stress that particularly affected the non-administrative staff who held professional or quasi-professional qualifications (e.g. nursing sisters, teachers and to a lesser extent, stock overseers). Such people brought with them as part of their training a set of expectations and standards concerning their own behaviour and the behaviour of the people with whom they had to interact professionally. Their expectations of the behaviour appropriate to the particular role-sets of nurse - patient, teacher - pupil - pupil's parents, and stock overseer - stockmen were forged through training and practice in the wider Australian society. The expectations of the Edward River people concerning these roles differed markedly from the dominant society's. This mismatch between expectations gave rise to a particularly stressful kind of role conflict situation. I shall illustrate this in the case of the nursing sister.

11.3 A special case of role conflict -- the nursing sister

Nursing sisters at Edward River had to have an all-round nursing competence. Their duties were manifold. Among other things they had to supervise patients' treatments, conduct daily outpatients' clinics, weekly ante-natal and

baby clinics, maintain patient's records, immunisation schedules and the dispensary's drug supplies and carry out parasite eradication programmes, as well as organise clinics for the the Flying Doctor, the Flying Dentist and occasional visiting health teams. Further, the duties included the supervision of the child feeding centre that provided a midday meal for all children under primary school age. The nurses were also expected to train local nursing aides and hospital domestic staff, and if they could find time for it, they were to run health education schemes within the community.

The position entailed far more responsibility than was normally the case in an urban medical centre. Since the settlement had no resident qualified practitioner, medical advice about acute illness was obtained by radio from doctors at Thursday Island base hospital. This in turn meant nursing sisters had to exercise a great deal of care in their search for diagnostic signs to determine whether the case justified a medical call or whether it could wait until the routine visit of the Flying Doctor. Diagnosis at this level was not normally expected of nursing sisters. Similarly, medical emergencies required nursing sisters to suture wounds and administer intravenous infusions. These duties too were more properly the domain of qualified medical practitioners.

The most common disorders treated were bacterial and viral infections of the bowel, infections of the upper respiratory tract and parasite invasions generally. Fungal skin disorders were common, as were ulcerating sores and eye infections. A number of adult males suffered from constant headaches. Injuries were common. Burns and stings from poisonous fish barbs comprised most of the trauma due to accidental causes. Many injuries were deliberately inflicted during the course of disputing. Epidemics, such as measles, occasionally swept through the community and usually involved large numbers of cases. Meningitis occurred sporadically, and epilepsy was not uncommon. Tuberculosis, however, was almost controlled through rigid screening procedures. Birth prematurity seemed high in such a small population, as did the incidence of diabetes. A number of people had heart complaints. The most frequent cause of death in the elderly

was pneumonia, whilst the major child health problems were upper respiratory and middle ear infections, gastroenteritis, anaemia and malnutrition caused in part by inadequate diet and in part by the problems associated with intestinal parasite infestation (e.g. see Best et al. 1973; Taylor 1973, 1977b). Up until 1973, which represents the limit of my medical records, there was no venereal disease, leprosy or malaria. Nor were there body lice, head lice, fleas or scabies.

The taxing responsibilities of the nursing sister's position in this isolated place were complicated by the fact that the indigenous medical system (see Chapter 4, pp. 244-7 and Taylor 1977a) was still operating, and as I noted in Chapter 9 (pp. 481-3), was operating in addition to, or sometimes in place of, the system of health care provided by the dispensary. In fact, the indigenous medical system as a "...constellation of beliefs, knowledge, practices, personnel, facilities and resources" (Fabrega 1972:167) greatly determined the way in which the Edward River people presented themselves as patients before the nursing sisters. The indigenous system and the Western biomedical model of health care contrasted sharply in a number of areas.

For example, each system conceptualised the body's anatomy and functions differently. Where the biomedical model saw the body as an entity composed of interrelated functional systems (e.g. the respiratory system, the digestive system, the nervous system, the skeletal system, the endocrinal system etc.), the indigenous model saw the human body as composed of parts (flesh, blood, heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, tendons etc.) which were not necessarily considered as interrelated. For instance, it was held that a sorcerer could remove large quantities of blood without immediate consequences for a person's normal state of activity. Indigenous treatment for wounds did not include any form of bandaging for suppressing blood flow, no matter how serious. The heart was the seat of the emotions, and strength and vigour came from the body's "strings", which is to say the tendons, veins and arteries. The "slackening" of the body's strings was held to be a chief cause of death

in very old people.

The indigenous system contained very few terms for specific maladies compared with the enormous lexicon employed by Western biomedicine. Further, sickness in the Western medical system was treated as a kind of accidental, but natural, invasion or mishap to the body. There was no necessary connection between ill health and a person's morality and social relationships. On the other hand, the indigenous system saw most causes of illness as being located in the landscape and in the behaviour of people (see Figure 5.1, p. 261). That is, sickness was not considered accidental. It was either caused by some personal dereliction on the part of the sufferer or else brought about by the careless or malevolent action of others. Therefore sickness at Edward River was accompanied by an extra dimension of stress that was normally absent from the patient role in the dominant Australian society, because of the belief that either the individual or others were responsible for ill health.

In the Western system, sick people were provided with treatment only when a person with the appropriate medical training had diagnosed their complaints and had formally admitted them to the sick role as patients. Accepting the sick role obliged a patient to accept and follow the treatment regimen prescribed by the medical practitioner. Similarly, it was the medical practitioner who decided when a patient was fit enough to relinquish the sick role. In the indigenous Edward River health care system, it was the responsibility of the sufferers (not outsiders) to admit themselves to the sick role and seek treatment. It was the sufferers, also, who decided when they were fit enough to leave the sick role.

The discrepancies between the two systems often surfaced in the hospital in the course of treating Aboriginal patients. The Edward River people valued Western medical treatments because of the efficacy with which they relieved unpleasant symptoms. Not infrequently, they presented themselves at the dispensary and requested a specific kind of treatment in much the same fashion as they might ask for a

local "proprietary" cure from the indigenous pharmacopoeia (see Chapter 4, p. 246). This was irritating to nursing sisters. It was their responsibility to identify the sickness and decide upon the treatment. On the other hand, patients often became displeased when their requests for specific treatments were apparently ignored and they were given something other than the treatment they wanted.

There was a similar problem with the carrying out of medical instructions. For example, when medicines were prescribed, Aboriginal patients left in control of their own dosage would discontinue their treatment programme as soon as they felt better. Antibiotics typically caused an improvement in well-being within two to three days but required the completion of the course (normally five to seven days) to eliminate the infection. In the Aboriginal view, when the symptoms subsided there was no further need for medication. The question of who was the best judge of a patient's condition was always a point of contention at Edward river (e.g. see Chapter 10, Case No. 18). Nursing sisters expected Aboriginal patients to follow their instructions. When they did not, it was necessary for them to ensure that people under treatment reported daily to the hospital so that their medication could be supervised. This not only increased the dispensary work-load, but it also left the Aboriginal people feeling that they were being supervised unnecessarily.

Calls for medical treatment after hours often gave nursing sisters cause for complaint. Sometimes children would be brought at night to the sister's residence for examination and treatment. Often they were so sick that it was clear to the nursing sisters that the signs of their distress must have been evident while the dispensary was open. Sometimes the delay in seeking treatment came about because, unknown to the nursing sister, an indigenous remedy was being tried first. At other times the delay was due to the fact that the Edward River people were less likely to recognise and react to the early signs of sickness than European parents might be. A child had to show continued lack of activity, loss of appetite and obvious discomfort before the need for

treatment was normally recognised. Since most children below the age of puberty slept with or near their parents, it was generally at night that parents became fully aware of a sick child's distress.

Nursing sisters could forgive such intrusions into their own leisure hours, but there were still other late-night calls upon their services which they found harder to tolerate. One kind of behaviour that they found particularly exasperating was the "gammon" illness. People, usually under some kind of interpersonal stress, occasionally staged spectacular "fits" and were brought to hospital by anxious relatives. I have described one such case in Chapter 10 (Case No. 15). I recorded a number of similar cases in which the objective of the person taking the "fit" was obviously to gain social support or the sympathy of others. "Fits" were usually staged with much drama, and nursing sisters would have to undertake examinations with great care to determine whether a person's collapse had a genuine organic cause or was simply simulated. Nursing sisters resented being used when a person's health was not clearly at risk.

Another kind of late-night emergency call that nursing sisters found exasperating also, was that necessitated by disputes. A serious dispute might produce several broken arms and require 50 or so stitches to repair the gashes in people's heads. Even if nursing sisters had known that such fights were organised ways of settling disputes rather than terrifying displays of Aboriginal violence, they would still have found it difficult to understand why it was considered necessary for people to inflict such injuries upon each other.

There were other forms of Edward River behaviour that nursing sisters found difficult to cope with as well. Edward River women seemed reluctant to report their pregnancies or to attend ante-natal clinics. They even seemed to resent questions about whether they were pregnant or not. There were several reasons for this. In the Edward River view, pregnancy was not a health problem that required medical attention. It was, rather, a natural event that was of concern only to the immediate family of the pregnant woman.

Within their belief system there was already a set of precautionary measures designed to ensure the health of an unborn child. These, of course, were the taboos surrounding pregnancy (see Figure 5.1). Another reason for their unwillingness to attend clinics was that pregnant women were sent to Cairns Base Hospital to be delivered. While this ensured that every facility was available to meet most kinds of birth crises, it also meant that women had to leave their families in the seventh month of their pregnancy to travel to Cairns. As was, and still is, standard international practice, airlines could refuse to convey women who were more than seven months pregnant. Understandably, most pregnant women did not relish the prospect of leaving their families for as long as three months. Some tried to avoid the nursing sister altogether and hide their pregnancies in the hope that their babies would be born at Edward River.

Sometimes people objected to the kinds of treatment nursing sisters administered to critically ill people. In the care of the sick, the Edward River view was that nothing should be done to cause a sick person further discomfort. Western medicine, on the other hand, holds that almost any treatment is justifiable when the object is to save a life. In Chapter 10, Case No. 19 provides an illustration of what can happen when a situation brings these discordant values into focus. Finally, when a person died, Aboriginal grief behaviour (see p. 490-1) often seemed bizarre and excessive to nursing sisters.

To the nursing sisters, the people of Edward River were unexpectedly difficult patients. The tensions that arose in the wake of the opposition between the two sets of principles and practices for dealing with ill health often manifested themselves in real conflict between patient and nursing sister (as in the cases cited above). Indeed, some nursing sisters had been threatened with violence or even attacked by angry patients. While these were rare events, they were nevertheless disturbing and usually caused the resignation of the nursing sister.

There was another important consequence of the indigenous health care system. It made it difficult for

nursing sisters to persuade people to change their existing habits for healthier ones. Many of Edward River's health problems could have been solved by simple behavioural changes. For instance, oral health at Edward River was in an appalling state. High sugar intake had led to high levels of dental caries. Since visits by the Flying Dentist were few, extractions were favoured over restorative dental treatment. I seriously doubt if any adult had a full set of teeth. Much of the obvious malnourishment of the children might have been overcome if parents had used Western "nutritional wisdom" as a guide to the purchase of foods from the retail store (e.g. refer to my comments on the store-bought diet in Chapter 7, pp. 396-401). Yet, however much nursing sisters might urge the brushing of teeth, recommend more balanced diets and advise people on cleanliness and hygiene, this advice had to compete with a set of beliefs that had always insisted that the surest way to avoid illness was to observe the taboos associated with places, people, food and actions and to do nothing to others that might lead them to use sorcery in retaliation. Edward River ideas about health and ill health were solidly anchored in the landscape and in the customs of the people themselves. They played too large a part in everyday social life to be discarded. Edward River people did not assert that their system was a universal theory of health and ill health; rather they saw it as culture specific. It was quite possible for them to imagine that other cultures had different sets of causes for illness. The health education programmes of nursing sisters at Edward River failed because they were the victims of the "fallacy of the empty vessels" (Polgar 1962:165). Edward River people were not like empty barrels waiting to be filled with the new wine of scientific ideas. They were already full of their own "ancient vintage".

Most of Edward River's nursing sisters were dedicated professionals, yet few lasted more than two years at the job. Professionally, it was too galling to continue to persevere when the goals of improved community health and the proper utilisation of health care facilities seemed so elusive. As Foster (1973:181) has noted, professionals and

technical specialists are trained and equipped to work in their own society where the problems are already defined and the solutions to them mostly at hand in the shape of programmes for intervention. However, from an anthropological point of view it is clear that programmes and techniques that work in a professional's society often have no relevance to another culture if the basic problems are locally perceived as different. Between 1968 and 1975, no nursing sister at Edward River had had sufficient cross-cultural training to begin to understand just what the local problems were in the delivery of health care, let alone to design programmes for overcoming them.

11.4 Summary

The staff enclave was a special kind of small world. It was a bureaucratic creation designed to serve, however imperfectly, certain policy goals, namely "...the development, assimilation, integration, education, training and preservation of Aborigines" (Aborigines' Act 1971, paragraph 56:5). While the staff world was implicitly intended to provide an image of the way of life of the world beyond the boundaries of Edward River, it failed to do so on two counts. Firstly, it did not resemble the majority of social groupings and communities. I doubt if there was any other kind of Australian community or institution, apart from the police or military, where the members were so subject to official oversight and surveillance in both work and non-work situations as the staff enclave of an Aboriginal community in Queensland. There were times when I thought the Edward River staff were more oppressed by the powers of the manager than the Aborigines were themselves. Secondly, only a handful of Aborigines with whom staff members had contracted informal relationships of some depth ever caught a glimpse of the staff pattern of life. The social barriers between the community residents and the staff were steadfastly maintained by both groups.

Staff who had the goals and standards of their particular professions to maintain often found difficulty in applying their expertise across the cultural boundaries.

This was exemplified in the case of the nursing sisters of Edward River where competing health care ideologies gave rise to conflicting expectations concerning the nursing sister's role. This in turn produced a high level of dissatisfaction and frustration in nursing sisters when they attempted and seemingly failed to effect, in any significant way, improvements in the delivery and use of the Western health care system. Non-professional staff, it seemed to me, did not feel the same kind of frustration. For most of them it was possible to measure success in terms of the completion of projects or the production of satisfactory work performance. However, no-one's performance was measured as such in terms of the extent to which they contributed towards the stated policy goals of "...the development, assimilation, integration, education, training and preservation of Aborigines."

Isolation, lack of amenities and the difficulty of managing interpersonal relations in a small world where work and non-work roles were difficult to keep separate, together with the frustrations engendered in professional staff, tended to keep the resignation rate high. A dominating characteristic of the staff enclave was its constant turnover of personnel.

CHAPTER 12CONCLUSIONS12.1 Concerning the sources of socio-cultural change at
 Edward River

In Chapters 2 to 5, I have presented a reconstruction of the Aboriginal way of life on the Edward River reserve as it was in the 1930s prior to the establishment of the mission. In Chapters 7 to 10, I have provided functionally equivalent descriptions of settlement life as it was between the years 1968 and 1975. A comparison of chapters in each before-and-after set shows abundant evidence of socio-cultural change. It is necessary now to try, in a summary fashion, to pin down the sources of those changes.

I defined socio-cultural change (pp. 16-17) as a change in social structures, or sets of behavioural patterns, that comes about:

1. through a change in the environment interacting with an unchanging set of shared decision-making structures (i.e. with a stable cultural system);
2. through a change in the cultural system or shared decision-making structures while the environment remains the same;
3. as a result of changes in both the environment and the cultural system.

The establishment and development of a mission on the Edward River reserve constituted a major environmental change for the reserve's inhabitants. It meant renouncing a semi-nomadic way of life for a sedentary one. It meant coming to terms with new kinds of ideas, activities, foods, material goods, dwelling places and spatial constraints. It meant encountering Europeans whose major function was to induct the people of the reserve, however gradually, into the life-style of mainstream Australian society. Involvement with the settlement, its routines and its staff would obviously

entail different behavioural patterns.

To an outside observer, the most obvious changes were those connected with the physical growth and economic development of the settlement. But from the very beginning, the pre-settlement system of resource exploitation was not devalued. There were many occasions during the first 20 years of the mission's life when the people had to return to the bush to seek their food because the mission economy, based on imported rations, produce from the settlement's gardens and beef from the cattle herd, was unable to supply the community's food needs. Even in the period between 1968 and 1975, when the community's residents seemed firmly enmeshed in the introduced cash economy and in the toils of consumerism, hunting and gathering was perceived as an alternative mode of subsistence. It must be added, however, that it was one that few wanted to take up on a full-time basis. Nonetheless, the traditional land tenure system was fully intact, and beyond the immediate environs of the settlement its rules for access to resources were respected. Knowledge of the landscape and its flora and fauna was still maintained in great detail, and the schedules of tract exploitation could be reconstructed by an outsider with little difficulty. Traditional techniques for handcrafting most items of the pre-settlement material culture persisted in spite of Edward River's developing consumerism, partly because many items were still in use (especially the weapons of litigation), and partly as a result of the development of a limited market for the sale of indigenous handcrafts. There seemed to have been no major revision or loss of the store of knowledge that the people of the Edward River reserve used to implement their pre-settlement subsistence economy.

The various forms of the settlement's economy (the hybrid ration/garden system of the early settlement years, the total ration system of the later mission years, and the cash economy of the DAIA) were domains quite distinct from the pre-settlement economy. They were additions to Edward River cultural repertoires rather than revisions of earlier activity systems. In the operating cultures of the various settlement economies, the Edward River people assigned to the staff the

responsibility for inculcating new routines and techniques and for directing and controlling economic activities within the settlement. They willingly acquired new knowledge and participated in each stage of the settlement's economic development. However, it was difficult for the Edward River people to accept every aspect of the introduced routines. The hierarchical organisation of responsibility and control that typified the structure of the work groups of the cash economy cut directly across the lines of authority specified in kin-based relationships. Even in 1975, Edward River people could not work comfortably within the organisational frameworks the DAIA was seeking to impose.

Since Europeans generally could not or would not relate to Aborigines within the framework of kin-based relationships, it was necessary for the Edward River people to acquire or develop other codes for interacting with Europeans. There was a formal code which regulated the interpersonal encounters between members of staff acting in their official capacities and the people of the settlement. It had developed out of early contacts with missionaries and pastoralists and placed European staff in a managerial or "boss" role. It recognised both the right and the duty of staff to control and direct encounters between members of staff and the people of the settlement in the workplace. Within broad limits, the "good helper for the people" concept outlined what the Edward River people expected of those under whom they had placed themselves in a situation of culture tutelage (see pp. 411-13).

Informal or out-of-working hours relationships between Aborigines and Europeans invoked another set of behavioural rules. Under this code, the depth of relationship was negotiable. As the degree of intimacy in an informal relationship developed, so the behaviour of the European partner was insensibly shaped towards something resembling kin-based modes of interaction. However, in such friendships, the European partner's status as a member of an Aboriginal kindred was very marginal indeed and certainly did not include the normal rights and duties of kindred membership.

The kin-based relationships of the pre-settlement era still guided much interpersonal behaviour between Aborigines. Some traditional rights and duties had fallen into disuse because the activities in which they were expressed were no longer relevant in the settlement context, or else had been suppressed (e.g. initiation, corpse disposal procedures, midwifery assistance, revenge expeditions). There was some deliberate revision of the kin-based codes (for instance, "going poison cousin"). Other duties of the traditional set, for example those connected with the education of children and the support of the elderly, were shared with the formal educational and welfare institutions of the mainstream society.

There were yet other situations in which Aborigines were expected to relate to each other in terms of roles that had been imposed by legislation and administrative direction. The need for such roles was accepted but it was frequently the case that the community's expectations concerning appropriate role performance were different from those of the Europeans who imposed the roles.

The post-settlement changes that occurred in the set of beliefs that comprised the pre-settlement cosmology provide a good example of the way in which an indigenous belief system can cope with what might appear to be a shattering assault on its existential relevance. Sharp saw the Aboriginal totemic belief system as relatively inflexible and unable to absorb large changes in the modal clusterings of events, behaviours and artefacts. Yet, as things turned out, the reverse occurred. I will consider in the next section why the fate that Sharp predicted for Yir Yoront and Kuuk Thaayorre peoples failed to materialise. What should be noted here is that the Edward River people managed to preserve intact their supernatural landscape and its associated powers and entities. They beat off the challenge Christian evangelism posed to the validity of their beliefs by interpreting Christian belief as another version of a cosmology that in fundamental respects was not dissimilar to their own. Further, they managed to reconfigure their own beliefs to take account of the presence of Europeans and

their works. Additionally, they were able to invent and elaborate new rituals in response to needs that arose in the wake of adopting a sedentary life-style. These rituals replaced those of pre-settlement times which had fallen into disuse. It was an area of vigorous local innovation.

Chapters 5 and 10 dealt with pre-settlement and post-settlement Aboriginal dispute resolution procedures, respectively. Clearly, the Aboriginal codes that defined wrong actions by other Aborigines and the proper pursuit of redress for them were still operating in the settlement, although much modified by European intervention and the physical layout of the settlement itself. "Old custom" disputing was not regarded as a satisfactory state of affairs by the Edward River people, but there was no other forum available in which they could resolve disputes that arose from breaches of Aboriginal codes of behaviour. Aborigines did not expect that their disputes with staff members would be conducted according to "old custom" disputing procedures. However, when staff members persistently breached the "good helper for the people" code, the Aboriginal community at Edward River was quite capable of developing its own ad hoc strategies to obtain their removal.

In summary, two major sources of sociocultural change at Edward River can be identified:

1. the revision of pre-settlement codes and beliefs (e.g. in kin-based relationships, in disputing and in cosmology and ritual) as a consequence of the adoption of a sedentary life-style and the presence of Europeans;
2. the addition of new codes to the operating cultures of the Edward River people.

Sometimes these codes were imposed as part of a deliberate policy of change and development and were intended to replicate the operating cultures of the mainstream society (e.g. the cash economy, formal and imposed relationships, the Aboriginal court). Sometimes, new codes emerged out of the

cumulative interaction between the Edward River people and the staff (e.g. informal relationships).

I now consider how far the direction and extent of such change has accorded with Sharp's predictions in the first instance, and with the hopes and expectations of those entrusted with the task of guiding the social and physical development of Edward River in the second.

12.2 Concerning "axes" and other totems

The object of this section is to be "wise after the event" and try to understand how it was exactly that Sharp came to predict a cultural collapse for the Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre peoples that he lived with and studied. (Please note that I am using the present-day cover-all terms Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre for convenience to refer to the groups that came within the purview of Sharp's study. Koko Mindjena includes Sharp's Yir Yoront and Yir Mel whilst Kuuk Thaayorre includes Sharp's Taior and Ngentjin, see also Chapter 1, p. 6). There is value in performing such an exercise, mainly because it says something about the way anthropologists interpret their observations and construct models or theories to explain aspects of particular societies.

The primary object of Sharp's researches was to come to a clearer understanding of the nature of totemism in at least one relatively homogeneous Aboriginal society. At the time of Sharp's fieldwork there was already a voluminous literature extant on totemism (e.g. McClennan 1869-70, Tylor 1899, Spencer and Gillen 1904, Frazer 1910, Goldenweiser 1910 and 1918, Boas 1916, Kroeber 1920, Linton 1924, Radcliffe-Brown 1929, Elkin 1933a and 1933b. It was an area of such confusion that Haddon (1934:136, quoted in Sharp 1937:vii) had been forced to conclude that, "Nearly every writer on the subject expresses different views from those of other writers but scarcely one of them has any original facts to offer". One might add that the position seems little clearer nowadays, for as Berndt and Berndt (1977:231) observe, "Totemism is a confusing term because it has been used in so many different

ways". Sharp's purpose was to offer new facts and attempt to explain one particular Aboriginal totemic system. He was not concerned to integrate his findings and interpretations with the wider domain of theories of totemism (e.g. Sharp 1937:x).

As Sharp described it for the Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre peoples, totemism was an association between classes of things, activities and states (the totemic phenomena) and particular groups of people (clans or lineages). The associations were established by a set of myths. While Sharp provided abundant evidence of such associations among the Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre, the most important piece of evidence he submitted was a list of the totems belonging to the Freshwater/Rain clan (Sharp 1937:330-3; the list's heading refers to the "Rain" clan, but Sharp had nowhere else listed such a clan; on internal evidence it is fairly clear that it was the Freshwater/Rain clan to which he was referring). For this group Sharp enumerated in excess of 220 totems. Included in it were 74 kinds of natural species comprising insects, birds, fish and other aquatic creatures, plants, crustaceans, amphibians, reptiles and marsupials. 27 of the items referred to general environmental phenomena such as clouds, dawn, stars and thunder. Another 30 items referred to artefacts and material things associated with human activities such as camping places, axes, ashes, shelters and pointing bones. All of these things were common enough in other lists of totems (e.g. see Spencer and Gillen 1904:768-73). What was unusual about the list was the inclusion of things such as parts, states and conditions of the human body (for instance, anus, blood vessels, sores, intellect and so forth), as well as human emotions and activities (e.g. marriage, copulation, shame etc.). There were 91 items of this type. Even more remarkable was the fact that this large number of totems belonged to a single clan which in 1933 numbered about 40 people. The Freshwater/Rain tracts occupied less than 6% of the total area owned by the 26 clans Sharp had studied. Less than 8% (17) of the totems associated with the Freshwater/Rain clan were shared with other clans. There is no doubt that Sharp meant his readers

to take the example of the Freshwater/Rain clan as an apt illustration of the distribution of totems across the remaining clans. It follows that if the other 25 clans had equally large sets of multiple totems covering the same wide range of things, events and states, and if there was the same degree of sharing of totemic items (i.e. less than 8%) between clans, then for all practical purposes the totems of the Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre people present themselves as a universal compendium of natural and cultural phenomena. Sharp did not present such a list for all the clans, although it is easy to calculate that it would probably have comprised more than 5000 items, if the Freshwater/Rain clan listing was typical. Sharp (1937:62) noted:

Not all the elements of the physical world, not all classes are totems, and it is for this reason that it seems wiser to call this type of totemism "general" rather than "universal". A listing of totemic objects would probably approach the universal, but a number of important actions, states, and qualities are not associated specifically with one lineage or another, and cannot be and are not considered as totems. It would appear that such actions as hunting, running, walking, such states as happiness, home sickness, such qualities of stinginess, for example, are too generalised to become established in association with any one particular mythical character or lineage.

Why were there so many totems? Sharp argued that inherent in the native cosmology was a basic tripartite division of the perceived world of experience. These classes consisted of tracts, social groupings and totemic objects. Tracts and totems had naturally distinctive characteristics and enduring identities. Social groups, on the other hand, were relatively changeable. However, Sharp argued, a strong objective reality could be imparted to otherwise ephemeral social groupings, if they could be related to the unchanging landscape and the well-defined totems. This was the real purpose of the totemic system of the Koko Mindjena and the Kuuk Thaayore. As Sharp (1937:viii) put it:

...the interrelationship of ancestral social groups and cultural phenomena with perdurable elements and species of natural phenomena and the necessity of reproducing and maintaining these interrelationships serves to stabilize the social and cultural morphologies of the community. The mythical world of the ancestors provides an archetypal social and cultural scheme from which the present can hardly diverge because of the complexity of the interrelationships which in the native mind bind various aspects of the past to each other and to the present.

Thus, social groups, totems and tracts were welded into a set of mutually dependent conceptual relationships. Small changes in the sets could be accounted for without upsetting the basic stability of the system, but because the interweaving of the elements appeared to be on such a cosmic scale, any major change in any of the sets, Sharp argued, would have repercussions for the others. The result could only be social and cultural disorganisation. Because of the tightness of the conceptual structuring, there was simply no room in the Aboriginal cosmology for Europeans and their enormous inventory of things. Contact with Europeans and European material culture must therefore cause the collapse of the entire indigenous world view, and with it the socio-cultural system itself. It was a courageous prediction. Few anthropologists have had such faith in their models that they have actually set the conditions for testing their validity against future events.

As it happens, Sharp was wrong about the way in which things would eventually occur. I believe that the descriptive materials which I have presented in Chapters 7 to 10 provide ample evidence for a vital and continuing cultural tradition which has coped exceedingly well with major changes in settings, activities, artefacts, social groupings and social relationships. It has done this either by revising or renovating pre-settlement codes or by augmenting traditional operating cultures with new ones. I am certain that Sharp would not be in the least dismayed to learn that the totemic belief system he patiently described

in such detail has turned out to have such resilience. However, I am convinced as well that Sharp's inductive leap towards the essential nature of totemism among the Koko Mindjina and Kuuk Thaayorre was a leap in the wrong direction.

I must acknowledge that the evidence for a universal compendium of totemic items seemed very strong in his data. Yet 35 years later, it was in no way possible for me to obtain lists of similar length. Map 4.1 in Chapter 4 (p. 198) represents a portion of the Edward River mythic landscape. In their general features the totemic entities in the map resemble Sharp's list for the Freshwater/Rain clan and contain the same kinds of categories, although in somewhat different proportions. 57% of the totemic items refer to natural species, 9% to natural events, 18% to human attributes, 8% to material culture items and 8% to mythological characters. The map shows the location of 65 totemic sites spread over the domains of 7 clans. While the list is not exhaustive, I am nevertheless reasonably certain that the totems of the Wallaby/Lightning and Watersnake clans are represented on that map in their entirety or very nearly so. As a whole there is nothing to suggest the cosmic sets of categories which Sharp argued were characteristic of the totemic systems of this particular area. This raises a problem. Have whole sets of totems disappeared from men's minds in the space of 35 years or was Sharp's Freshwater/Rain clan an extraordinary or atypical example? I cannot answer these questions, since I have not attempted to collect totemic lists for present day Freshwater/Rain clan members. My thinking at this time, however, would lead me to agree with Worsley (1967:150) that the appearance of "compendious systematization" in Australian Aboriginal totemic systems is probably misleading and irrelevant.

In Chapter 4, I have proposed an alternative view of what totemism might mean for the people of the Edward River reserve. I equated the anthropological concept of totemism to the class of things referred to by such indigenous terms as woochorrm (Kuuk Thaayorre), waltelem (Yir Yoront), pulwaiya (Wik Nganchera) and "story" (Edward River Aboriginal English). Such terms, I argued, referred to a

set of symbols that represented mythological events at particular places. In other words, the totems were primarily tags for identifying segments of a mythological record. The association between social groups, totemic objects and tracts does not come about, as Sharp suggested, because of the inherent features of the totems and tracts themselves (i.e. their perdurability), but rather because the ownership of a set of totems by particular clans denoted the ownership of a ritual estate which in turn justified, or provided a charter for, the clans' primary entitlements to tracts within the countryside. This interpretation sits easily with Sharp's general description for the totemic system of the Koko Mindjena and the Kuuk Thaayorre. It does not, however, require the system to break down when confronted with the presence of Europeans and their material culture.

The anxieties, ambivalences and bizarre behaviour among the Edward River people concerning European material culture which Sharp observed and described in his classic "Axes..." paper of 1952 and earlier elsewhere (e.g. Sharp: 1934a) were not so much a case of culturally fatal cognitive disorientation, but rather a short-run perturbation of a cultural system coming to grips with a problem. The problem lay, so I would now argue, in regularising the supply of European material culture. It was solved by inviting the establishment of a mission. There was no compelling need for the Koko Mindjena and Kuuk Thaayorre peoples to account for all things European within their particular totemic system. In Chapter 9, I have shown how the Edward River people have accounted for some European things within their totemic belief system (e.g. God, horses). There was no attempt to account for all things European nor was there any felt need to do so as far as I could determine. Instead, I have suggested that the Edward River people had come to think that the European cosmology was very like their own. If this were the case, then from an Edward River point of view Europeans themselves would have had the "stories" appropriate to the genesis of their own artefacts and Edward River people would have had no reason to bother themselves about such things.

I have a small amount of evidence to support this contention. For instance, when some item of European manufacture was causing trouble in the settlement (e.g. alcohol) people would say when berating others, "We don't have the story for that thing (i.e. alcohol). We don't know how to use it yet." The implication was, so I felt, that Europeans had the "story" and therefore knew how to use the thing properly. Or again, when I taxed an informant about the existence of a "story" place for the ubiquitous feral pig, I was told that there was no such place on the Edward River reserve, but it was then confidently asserted that "...there must be one somewhere" and that probably a white man had it.

Perhaps my most telling single piece of evidence is contained in the following example:

I had invited E. C. to visit me in Brisbane in 1971. It was his first trip in a jet plane and his first experience of a city bigger than Cairns. When I met him at the airport, he was plainly impressed and not a little confused by the comparative enormity of the place and numbers of Europeans. As we drove towards the city, E. C. looked about him at the tall residential buildings and asked, "Brother, did man make these things? I think they must be from story," he prompted.

I said that the buildings were indeed man-made and further along our route I showed him a building under construction. By the time we reached a central business district of Brisbane known as Fortitude Valley, the size of the buildings had increased considerably and E. C. was once again having doubts about the origins of the buildings. I assured him that they were indeed man-made and not the product of some whitefellow "story".

To get to my home, we had to cross the Brisbane River and I chose to go via Brisbane's largest bridge. It was a massive suspended steel arch. E. C. had never seen anything so big. "What do they call this one, brother?" he asked. Without quite realising the implications of my reply, I said, "It's the Story Bridge." It was named after a prominent

Queensland citizen, J. D. Story. "Ah," said E. C., totally mistaking the meaning of the label "story". He looked up at the fretwork of interlacing girders flashing by and found a comparison from his own Edward River environment. He said, "It must have grown up like a mangrove, I reckon." Then he sat back with great satisfaction and contemplated the rest of Brisbane's marvels without puzzlement. His cognitive orientation was restored and his faith in the power of "stories" reasserted. The European environment was clearly interpretable through the categories of the Edward River cosmology. I had not the heart to tell him otherwise.

12.3 Concerning Acts, their intentions and their consequences

The various pieces of legislation that created and maintained the Edward River reserve and provided for the development and control of the Edward River community had two major purposes:

1. to transform Aboriginal settlements into communities capable of sustaining themselves without government funding and special administrative oversight;
2. to produce citizens who could competently participate in the economic, political and social institutions of the dominant society, and who could, by virtue of that competence, be absorbed into it.

In Chapter 6 (pp. 338-40), I outlined how the DAIA proposed to accomplish the transformation process through the physical development of the settlement itself and by installing routines, activities and social structures that reflected processes in the wider Australian society.

From the detail presented in Chapters 7 to 10, it should be clear that Edward River in 1975 had not yet become a normal country town, functioning like any other country

town. Apart from the sale of cattle, Edward River produced no income of its own and was supported largely by government funds. All major decisions concerning the reserve's development and the disposition of its resources, both human and physical, were made and implemented by DAIA personnel. So far as I could gauge, Aboriginal input through the Edward River council and its representative on the Aboriginal Advisory Council was minimal. Except for the buildings associated with the school, the church and the crocodile farm, all other structures including the houses in which the Aborigines lived were the property of the DAIA. In legislative and in practical terms, the manager's authority was pervasive. It extended over Aborigines and staff alike both during and after working hours. No Aboriginal person had permanently left the reserve to pursue an occupation in the mainstream society during the nine years of DAIA control. Staff and Aborigines for the most part lived in separate social and cultural worlds. Indeed, between 1968 and 1975 Edward River fitted the description of the "total institution" admirably. In fact, from its very inception it had always had institutional characteristics. As a total institution it was more "total" than most (cf. Goffman 1968:16), since its inmates had been born into it, had lived their entire lives within it and had never ventured into the outside world without supportive agencies of the DAIA.

It could be argued (and probably would have been by the DAIA) that Edward River's resemblance to a total institution was simply a transitory phenomenon and one likely to disappear as further changes took place. However, I would argue that this is not the case. I believe the great weight of this research suggests that the dynamics of the interface between the Edward River staff as change agents of the donor culture and the Edward River people as culture recipients would perpetuate the situation of 1968-75 well into the future, unless a major revision occurred in the DAIA strategy for change. That is to say, Edward River would always in practice be a "managed" community with a strong cultural cleavage between the staff enclave (the managers) and the Aboriginal people of the settlement (the managed). I make

this prediction in spite of the fact that the Edward River people themselves are firmly committed to the notion of change.

To justify the prediction I have just made, it is necessary to look closely at the processes of cultural change as they occur at Edward River. To assist in this analysis I will restate the principal features of the theoretical paradigm for culture change processes developed in Chapter 1 (pp. 18-27) and use them to illuminate the processes of directed change at Edward River.

This model of the culture change process begins with the recognition by an individual or group of a need for change or an exigency. If the need for change is seen as salient enough to require implementation in a group's cultural repertoire then some one or some group must articulate the exigency and give it shape in terms of a goal. The goal is established through the innovative revision of mental configurations. Any proposed new goal must be articulated in such a way as to be both desirable and obtainable. To activate others to engage in collective action aimed at realising the goal, it is necessary that some one or some group must act as advocate(s) on behalf of the innovation in order to secure general social acceptance for the new idea. An innovation can be said to have entered a cultural repertoire as a viable operating code when it is performed by those who have accepted it. With performance, a new recipe for action will enter the phenomenal world of the particular society as an observable entity in its own right and in doing so may create exigencies for actors in other domains. The exigencies created as a consequence of an innovation have a wide variety of possible outcomes. The original innovation may be extinguished because too many adjustments are required in domains with needs of greater saliency. Alternatively, there might be set in motion a wide range of revisions in other areas to support the original innovation. Yet again, the original innovation might have to undergo revision itself to accommodate undesirable consequences or contradictions incurred in other parts of the cultural system. The process of accommodating an innovation to other parts of the cultural

system, I identified as integration. As I noted earlier (p. 27), by the time the consequences set in motion by an innovation have been worked out, the originating innovation itself may have changed beyond all recognition.

The formation of the mission settlement at Edward River provided the instrumental articulation for two different kinds of exigencies, one Aboriginal, the other European. In the experience of the Aborigines of the Edward River reserve, the mission provided the only means for achieving an adequate and equitable supply of the products they wanted. For the missionaries, the settlement represented a way to establish Christianity among the reserve's inhabitants and the means for leading them away from their hunter-gatherer mode of life towards some kind of more productive and economically viable sedentary life-style. It would seem that the Aborigines were well aware that in satisfying their demands for the products of European culture, they themselves would be required to change. That is to say, their original exigency, the need for goods, entailed a second exigency, the need for change. But having accepted that entailment, the articulation of the direction and kind of change was left to the Europeans. The Aborigines themselves had no idea what kind of cultural beings they were expected to become. It was an act of great faith that led the people of Edward River to bind themselves to Europeans in a culture-donor/culture-recipient relationship. As it happened, the missionaries failed to realise their particular image for the future of Edward River and its Aboriginal residents, especially with respect to the adoption of a Christian ideology. In 1967, the Anglican Church surrendered the responsibility for managing the future of Edward River to the DAIA.

The DAIA plan for Edward River and other Aboriginal settlements was clearly spelt out. I will not reiterate the plan here, since I dealt with it in some detail in Chapters 6, 7 and 10. In broad terms, desirable changes were to be induced at Edward River by simultaneously creating a physical environment that mimicked a major setting of the mainstream society (i.e. a country town) and by imposing activities, roles and social structures that were meant to replicate

key institutions in such a setting. Those who were responsible for the articulation of the plan (senior personnel of the DAIA) and those who were expected to put the plan into effect (the staff of Edward River) had little or no knowledge of the culture they were intending to change. The DAIA appeared to believe that such knowledge was irrelevant and that if the proper settings and social structures were implemented, then the desired cultural changes would follow automatically. In principle, the plan did not oppose the expression of Aboriginal culture, except where it seemed to be harmful, as in the case of sorcery.

In the terminology of my culture change model, it was the staff who were in the position of being the advocates of culture change. By virtue of the culture-donor/culture-recipient bond, they were in the eyes of the Edward River people legitimate advocates. The staff, as officials legislatively charged with the responsibility of instituting change at Edward River, expected that the changes they proposed would be accepted and would manifest themselves in subsequent performance. Indeed, many of the changes advocated were performed with all the success the planners could have hoped for. The Edward River people adjusted well to their new houses, accepted the cash economy with little complaint, acquired new occupational skills and sent their children off to school to receive a European-style education.

On the other hand, there were two areas where changes had been imposed and in which there were obvious discrepancies between what the advocates intended to have happen and how the Edward River people responded.

The first of these concerned the domain of authority. The rationale for introducing work structures based on the Western model with its typical hierarchical ordering of authority relationships and patterns of responsibility was to prepare the Edward River people for the eventual self-management of their own community. The same reasoning underlay the imposition of roles such as councillor and policeman. The Edward River people had no objection to Europeans wielding such authority themselves, but they could not accept roles that endowed some Edward River people with

a greater degree of authority than that accorded to them under the traditional system of kin-based relationships. Because kin-based relationships had remained a focal code for the conduct of interpersonal relationships amongst Aborigines on the reserve, they were unwilling to revise them. The result was two sets of conflicting expectations regarding the performance of imposed roles, and these in turn generated role conflict.

The second area of discrepancy concerned the introduction of the Aboriginal court. From the DAIA point of view, the Aboriginal court was a means of training Aborigines in the dispute resolution procedures of the mainstream society, as well as a necessary (though rarely invoked) instrument for enforcing compliance with imposed behaviours. None of the codes over which the Aboriginal court had jurisdiction addressed any of the real causes for disputation between Aborigines. Aborigines seeking redress for wrongs committed by other Aborigines could only find it within their modified, but still violent, "old custom" dispute settling procedures. For the people of Edward River, the Aboriginal court was a means for reconciling the consequences of "old custom" disputing with European notions of law and order.

A crucial precondition in the DAIA view for the development of any future plans to place the administrative control of the settlement in the hands of the Edward River people themselves was that they be able to maintain law and order in the fashion of the European model and that they acquire community and workplace leadership roles like those in any normal country town. But the consequences of the two discrepant sets of expectations concerning imposed roles and the Aboriginal court worked in the opposite direction. The role conflict engendered by the unwillingness of Aborigines to revise their own conception of the limits of personal authority together with the resolution of that conflict in favour of the retention of Aboriginal values seemed to have become integrated as a stable pattern in the interactions between a constantly changing staff enclave and the residents of Edward River. In preserving their own cultural values concerning authority relationships among themselves, the

people of Edward River were creating a permanent managerial niche for the staff within the settlement. Edward River people believed that the staff were indispensable for the running of the settlement. Similarly, because the staff were unable to delve beyond the surface violence of Aboriginal disputation, they were prevented from discovering just how poorly the introduced legal mechanisms were suited to deal with disputes having their origins in customary law. The staff for their part were equally convinced that the Edward River people were still too powerfully swayed by "tribal" emotions to be entrusted with the management of their own affairs.

The staff were not well placed to understand what was happening. None of them had the special insight that training in cross-cultural community development might have imparted. Within the DAIA there were no formal mechanisms for accumulating information and analysing the dynamics of social relations within the settlement. For most staff it was sufficient to cope with the day to day exigencies posed by the difficult physical environment, the problems of managing interpersonal relations with other staff members, and the stresses induced by trying to maintain standards in a situation where there were discordant expectations concerning professional roles.

If the Annual Reports of the DAIA for the years between 1968 and 1975 are any guide, the success of the DAIA strategy for the development of Edward River was measured almost solely in terms of the completion of projects that enhanced the physical amenities of the place. For Edward River people too, the physical development of the community signalled progress. But the appearance of progress was belied by the failure of the social organisation of the community to develop in the direction envisaged by the planners. Edward River was adapting not so much to the mainstream Australian society but to a bureaucratic organisation. The culture-donor/culture-recipient bond was being transformed into something that threatened to lock both Aborigines and civil servants into a state of perpetual dependence one upon the other. It is all too easy for a bureaucracy whose

existence is contingent upon supplying the needs of special groups judged incompetent to manage their own affairs to fall in with such a bond, even when its official purpose is to "work itself out of a job" (see Chapter 6, p. 388).

On 12 April 1984, a new Bill, the Community Services (Aborigines) Bill was brought down in the Queensland Legislative Assembly and enacted. In his speech on behalf of the legislation, the Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs stated that it was the government's intention to give Aboriginal communities on reserve lands greater executive responsibility for area management, financial planning and the civic and civil conduct of their communities (Queensland 1984:2891-7). Aboriginal councils were to be elected under the same conditions as local government authorities. The councils were to have the power to employ people, levy rates and charges, borrow and invest moneys, and appoint police officers both to supervise community By-Laws and operate essential services including fire control and ambulance transport. Aboriginal courts were to remain in operation. The Aboriginal Advisory Councils of previous legislation were to be replaced by a corporate Coordinating Council made up of the chairpersons of the elected councils. The Coordinating Council had the power to undertake public works and acquire public property. The supply of consumer goods to Aboriginal communities was to come under the overall management of an Aboriginal Industries Board (made up from members of the Coordinating Council) while the management and control of community retail stores and other business enterprises were to pass into the hands of local residents. The DAIA was renamed the Department of Community Services (DCS) in keeping with its new role of providing advisory services. A period of three years was allowed for the changeover of administrative and executive powers. Communities could, if they wished, ask for an extension of DCS assistance. During the three years of the "changeover" the DCS would ensure the continuity of adequate accounting standards and reporting while all transactions of Aboriginal councils would be carefully scrutinised by the Auditor-General.

The Community Services legislation was intended to complement an earlier set of amendments to the Land Act 1962-1981 and the Forestry Act 1959-1979. The amendments were contained in the Land Act (Aboriginal and Islander Land Grants) Amendment Bill. The legislation which was passed on 31 March 1982, came to be referred to as the "Deed of Grant" Proposal". The intention of the amendment was to vest a form of perpetual title, the Deed of Grant in Trust, in elected community councils (or trustees). Special provision was made to ensure that any action to alter or cancel a Deed of Grant in Trust (as, for example, by order of the Governor-in-Council) must have parliamentary approval. The amending Act and the new Act were aimed at providing Aboriginal and Islander peoples with security of tenure and control over their own lands as well as increasing the degree to which they managed their own affairs. In a bold move, the Community Services legislation provided deadlines for the withdrawal of DCS control.

For Edward River, the legislation will not achieve its stated goals unless the people of the reserve accept that an elected Aboriginal council is the appropriate body to assume responsibility for the day to day running of the community. This in turn means that the Edward River people must relinquish a strongly held set of values concerning the bounds of legitimate authority. In the past, Edward River people have resisted efforts to impose structures that gave Aborigines wider authority than that permitted within the limits of the kin-based relationship set. I venture to predict that the management structures the present Act seeks to impose will fare no better at Edward River than others have in the past. The concept of community self-management, in the form presented in the legislation, is something that threatens the stability of strongly held Edward River values.

As Zollschan (1976) has pointed out, effective change will only take place when there is agreement between the advocates of change and the target population concerning the desired goals and the means of implementing them. When the articulators and advocates of change are separated by a cul-

cultural chasm as wide as that which separates Edward River society from the Australian mainstream, then such consonances, in the absence of knowledge and consultation, can only be achieved by accident. In these circumstances, planning for change will only be pursued with profit when the change agents learn about those they would change, and conversely those who would be changed have some say in what they are to be transformed into and in the means for doing it. The strategy of change by legislative fiat and departmental implementation needs to be replaced with a more flexible and culturally sensitive strategy which will neither mock the good intentions of the planners nor frustrate the efforts of the Aborigines themselves to make a realistic, self-reliant and Aboriginal adaptation to their circumstances.

12.4 Edward River in a wider perspective

Edward River is but one of a number of Aboriginal communities in Queensland which have been controlled and managed under the provisions of Queensland's Aboriginal Acts and Regulations. My first purpose here is to present a brief sketch of recent research among other similar Queensland Aboriginal communities so that the reader may have a comparative yardstick against which to assess my critique of the Government's efforts at inducing socio-cultural change. My second purpose is to provide an indication of what has happened in states other than Queensland, where authorities have attempted to disengage themselves from the day to day control of Aboriginal communities by implementing programs for Aboriginal self-management.

The first comparative study of Queensland's Aboriginal settlements and missions was carried out by J.P.M. Long in 1965-66 as part of a general survey of such communities in Australia's eastern mainland states (Long 1970). He visited all the communities in the closely settled parts of Queensland (Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Palm Island and Yarrabah) and 4 of the nine remote settlements (Aurukun, Doomadgee, Weipa and Bamaga). Long was primarily interested in the administration of Aboriginal welfare. As a consequence, his brief descriptions of Aboriginal settlements are largely concerned with matters relating to the formation of settlements, their administration, employment opportunities, income, physical amenities, schooling, training schemes and development projects. The effects of institutionalisation upon the "inmates" of Aboriginal settlements were plainly apparent to him, although he felt there was a difference in the degree of institutional apathy displayed by various communities (Long 1970:181):

In the long-established communities within the settled areas, whose members have experienced a degree of rejection and hostility from the surrounding White communities, some of the symptoms of 'institutionalisation' are more apparent than in many of the remote northern settlements whose members have not had

such experience and where the traditional culture remains strong. But because Aborigines in all the settlement communities have so obviously lost their independence (and much more than their economic independence is lost) their attitude has tended, or is tending, to become one of 'hostile dependency'.

Since Long's survey, research of much greater anthropological, sociological, or psychological depth has been or is being pursued among Aborigines living on government controlled reserves and mission settlements in Queensland. For example, research has been carried out at Doomadgee (Trigger 1981), Mornington Island (Cawte 1972, Memmott 1982, 1983), Aurukun (McKnight 1971, D.E. von Sturmer 1980, J.R. von Sturmer 1973a, 1973b, 1978, Sutton 1978), Lockhart (Chase 1980), Hopevale (Haviland 1979, Terweil-Powell 1975), Bloomfield (Anderson 1979, 1980), Yarrabah (Craig 1979, 1980) and Cherbourg (Eckermann 1973, Koepping 1976, 1977, Guthrie 1975a, 1975b, 1976).

Continuity and change is a constant theme running through the recent anthropological research among Aboriginal populations living on or near the lands they occupied in pre-settlement times. Sometimes the persistence of pre-settlement beliefs and practices has been such as to allow the reconstruction of essentially pre-contact patterns (see especially Memmott 1983, for his reconstruction of Lardil social structure and use of space; D.E. von Sturmer 1980, for her study of nurturing and the social relations of child raising; J.R. von Sturmer, for his explorations in economy, territoriality and totemism among Wik speakers). Most researchers in remote Aboriginal communities take account of the fact that their research is taking place in a situation of guided socio-cultural change. They also point out that Aboriginal people in such communities do not engage in the wholesale abandonment of former traditions in favour of new beliefs and social forms. Rather, much of the adjustment of Aboriginal people to the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle and the introduction of new forms of economy, education, health care, politics and religious beliefs has been in terms of their own distinctive cultural repertoire. Thus Chase (1980) shows in great

detail how the people of Lockhart River see themselves as the inheritors of a body of traditions handed down from the recent past. It is this body of knowledge that serves to guide, direct and constrain their present behaviours rather than the deliberate attempts by missionaries and government officers to change their ways. A number of studies have traced the effects of enforced change at length (e.g. D.E. von Sturmer 1980, in the relations of reproduction; Memmott 1983, in settlement socio-spatial patternings; Haviland 1979, in socio-linguistic change; Terweil-Powell 1975, developments in kinship systems).

Most studies refer explicitly or implicitly to the bicultural nature of Aboriginal settlements. Often the chasm and lack of communication between the two groups, European and Aboriginal, is quite marked and resembles the situation at Edward River. Thus Chase (1980:36-7) writes in the following way of the staff enclave at the Lockhart River Mission:

European staff received no formal training on the nature of Aboriginal society and culture. Often they were people who were moving strategically from other Government Departments for the purposes of career advancement, or else employees doing their period in the bush: a necessary prerequisite to later appointment in more settled areas. In a few cases, later friendships formed between individual Europeans and individual Aborigines, though this had strict limitations. Most staff, and their wives in particular, found residence in the small isolated community stressful. On the one hand, internecine feuds between groups of employees brought internal competition and conflict to the European residents, while on the other hand, the behaviour of the Aboriginal population was seen as bestial, horrifying, and threatening to European values.....Those Europeans who saw themselves as sympathetic to Aboriginal people inevitably became disillusioned when their attempts to improve Aboriginal community life were met with indifference and positive rejection.

While missionaries and government officers have been generally characterised as initiators of change, they have less frequently been seen as unintentional promoters of Aboriginal

tradition in the way that I have argued in Section 12.3. I suspect, however, that the patterns of dependency exhibited between the people of Edward River and the staff enclave occur elsewhere in Queensland's Aboriginal settlements. Such dependency may be seen as the price to be paid for the maintenance of traditional relationships and authority structures. It is convenient for Aborigines to keep the Europeans in their places as the "bosses". Consider this revealing set of remarks from Sutton (1978:xv-xvi) describing his entry into the field among the people of Cape Keerweer:

As soon as I arrived, the people I worked with assigned me the roles which they saw as appropriate - I was to be the "boss" for Cape Keerweer, I would be in charge of cattle management, I would run the store and communications and transport, I would be the go-between in internal disputes and the ambassador to the outside world and all its bewildering governmental and other agencies. Above all, I would lead them back to their homelands from which they had migrated to Aurukun Mission in the past 50 years. I "belonged to them" (their words). (His parentheses.)

Clearly, Sutton was being seen as the ideal "boss", a composite made up of mission superintendent-cum-handyman and cross-cultural broker.

The research conducted at Yarrabah and Cherbourg presents a different picture. These communities are located in the more densely settled parts of Queensland. Originally, they were set up as places of refuge for the remnants of tribal groups that had been dispossessed by the European invasion of their lands. Here the "hostile dependency" Long noted earlier is more marked. Craig (1979:70-71) describes Yarrabah in the following bleak way:

There has evolved on Yarrabah a reserve culture which resembles neither traditional Aboriginal nor white Australian society. This culture is the product of resettlement and close to 100 years of institutionalisation; it involves the admixture of 30 different tribes, several races, and two vastly divergent cultures...The people there see themselves as being different

from other groups, both black and white, and most reject Queensland's 'drive toward uniformity'.....While the Aborigines of Yarrabah seek equal opportunity, they, for the most part, disagree with Queensland's policy of assimilation, homogenisation, and the eventual incorporation of the State's Aboriginal reserves as shires. They view Yarrabah as their home and they intend to keep it that way.

As a training ground for assimilation, Yarrabah has not been successful. The stated policy in Queensland is egalitarianism, e.g. full rights and responsibilities for Aborigines, but the institutional structure of the Reserve belies this intention in that it is inherently not egalitarian. Instead of helping reserve Aborigines to overcome their status as second-class citizens, Yarrabah is perpetuating it. This is due in part to the fact that the State runs the Reserve like a business, acting primarily as a custodian of the taxpayers' dollars, not as a guardian of the local community's interests. Moreover, there exists on the Reserve a managerial elite of predominantly white bureaucrats whose relationship to the local population goes beyond mere domination: they have usurped several of the key functions normally exercised by a community's heads of household, parents, and patriarchs. The DAIA runs the local economy, owns most of the homes, controls the labour market, oversees local government, monitors the children's health, manages an Old People's Home etc. The people have largely forgotten the Church's admonition to 'strive for self-improvement'. Besides being impossible under the present reserve system, it is easy to see why the local inhabitants take the view: why bother, when the State takes care of everything? The result of Queensland's reserve policy on Yarrabah is a form of enforced parasitism whereby Aborigines have come to believe not only that the DAIA will take care of them, but that it should take care of them.

(His emphasis.)

While the above may be an overly partisan view, the research of Guthrie and Koepping at Cherbourg would, nonetheless, support Craig's portrait of institutionalisation (see especially Guthrie 1976, 1977).

Through its Community Services Legislation, Queensland is entering seriously into the process of dismantling institutional controls over Aboriginal communities and handing over to them the responsibility for managing themselves. If my suspicion concerning the relationships between staff enclaves and the Aboriginal communities they serve is well-founded, then the process of disengagement may be more complex than the planners of the exercise have realised. Other Australian states are already some way down the path of disengagement and there is now a small but growing body of research relating to the devolution of power and authority in tradition-oriented Aboriginal communities. Some of it is particularly relevant in view of the argument that I have advanced in this chapter.

Foremost among these non-Queensland studies has been the work of Tonkinson with the Aboriginal community at Jigalong on the western periphery of the Gibson Desert in north-western Australia. In 1946, Jigalong became the site of a fundamentalist Christian mission. Before that, it had been a ration depot and as such had attracted a steady stream of desert-dwelling natives. In 1969, the missionaries abandoned their attempts to convert the people of Jigalong and withdrew from the area. In 1973, the settlement became an incorporated Aboriginal community in which responsibility for community affairs was vested in an all-Aboriginal council assisted by white advisors. The community was heavily dependent on government finance for its economic and social development.

Tonkinson's research association with the Jigalong "mob" dates from 1963. In a book (Tonkinson 1974) and a series of papers (Tonkinson 1970, 1977, 1978, 1982), he traces the social history of the community through its period as a mission and then as an incorporated and (supposedly) self-managing community. In brief, Jigalong's period under missionary control saw an intensification of Aboriginal ritual and social life. There evolved a distinctly Aboriginal view of the spheres of authority and power within the settlement. The area of white settlement, the "mission", was regarded as the domain of the staff enclave. It was their arena of power and control. Where the Aborigines lived, the "camp", was

Aboriginal space. From an Aboriginal point of view, white people had no legitimate authority there. The cultural chasm between missionaries and Aborigines was so complete that by 1969, when they left the field, they had converted only one person! The Aboriginal council had to step into the power vacuum left by the missionaries, since the white advisory staff refused to exercise the paternal authority formerly wielded by the missionaries. Using the need to control the delinquent behaviour of children as an example, Tonkinson (1982) skilfully reveals how the councillors became trapped by the conflicting demands made on them by their adherence to traditional law (conferred on them from the Dreaming) and the responsibilities expected of them when they succeeded the missionaries as managers of their community. Tonkinson (1982:124) observes:

Jigalong Aborigines who now harbour fond memories concerning aspects of the mission era are not yearning for a fresh infusion of fundamentalist theology. What they miss is the kind of paternalism that was unflinchingly applied in the social field of "the settlement" - that which absolved them of tasks they did not want, or feel any need, to assume. The present problem stems from several major sources: continuities in Aboriginal understandings about power and its locus as external to self; traditional attitudes to children, whose non-problematic status in the pre-contact society was transformed by the settlement situation and a new social field that demanded new rules; and a legacy of missionary paternalism that masked emerging problems and left Aborigines ill-prepared to assume necessary responsibilities associated with community self-management.

Other researchers (e.g. Sackett 1978; Myers 1982) have alluded to the same kind of dilemmas when Aboriginal councils are suddenly vested with the authority that was once exercised by white staff. Myers' account offers a subtle and compelling analysis of the problems of the Pintupi in attempting to come to terms with contemporary situations that seem to demand an elaboration of what they have traditionally understood as having comprised legitimate authority in different domains. They still seek to involve non-Aborigines as

"bosses" in their decision-making. As Myers (1982:109) says:

Why they do so is an interesting question which I shall try to answer briefly. A "boss" is someone outside the community. His decisions are similarly "outside", beyond the system of kinship. Decisions made by the council, even though they are conceived of as the heads of the community, are usually taken to the white boss for ratification. If these decisions then come to have unfortunate consequences, the blame is often shifted to the white boss. So when a "worker" is fired from his job or his wages reduced for lack of work, it is usually the white boss who will take the blame. The advantage, then, of having such a "boss" is obvious. He becomes the external object around which negotiation and transaction can take place. He becomes, as it were, the Law. If a councillor wants to be sure that a vehicle will not be used by anyone in the community, he will ask the white boss to hold the keys. The white boss, the Aborigine feels, can refuse its use whereas he, bound in the web of kinship, cannot.

It could be argued that the examples I have presented in this section do not square with the Queensland situation concerning the devolution of power. I would argue otherwise and insist that we are really looking at the same kinds of processes. Edward River, I submit, is not an aberrant example in its dependence on European staff. The complementary interdependence between staff and Aboriginal villagers is of fundamental importance in the maintenance of core Aboriginal values about the nature of power and authority relationships. The insensitive application of the new Community Services Act may do just the kind of damage to Edward River society Sharp predicted many years ago for the introduction of the "steel axe".

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