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1.1 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 km$^2$. 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.
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 Aboriginals 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 intellect-
ual 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 Aborig-
inal inhabitants of western Cape York Peninsula whose pre-
contact environments and cultures were similar to the Yi:
Yoront.

Sharp predicted that the totemic ideology, the
fundamental underpinning of Yir Yoront beliefs, would dis-
appear 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 call-
ing 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.

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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 configurated 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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submarines</th>
<th>with a submarine shape</th>
<th>move</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>with a fish shape</td>
<td>swim</td>
<td>fast</td>
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Step 2 IDENTIFICATION

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<td>Fish</td>
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Step 3 SUBSTITUTION

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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 foregoing 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:

```
Exigency
  ↓
Innovation/Articulation
    ↓
Advocacy
    ↓
Acceptance
    ↓
Performance
    ↓
Integration.
```

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 "Munuk" 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 fieldwork 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 salt pans 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 flood-
waters 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 domi-
nate 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 pre-
vailing winds make tides off this part of Cape York Penin-
sula 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 approxi-
mately 44% of the reserve. This is a very open textured plant
community common to the alluvial plains of the southwest
mean daily maximum temperature °C Kowanyama
34 32.1 32.7 32.5 32.2 31 30 35.1 35.3 36.2 35.9 35.3

mean daily minimum temperature °C Kowanyama
23.8 23.7 23.4 21.1 18.7 15.8 15 16.9 18.6 21.3 23.6 24.1

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

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 (Colluricinda harmonica) and the pallid cuckoo (Cuculus pallidus) are all referred to by a single term, minh way, in Kuuk Thaayorre.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Shape</th>
<th>Other discriminatlng features</th>
<th>Kuuk Thaayorre Term</th>
<th>Common &amp; Scientific names</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water habitat</td>
<td>miuh kovil</td>
<td>Mitchell's water monitor (Varanus mitchelli)</td>
<td>VARANIDAE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangrove habitat</td>
<td>miuh napp</td>
<td>Mangrove monitor (V. indica)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open habitat</td>
<td>miuh chäpar</td>
<td>Lace monitor (V. varius)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue-tongued</td>
<td>miuh thunh-ningan</td>
<td>Fat-tailed gecko (Diplodactylus varius)</td>
<td>GEKKONIDAE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin-bodied</td>
<td>miuh kumun-thar</td>
<td>Copper-tailed skink (Ctenophorus tenuilatus)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick-bodied</td>
<td></td>
<td>Common blue tongue (Tiliqua scincoides)</td>
<td>SCINCIDAE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessing frills, dewlaps, or neck pouches</td>
<td>miuh nanthik</td>
<td>Frilled lizard (Chlamydosaurus kingii)</td>
<td>AGAMIDAE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking frills, dewlaps, or neck pouches</td>
<td>miuh rüm-püm-tén</td>
<td>Jacky lizard (A. inermis)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The table provides a taxonomic key for assigning Kuuk Thaayorre labels to different species of legged lizards, including their scientific names and family classification.
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 $260^2$ 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 watercourses 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 II.
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 organisation 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 handicrafts. 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 tetracolum). 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 wurripin ("dry-wet time"), raak kaal kurrrch ("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
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>raak (time or season)</td>
<td>raak karrtham (wet-time)</td>
<td>raak wurripan (dry-wet time)</td>
<td>raak kaal kuurrch (cold-time)</td>
<td>raak paapath (sun-hot time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>raak may mantam (small fruit time)</td>
<td>raak may yulu-ku (bush apple time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>raak thaanguni (grass burning time)</td>
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<td>raak wampu</td>
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<tr>
<td>raak wuurn (hand's breadth high)</td>
<td>raak wuurn yangkar (shin high)</td>
<td>raak warrath wuurn paathar (wuurn is flowering)</td>
<td>raak wuurn muthkaw (wuurn bends grass to the east)</td>
<td>raak wuurn muthkuw (wuurn bends grass to the west)</td>
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Figure 2.7 Kuuk Thayorre 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
**Kuuk Thaayorre**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kuuk Thaayorre</th>
<th>English Equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>raak kanpa minch kanangkarr</td>
<td>in the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wurr moongthak karr-man inhth kanpa</td>
<td>very long ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>karr-man kanpa</td>
<td>many years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>karr-man</td>
<td>three years before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pung-up kanpa</td>
<td>the year before last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngerngkan kanpa</td>
<td>last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngerngkan</td>
<td>last week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voorr</td>
<td>day before yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngul</td>
<td>yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melnk-elnk-arr</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yuu-ka-ra</td>
<td>Daily Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wuurr voorr</td>
<td>later today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raak yuu-karr-ontam</td>
<td>tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thono-marr</td>
<td>next week</td>
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**Seasonal Time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasonal Time</th>
<th>Daily Time</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tomorrow</td>
<td>next week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next year</td>
<td>for many years ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for always</td>
<td>for always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 wurripa - "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* (*Eléocharis 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 wurrippan*. 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 spearmen 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 wurrippan* 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 spearmen 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 wurrippan*. 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 shrunk, 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...
yuukthaanch (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 turrrmar, 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 Thinkam-weneth 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)
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), Thakorrwun(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 Thakorrwun(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 Pirmirrn (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 km$^2$). 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, water-lilies 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 woocchorm 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 woocborrm, 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 woochorrvm. 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 woochorrvm.

Clan members had the duties to preserve and transmit the woochorrvm, 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 *woochorrnr*, 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-leafed" 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>No. of males</th>
<th>No. of females</th>
<th>Total clan population</th>
<th>Estimated area of estate (km²)</th>
<th>Percentage area of total homelands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spear/Yuucchup</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog/Goanna</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>147.6</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallaby/Lightning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewfish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brolga</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>139.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watersnake</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck/Spear</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>313.6</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average size of estate, 88.9 km²
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
woochorrn 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 respon-
sibility 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-marriage 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
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 Kariera system. McConnel argued that not only did the Wik Mungkan practise matrilateral 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 MBDoS 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 matrilateral 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 patrilines 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 Wikmunkan 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 precriptive 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 matrilateral 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yir Yoront</th>
<th>Kuuk Thaayorre (Kuuk Yak)</th>
<th>Wik Uwanh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Kintypes</td>
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<td>FF, FFB, B-, FFE, FE-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>pa'a:</td>
<td>FM, FMH, MF, WFF</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pa) ama</td>
<td>M, MA, BS, BS</td>
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<td>DSC, SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>pang:</td>
<td>HSC, DH, FSDC</td>
<td>paangun (paangun)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. The distribution of kin terms over kintypes in Yir Yoront, Kuuk Thaayorre, Kuuk Yak (a dialect of Kuuk Thaayorre) and Wik Uwan.
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 FFB=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 P2S or someone classified with him. In Kuuk Thayorre, 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 connumbium. 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
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"

Ororko —— Ongothon
\(\triangleright\)Ego —— Ongothon
\(\triangleright\)waanhin —— Ongothon
Okaman —— Ongothon

Alternative 2: calling "by the mother"

Ororko —— Ongothon
\(\triangleright\)Ego —— Ongothon
\(\triangleright\)waanhin —— Okalin
Okaman —— Okalin

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 twenty-eight 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to Ego</th>
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<th>Vocative</th>
<th>Bereavement</th>
<th>Gesture</th>
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<td>waanhin</td>
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<td>kemeth</td>
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</tr>
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<td>thaanen</td>
<td>venchil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ngan maveath</td>
<td>mavath</td>
<td>venchil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>paangun</td>
<td>venganwarra</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pem-parr-punt-wayump</td>
<td>paangun</td>
<td>venganwarra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Yhuyorre 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 ØSC, ØBSC and ØBSC. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Waanhin kintypes</th>
<th>Puumin kintypes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+  FBS+ MZS+ BSS</td>
<td>&quot;waanhin&quot;</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>FBS- MZS- FF</td>
<td>&quot;puumin&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
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<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pilump</td>
<td>pil ump</td>
<td></td>
<td>yan ker n</td>
<td>yan ker n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yapan kintypes</th>
<th>Wiiln kintypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z+</td>
<td>H+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pluump</td>
<td>pluump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yapan kintypes</th>
<th>Wiiln kintypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z+ FDD+ MZD+ SD “yapan”</td>
<td>Z- FDD- MZD- FFZ “wiiln”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piluump</td>
<td>piluump</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waanhin kintypes</th>
<th>Puumin kintypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B+ FBS+ MZS+ DSS &quot;waanhin&quot;</td>
<td>B- FBS- MZS- FB &quot;puumin&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes yes</td>
<td>yes yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of same generation level</td>
<td>of same generation level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 kinset 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maarn kintypes</th>
<th>FFZSD</th>
<th>FFZSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>&quot;maarn&quot;</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFZ, ZHZ</td>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFZ, ZH</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7  A man's duties towards those males and females he called maarn (Kuuk Thayorre vocative terminology).
could not accept food from
man. 0 0
adopted the following term
on the death
of

A man...

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 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 ceremonies of

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rorko kintypes</th>
<th>Kuthn kintypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MMBDD OW, MBD &quot;rorko&quot;</td>
<td>MMBDS MBD, MBD &quot;kuthn&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>yuk-warr-mungkan</td>
<td>thakuhan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10 A woman's duties towards those females and males she called rorko and kuthn (Kuuk Thaayorre vocative terminology).
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, Wuuchpaanthmeer, 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 dispute 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 maru 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 thakhnham 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 did, 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 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
A man...

could interact with ease and familiarity with

as a youth was educated in hunting technology, craftsmanship and the economic resources of his estate by

learned 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nganhin kintypes</th>
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<table>
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</table>

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 specialized 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ngothon kintypes</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>BS</th>
<th>male &quot;ngothon&quot;</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>ND</th>
<th>female &quot;ngothon&quot;</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pinharr kintypes</th>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<th>Ngothon kintypes</th>
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<th>male &quot;ngothon&quot;</th>
<th>BD, SM &quot;ngothon&quot;</th>
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<td></td>
<td>BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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 bereavement term on the death of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nganhin kintypes</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>FB</th>
<th>&quot;nganhin&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

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 remarriage 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... 

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mokr kintypes</th>
<th>Kaaln kintypes</th>
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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

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 organizing revenge for the death of a

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thuuwun kintypes</th>
<th>Z-S</th>
<th>Z+S</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 "wrongheaded" marriage partners among

played a passive role in the mortuary ceremonies of

adopted the following bereavement term on the death of

Table 3.16 A man's duties towards those females and males he called kalin and thuuwun (Kuuk Thayorre 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 ngaanch, 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

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<th>Mayath kintypes</th>
<th>Thaaman kintypes</th>
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</table>

A woman...
observed speech, spacing, touching taboos towards
could interact in relative freedom with
played a passive role in the mourning observances for
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

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayath kintypes</th>
<th>Thaaman kintypes</th>
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</table>

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 under­
take 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 behav­
avour 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 obli­
gations 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
Table 3. The duties of men and women towards their male and female kintypes (Thaayorre vocative terminology).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kintypes</th>
<th>Mother's</th>
<th>Father's</th>
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<th>Brother's</th>
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<th>Uncle's</th>
<th>Cousin's</th>
<th>Friend's</th>
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Interacted freely with.

Occasionally sent food to an aged.

Could be a casual caretaker for young.

Helped during the confinement of.

Could expect some support in old age.

Helped in the mortuary preparations of deceased.

Adopted the following bereavement term on the death of.

Placed a passive role in the mourning ceremonies of.

Adopted the following bereavement term on the death of.

Placed a passive role in the mourning ceremonies of.
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

A woman...
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

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 nieces.

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 (yurrthongkn) 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 iata 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
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 "wrongheaded" 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
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, waahnin 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 thuwuun. 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 thuwuun), 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 polysemantic 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 pyrrophanus), 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:

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

...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 *woochorr* 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 *woochorr* 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 *woochorr* 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 *woochorr*.

Used in the second and most common sense, *woochorr* 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* woothorrwrr, 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 Ngokmeerngothen 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 woochorrn 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 woochorrn) 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, woochorrn, 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 woochorrn, or, in Aboriginal English, "story"), in song (wuuch woochorrn) and celebrated in dance rituals (yangkar woochorrn).

Woochorrn 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 woochorrn (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 wuochorrn were said to be the same because they involved the same songs. For this reason the Wallaby wuochorrn 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 wuochorrn, it could not be assumed that because two clans referred to some of their wuochorrn by the same totemic label that the wuochorrn themselves were regarded as necessarily linked. For example the Minh Pinch wuochorrn 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 wuochorrn 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 wuochorrn of the Duck/Spear clan bear any relationship to the Spear wuochorrn of the Spear/Yuuchup clan.

For each clan there was a unique set of raak wuochorrn which lay within the clan's estate. Following Barker (1976) this set of raak wuochorrn 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 woochorrmm through myth and song;

2. the performance of the rituals that celebrated the woochorrmm and released the powers inherent in the raak woochorrmm;

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 salt pans 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 woochorrn associated with them, and, by extension, was often used to designate the entire set of woochorrn 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. Reining 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 Therngr. 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 Rimkontun 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 *woochorrn*." 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 *woochorrn*, and from then on it was decided to make this a secret thing and to celebrate it in the *Withirrne* initiation ceremony. Malriw became ngach and The Wounded Man was called Kaal-Malriw.

(Taylor field notes)

The Dog story, *Kuta woochorrn*, 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 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, kathnubung. "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 (nay 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 Thaakumurka. 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
 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 Withirrna 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 pyrrophanus).

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 Kemput, 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, Kookomin and paused at Kumunkungkururn, 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 Thartumurk 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 Thartumurk 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 Thartumurk 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 Thartumurk 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 Thartumurk 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 wochorm 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 Kunthom and cooked his fish there. While the small fish roasted he lay down to recover from having struggled with such "large" fish. He cut paperback 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 woochorrmm 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 Kuu­­tumun 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 Freidians 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 woochorm. 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 \textit{woochorm}. 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 salt pans. 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 woochorrm, 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 covered 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 woohorrm 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 woohorrm required
three groups of performers: the dancers who usually
belonged to the clan whose woohorrm 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 woohorrm 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 *Withirrna* 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 woohorrjm. 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 Wuuchpaanthmeer. 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/Lightning 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 Thiimilingk 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 woochorrnm by the mythic beings. Some of the raak woochorrnm 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 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 extramarital 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.

Paantwiyntin was a tract that was exploited during
the dry-wet time from Ngatkooyumpan or Wootemen 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 Paantwiyntin.

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'ir 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 woochorrn. 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 awa 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 woorchorrm.

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 woomoong school 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. Sicknesses 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 "woochorm", 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,
leaving behind which conferred membership in CLAN SPIRIT CENTRES = raak parr'x woorchorm performed deeds called WOOCHORM at PLACES = raak woorchorm which formed part of A RITUAL ESTATE (lying within a clan estate) and required the performance of RITUALS which reactivated the powers of

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 woohorrm, 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 5 LAW AND ORDER AND SOCIAL CONTROL

5.1 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 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. Tamrintill'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 marryng 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad &amp; specific fields of behaviour in which supernatural sanctions are invoked</th>
<th>Examples of consequences of rule breaches</th>
<th>Underlying values protected by sanctions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>violation of place taboos produce swellings, sores, vomiting, diarrhoea, sickness, death depending on potency; walking too close to creation sites will cause sore feet in women &amp; children</td>
<td>respect the country &amp; its safe and dangerous places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ritual &amp; Mythic Beings</strong></td>
<td>neophytes breaking food taboos while in ritual seclusion suffer nausea, lethargy, &amp; vomiting; men being introduced to rituals will get sick if they violate food taboos; a child who inadvertently falls into an initiation &quot;hole&quot; will choke to death with a swollen throat; a native doctor who uses his powers too early risks sadness;</td>
<td>observe without fault the prescriptions of ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pregnancy</strong></td>
<td>if a pregnant woman: eats carpet snake, the birth will be hard; rifles scrub turkey Sounds 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;</td>
<td>avoid all actions that might endanger the health of family members, born and unborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood</strong></td>
<td>a child who eats: large wallaby will be fretful; crocodile will get scaly sores; emu flesh will be extremely ill;</td>
<td>respect &amp; honour the dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood</strong></td>
<td>a parent who: binds spear barbs near his newborn child will blind it; eats kangaroo will induce fits in his/her child;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Menstruation</strong></td>
<td>foods prepared by a menstruating woman will cause other family members to vomit;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mortuary</strong></td>
<td>eating the deceased's totems while under mortuary taboos causes vomiting or sickness;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incest</strong></td>
<td>people who engage in illicit sex outside the range of permitted partners will get skin sores;</td>
<td>observe the formalities of kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td>accepting food from a &quot;longway relation&quot; will cause vomiting;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 withholding 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 homestead 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 Tolar. Min Tolar 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 Tolar 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 plaints 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, Kuan 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-ruled 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 proprietory 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 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 rulim 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 Kunkuru 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/Yuchup 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/Yuchup 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, spear­nings 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 mêlée, 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 kin-dred; 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
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 kinred. 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 Forgoing redress

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 them­
selves to be helpless or powerless to take redressive meas­
ures 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
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 proced‐
ures, any more than an occasional miscarriage of justice
within our own Western legal system causes any drastic over‐
haul of the fundamental nature of our method of resolving
disputes.